

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Chinese Propaganda Theme Park Opens in Florida "Splendid China" Promotes Idyllic Image of Tibet and Other Cultures; Park features Reproduction of Potala Palace

International Campaign for Tibet

11/6/93

Washington, D.C.-- An international Tibetan organization today denounced the \$100 million "Splendid China" theme park in Florida, due to open its gates on December 18, saying that nearly half of its 60 exhibits will feature idyllic scenes of minorities and religions that actually have been persecuted and devastated by the Chinese government.

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) says the soon-to-be opened theme park, located less than two miles from Disney World, is misleading and highly sanitized portrayal of Tibetans and other peoples and called on the park to remove all exhibits and references to Tibet, which was invaded by China in 1949 and has occupied it ever since.

"'Splendid China' is part of a campaign by China to show off its happy natives to the world - by rewriting and whitewashing our history. Their depiction of Tibetans in this sort of exhibit is offensive and we are shocked that it is opening on American soil," said Lodi Gyari, President of the International Campaign for Tibet.

The theme park is part of an extensive external propaganda campaign being carried out by Beijing in an effort to depict the purportedly idyllic existence of Tibetans, Mongolians, Uighurs, Miao, and other peoples whose cultures have been suppressed -- and in some cases obliterated -- by the Chinese, according to ICT.

Advertisements for the park proclaim that headlining "the outstanding reproductions at Splendid China is... the imposing Potala Palace, the former home of the Dali[sic] Lama" in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. Chinese Communist forces looted the Potala Palace, which was also a Buddhist monastery; closed it for decades; and now maintains it as a museum and the one major Buddhist site in Lhasa where the practice of Buddhism is forbidden, according to ICT. "Splendid China" is a project co-sponsored by China Travel Service, which is owned by the government of the Peoples Republic of China, and the American Eastern International Company. It is intended to promote tourism in China and deflect attention from China's human rights record by portraying a false picture of tolerance, tranquillity, and openness in China today.

Experts familiar with China's repressive policies toward Tibet view "Splendid China" as a cynical use of Tibetan culture. "It is ironic that China sees fit to exploit Tibetan cultural heritage at the same time it is systematically undermining and destroying it," said Professor June Teufel Dreyer, Director of East Asian Programs at the University of Miami and author of 'China's Forty Millions', a seminal book on minorities in China.

Professor Jeffrey Hopkins, Director of the Center for South Asian Studies at the University of Virginia and a guide who frequently takes tours to the Potala Palace, says that religion remains completely suppressed there. According to Hopkins, the monks are not allowed to wear robes, while informers "roam the Palace, reporting to the police what foreigners and Tibetans are doing and saying."

Hopkins also said it is a "nightmare for the Tibetan people to be called a 'minority' of China and to have the Potala Palace included as a 'Chinese' site. It is a Tibetan site."

Many of the other "minority" and religious sites depicted in "Splendid China" theme park also are under strict regulation and control of communist party authorities and are not allowed to return to their original functions, Lodi Gyari said.

"If the U.S. set up a theme park of idyllic Native American exhibits without focusing on the true fate of Native Americans in this country, there would be an enormous outcry from politicians, the public and Native American groups -- as there should be," Lodi Gyari said. "

Americans who consider going to 'Splendid Chain' should realize that if they do so, they will be participating in a propaganda exercise."

<p>The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) is a Washington-based Tibet monitoring and advocacy group. Established in 1987, ICT is a non-profit organization promoting human rights and democratic freedoms for Tibetans.</p>

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Secret Documents Outline Chinese P.R. Plan to "Divide and Destroy" Tibetan Supporters

Leaked Classified Documents Could Affect Renewal of China's Most Favored Nation Trade Status on Eve of President Clinton's meeting with Chinese President

International Campaign for Tibet

11/15/93 Washington, DC

Classified documents leaked from Beijing detail the Chinese government's aggressive, multi-pronged propaganda offensive to sanitize its occupation and oppression of Tibet and "eradicate...divide and destroy" the international supporters of the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled leader.

"During the whole period of the 1990s, it will not be possible to eradicate" the Dalai Lama's supporters, "yet it may be possible... to divide and destroy them," observes one of the four secret Chinese government documents obtained by the Washington-based International Campaign for Tibet (ICT). The documents were prepared for a March, 1993 meeting of government officials to review an external propaganda strategy regarding Tibet, which China invaded in 1949 and has occupied ever since.

"These documents reveal how worried the Chinese government is about the negative publicity their suppression of Tibet is having on their image and how determined they are to callously and cynically manipulate the foreign press and public opinion," said Lodi Gyari, president of ICT. The documents, along with an analysis and introduction were released today by ICT in a report titled "China's Public Relations Strategy on Tibet."

ICT says the secret document may affect the Clinton Administration's decision on whether China has met the conditions regarding Tibet that were part of President Clinton's Executive Order last May conditioning future renewal of China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) trading status. One of the conditions calls for steps by the Chinese to protect Tibet's distinctive cultural and religious heritage.

The documents show that China instead plans to employ Tibetan culture to "conduct propaganda on the question of Tibet." The comprehensive Chinese campaign includes proposals to play upon the "deep feeling for their homeland" harbored by Tibetans living abroad by persuading them that Chinese rule in Tibet has led to "economic and social development".

President Clinton is scheduled to hold a summit meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin on November 19 in Seattle. ICT is urging President Clinton to raise the issue of Tibet with Jiang during their meeting.

"China will be hard pressed to contend that it is respecting Tibetan culture now that these documents have been made public," said ICT's president Lodi Gyari. "these documents make clear that Tibetan culture is being used as a tool for Beijing's political propaganda."

The Chinese propaganda campaign already has included well-planned trips by foreign journalists to Tibet; Chinese government-financed overseas trips by Tibetan singing and dancing groups; and even the use of the Chinese Army's political department to produce "Karioke tapes of popular Tibetan songs sung by famous Tibetan singers," according to their documents.

On December 18, using a reproduction of the Potala Palace, where practicing Buddhism remains forbidden, China also will open a \$100 million theme park, "Splendid China," less than two miles from Disney World in Florida. While not mentioned, "Splendid China" appears to be exactly the kind of cultural propaganda initiative envisioned by these documents.

The unnamed authors of the Chinese propaganda plans, which cover 27 pages, contend that China should "launch a tit-for-tat struggle in public opinion against the Dalai Clique and the international forces" that want Tibet to be free and independent again. Not only should China continue to send Tibetan singing and dancing troupes abroad but also "organize experts and scholars to write articles and books and use historical facts to declare righteously to the world that Tibet is an inseparable part of Chinese territory," the documents say. "We should use people from abroad to carry out the propaganda on Tibet for us, which is more powerful than [if] we do it," the Chinese propaganda experts write.

ICT noted that the Clinton Administration has placed considerable emphasis on negotiations between Beijing and the Dalai Lama in monitoring China's compliance with his MFN order. However, the documents reveal that China considers negotiations with the Dalai Lama to be an exercise to resolve the problem of his "repatriation," rather than to address the issue of Tibet's future as outlined in a Five Point Peace Plan proposed by the Dalai Lama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

The classified Chinese documents scoff at the Dalai Lama as the so-called 'Nobel Peace Prize Winner,' and ridicule his "high level lobbying" with officials in many nations. "It seems that under the cloak of the so-called 'Nobel Peace Prize Winner,' Dalai has a certain international market," one of the secret Chinese documents states.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

The documents offer the most complete view of China's high-level policy planning on Tibet to emerge publicly since the communists occupied Tibet in 1949. The papers paint a portrait of a Chinese leadership that feels besieged and beleaguered by "international enemy forces" such as Amnesty International and the International Human Rights Law Group, and the "Dalai Clique," all of whom are seen to be conspiring to weaken China by using the issue of Tibet as a weapon.

The documents identify the United States and France as the two nations most hostile to China on Tibet, characterizing the U.S. and French position as "especially ugly." Cited specifically for their pro-Tibet views are U.S. Senator Claiborne Pell (D., Rhode Island), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Danielle Mitterand, wife of the French president Francois Mitterand, who attended a "Tribunal on the Question of Tibet" in Strasbourg in November 1992. The documents also decry a March 1992 resolution passed by the U.S. Senate that called Tibet "an occupied country" and "the Dalai's exiled government... the legitimate government of Tibet." Plans for China's external propaganda strategy on Tibet include directly broadcasting government-produced TV programs on Tibet to the U.S. and Europe; inviting sympathetic reporters to visit Tibet; publicizing important Tibetan religious events internationally while suppressing them there. "These documents may provide the most important insiders' glimpse into the workings of Communist party authorities who are clearly shaken over the threat posed by Tibet to the image of China as she tries to gain legitimacy with the outside world," ICT says in the introduction to its report on the secret Chinese propaganda plans.

<p>The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) is a Washington-based Tibet monitoring and advocacy group. Established in 1987, ICT is a non-profit organization promoting human rights and democratic freedoms for Tibetans.</p>

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

China tries to change its image over rights violations in Tibet

Washington Times

by Gus Constantine, Washington Times

11/16/93

China, under pressure to loosen its grip on Tibet, has launched a propaganda campaign to counter its critics, a group opposing China's stand said yesterday. The International Campaign for Tibet, a non-governmental organization pushing human rights and self-determination, disclosed the existence of the campaign at a press conference. It said details of the campaign were spelled out in "classified documents leaked from Beijing" earlier this year.

The disclosure came as President Clinton prepared to meet China's President Jiang Zemin on Friday in Seattle in the hopes of easing tensions in one of the world's most important bilateral relationships.

"The documents show the Chinese government's aggressive, multipronged propaganda offensive to sanitize its occupation and oppression of Tibet," the Tibet self-determination group said.

The committee, in a report titled "China's Public Relations Strategy on Tibet," accused the Chinese government of the following:

Seeking to persuade Tibetans living abroad that Chinese rule in Tibet has led to economic and social development and enhanced living standards.

Organizing trips by foreign reporters to Tibet in the hopes of showing its rule in a favorable light.

Opening, as part of a "cultural propaganda offensive," next month a theme park near Disney World in Orlando, Fla., where it will reproduce the Potala Palace, the traditional citadel of religious and political power in Tibet's capital of Lhasa.

"Tibet has become an unmanageable problem for China...there is a sense of panic," said Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari, president of the organization.

So it has decided to "place roadblocks in the path of the Tibetan people's struggle for freedom," he said.

Mr. Gyari, from the eastern Tibetan region of Kham, has been part of the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile, which has headquarters in Dharamsala, India.

Rep. Charles Rose, North Carolina Democrat, said the leaked documents offered proof that "the Chinese are suppressing Tibetan culture." He said he would advocate rejecting most-favored-nation status when the question comes up for renewal next spring.

MFN, the low-tariff norm applied by the United States to its trading partners, requires renewal annually in the case of communist countries.

The congressman also said he will urge Mr. Clinton to be firm with Mr. Jiang when they meet in Seattle during the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Also at the press conference yesterday was Rep. Nancy Pelosi, California Democrat and a congressional leader of efforts to force an improvement of human rights in China using trade as a lever.

She made less of the leaked documents than other speakers, calling them simply "further evidence" of the "great injustice perpetrated by China on Tibetan culture."

Another participant at the press conference, Reed Brody, director of the International Human Rights Law Groups, focused criticism on China's reported description of its critics in the documents as "enemy forces".

"We do not single out China," Mr. Brody said of the group's human rights monitoring activities. He mentioned his group's criticism of repression in Guatemala and in Indonesia, where a liberation group in East Timor is also seeking to break away from Jakarta's rule.

Tibet, a part of China under the last Chinese dynasty, was pried loose by Britain in 1911 when the dynasty collapsed.



The Standard (Hong Kong) 17 Nov 93

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

China: An Anti-Tibet Offensive ?

Newsweek

November 21, 1993

Bill Clinton's meeting this week with Chinese President Jiang Zemin may get prickly if the topic turns to Tibet. Alleged secret documents released last week by supporters of Tibet's exiled leader, the Dalai Lama, suggest Beijing is planning a global PR campaign to 'divide and destroy' the Tibetan solidarity movement. The documents, obtained by the International Campaign for Tibet, discuss methods for swaying Western media away from pro-Dalai Lama stories. ICT says announced plans for a China-sponsored Florida theme park - which will depict Tibetans as "happy natives" - are also part of China's effort to "whitewash" its rule in Tibet as a congressional vote nears on renewing China's favored trade status. Chinese officials were unavailable for comment.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Buddhist plan demonstration at China park

Tampa Tribune

by Karen Haymon Long, Tribune Staff Writer
11/30/93

Tampa-- Furious over exhibits they say whitewash history, Tibetan Buddhists plan to picket the \$100 million Splendid China theme park when it opens next month in Kissimmee.

Owned by the government of the People's Republic of China, the park will feature 60 scaled-down replicas of historic sites and landmarks, including the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, where the Dalai Lama lived until he fled the Chinese in 1959.

John Ackerly, an attorney for the International Campaign for Tibet, based in Washington D.C., wrote park officials asking them to remove the palace and all other references to Tibet. He has yet to get a reply.

"Including the Potala Palace in Splendid China is an insult to Tibetans everywhere," he wrote. "The Potala Palace has been shelled, looted and shut down by the Chinese. Its monks were forced to flee into exile and those who stayed ended up in labor camps, where many perished."

Carl E. Reynolds Jr., marketing director for Florida Splendid China Inc., said the park was not built to make a religious or political statement.

"The park doesn't approach those subjects," he said.

Reynolds said visiting the park "will be like taking a 5,000-year journey over 10,000 miles. It would be like going to China today and wanting to see these magnificent man-made wonders on a single day."

Lodi Gyari, president of the Tibetan group, said in a statement sent to the park and to the news media that nearly half of the park's 60 exhibits "will feature idyllic scenes of minorities and religions that actually have been persecuted and devastated by the Chinese government."

He said the theme park is part of a campaign by China to "show off its happy natives to the world - by rewriting and whitewashing our history."

Reynolds said porcelain figures, not real people will be used in the exhibits.

Ackerly, the Tibetan group's attorney, plans to picket the park Dec. 19, the day it opens, along with Tibetan Buddhist monks from New York and Wisconsin and Tibetan Buddhists from the Tampa Bay area and elsewhere. The monks, one of whom lived in Potala Palace when it was a monastery, plan to pray outside the park, which is two miles west of Walt Disney World's main entrance road.

In his letter to park officials, Ackerly said the Potala Palace is run by Communist Party authorities who maintain stifling regulations over it.

"It is difficult for us to conceive how you can use the word 'Splendid' when you are showcasing religious and minority sites, most of which have been desecrated or demolished and which today are kept under a tight rein," he wrote.

Doug Werner, director of Karma Thegsum Choling, a center in Tampa affiliated with Tibetan Buddhism, encourages people to boycott the park.

"The Chinese still continue to avoid the truth. They should tell the truth," he said, adding that exhibits should include information about the history of persecution in China.

University of South Florida religion professor Nathan Katz, an expert on Tibetan Buddhism, said religious freedom doesn't exist in Tibet.

"Buddhist monks and nuns and laypeople are escaping to India on foot to be able to practice their religion. And not just in Tibet, but in China as a whole."

He said that he would not boycott the park as some Tibetan Buddhist plan to do.

But he will let the owners know he disapproves.

"Tibetans are as outraged about this exploitation of their suffering as were African Americans about the "Whydah" pirate museum, Katz said, referring to a defunct plan for a museum in Tampa featuring a former slave and pirate ship.

Reynolds said some Splendid China exhibits will show religious monuments defaced by the Communists.

"We've replicated those. They are not glossed over. They show the chiseled marks on them the way you'd see them today," he said. "We're not saying these things did not occur."

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Theme Park Ignores Oppression

The Savannah Morning News

Letter to the Editor

Editor:

On Dec. 19 a new theme park, "Splendid China" is scheduled to open in Kissimmee, Fla. The International Campaign for Tibet is asking as many as can see their way clear to do it to go to Kissimmee on that day to protest inclusion in that propaganda park of Potala Palace. I am writing in support of that protest.

Imagine, if while communism still ruled Russia, there had been a theme park to be opened called "The Splendid Soviet Union." Featured would be scaled models of various sites from East Germany, Latvia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. It would not have been thinkable.

Now, however, because some of our more enterprising capitalists covet a market of umpty-gagillion Chinese, (and who could blame them?), and because China's commissars want to go on flooding the United States with their oh-so-much-more-cheaply produced goods, or for some such reasons, this travesty of decency is opening before us - and near Disney World of all things.

Potala Palace was the central temple of the Tibetan branch of Buddhism. It was a kind of Vatican to millions of Buddhists in Asia and elsewhere. In 1949, while America's attention was taken up with Korea, China invaded Tibet, then a sovereign nation, according to the Tibetans, among others. The Red Army conquered easily; the boy-leader of that country, the Dalai Lama fled by night to India, where he yet resides. Ninety percent of the temples and monasteries were destroyed. The Tibetan people en masse were oppressed, jailed and killed. A few temples were spared, or, like the Potala Palace rebuilt as tourist attractions. However, to this day it is forbidden to wear a priest's robe, or utter a mantra or pray in that religion's once holiest shrine. Clearly the Potala Palace of Splendid China is a gory trophy of war. It has no business on American soil.

Doubtlessly, even if things go awry with the acquisition of Hong Kong, and as happened with Tibet, millions of people are put to death. Splendid China will want to add some trophy from there too. Later there may even be a Red-cot, with a scale model of Old Saigon for nostalgic vets and a showing of the Khmer Rouge favorite, "The Killing Fields" with a pro-China commentary and a laugh track.

The blood goes cold.

Dec. 19, Kissimmee. Remember Tiananmen Square. Be There.

By the way, I am the son of Charles N. Baisden, one of the Flying Tigers who fought under Chinese colors against great odds to stop the Japanese from doing to China what China is now doing to Tibet.

Daniel R. Baisden

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Recreating China

Discerning between propaganda, history

USA Today

12/09/93 Thursday section 6D

When Disney announced it was building a new American history theme park in Virginia, cultural historians expressed concerns about the "cleaning up" of historical fact.

A new theme park in Florida is raising the same concerns. Splendid China, opening Dec. 19 in Kissimmee, about 2 miles west of Walt Disney World, is a \$100 million park devoted to the culture and history of China. More than 60 exhibits replicate Chinese landmarks in miniature, including the Forbidden City, Lunan Stone Forest and the Great Wall. Live entertainment includes Chinese dancers, acrobats, storytellers and martial arts demonstrations.

"Splendid China is not a traditional theme park, which are high-tech and make-believe," says spokesman Carl Reynolds. "We don't have rides. Splendid China is more cultural, a celebration of 5,000 years of Chinese history." But the park, co-owned by the government-run China Travel Service and a Chinese-American real estate conglomerate, is under attack by International Campaign for Tibet, a Washington-based monitoring and advocacy group.

A statement released by ICT calls Splendid China "part of an external propaganda campaign being carried out by Beijing ... to depict the purportedly idyllic existence of Tibetans, Mongolians, Uighers, Maio, and other peoples whose cultures have been suppressed - and in some cases obliterated - by the Chinese."

"Splendid China totally whitewashes the reality of religious and cultural persecution in China today," says John Ackerly of ICT which plans to picket the park on opening day. "The Chinese government is appropriating Tibetan culture and putting forth to the west these cute village scenes as if they were protecting the Tibetan way of life." Reynolds disagrees. "This is not a political park, this is a cultural park," he says. "Many landmarks were defaced during the Cultural Revolution, and the replicas in the park include these defacements. To the credit of the owners, who are Chinese, the park is not trying to hide from atrocities done so many years ago. They're sticking to the authentic."

Admission is \$23.55 adults; \$13.90 ages 5-12.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

The Torturers' Theme Park

Miami Herald Editorial

'SPLENDID' CHINA?

Florida's latest tourist attraction is a galling fantasy version of China.

Florida has a flair for fantasy, a natural whimsy that suits movie studios and theme parks. You can suspend belief in Florida - revisit the '40s on South Beach, see elephants fly in Orlando, or peruse pirates' booty in Key West. Most of the time, Florida's knack for cheerful unreality delights tourists and salves the local psyche. Occasionally, though, it breeds monsters. On Sunday, an outfit with ties to the Chinese government will open an especially unreal theme park in Kissimmee, sweetly dubbed "Splendid China." The \$100 million fantasy world supposedly displays the peaceful diversity of an engagingly tolerant People's Republic. At least half its exhibits showcase China's ethnic and religious minorities, fairly gushing over the charming folkways and pretty buildings.

Don't look too hard for the Murdered Dissidents' Pavilion. You won't find the Tortured Buddhist Monks' Gallery or the Arcade of Imprisoned Religious Leaders. But you *will* find - the irony is stunning - a towering replica of the Potala Palace, the desecrated Tibetan monastery from which China drove the Dalai Lama into exile.

Yep, there it is, displayed as a triumph of religious and cultural freedom: The central shrine and former government headquarters of a conquered Tibet, a building in which the practice of Buddhism is now illegal. The Dalai Lama says that Tibet's culture, under the brutal hand of China's police state, will be lucky to survive the decade.

The owners of "Splendid China" have every right to operate here. But Florida officials, usually fond of ribbon-cuttings and grand openings, have no place at Sunday's opening of this propaganda palace. Tax dollars should not pay for field trips in which school children might soak up such nonsense.

Not all fantasy is fun. There's a difference between make-believe and lies.

Florida, a state specializing in *real* fun, should be the first to notice.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Looks like China? It may be Florida

New park packs Great Wall, Forbidden City and controversy into 76 acres

The Atlanta Constitution

by Al Levine, staff writer

Kissimmee, Fla. - Just down the road from the Bates Motel, and around the corner from Cinderella's Castle, there's a new addition to Central Florida's surreal landscape. It's China, in all its ancient beauty, in miniature.

In Florida's newest theme park, Splendid China, a 76-acre walk through Chinese history and culture. The \$100 million park, which opens today, features 58 exhibits replicating Chinese landmarks in miniature, including the Forbidden City, Lunan Stone Forest, and a half-mile long Great Wall made of 6 1/2 million tiny bricks hand laid one-by-one.

Its expectations are modest. Splendid China hopes to draw a million visitors a year. Disney will draw 62 million to its Florida theme parks in 1993, according to Amusement Business magazine estimates, while Universal Studios will attract 7.4 million and Sea World 4.5 million.

Located two miles from Disney World, this is an unusual theme park. There are no rides. A ticket, \$23.55 for adults and \$13.90 for children 5 to 12, offers the opportunity to marvel at the work of Chinese artisans, watch performances by Chinese dancers, acrobats, Mongolian wrestlers and kung fu fighters, choose from four restaurants and buy souvenirs at 13 gift shops.

It was built jointly by China Travel Service of Hong Kong and a Chinese-American real estate conglomerate that is developing a subdivision next to the property.

No one is predicting today's opening crowd, but park officials can expect at least 100.

That's the number of protesters planning to picket the park on behalf of the International Campaign for Tibet, a Washington-based human rights organization.

Tibetan Buddhist monks from Atlanta, Tampa, and other Southern states plan a peaceful protest to protest the fact that the Potala palace is a featured replica of the park. The real palace is where the Dalai Lama, Tibet's traditional leader, lived until he fled the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959.

"The Chinese government would like China to appear to be an open and tolerant society," said John Ackerly, an attorney for the ICT, "when this park is really a whitewash of history."

He said 50 monks who once lived at the Potala would lead a prayer ceremony at the park.

"We plan to be at the front gate handing out literature," Ackerly said. He predicted that the protests would continue indefinitely on weekends.

Park officials say Splendid China was not built to make a religious or political statement.

"This is not a political park, this is a cultural park," said spokesman Carl Reynolds.

Some exhibits will show religious monuments defaced by the Communists, he said. The Forbidden City and Imperial Palace, however depict a grand celebration and not the 1989 bloodshed of pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square.

Many of the displays feature hand-crafted, hand-painted porcelain figures of people and animals. There are 10,000 figures in the park, all mounted on steel posts and imbedded in concrete below the closely cropped oyster grass indigenous to China but purchased from a nursery in New Jersey.

There's an explanatory sign at each display and a button-operated machine offering longer, taped explanations in English and Spanish. Tour guides will be available, too.

Splendid China's other major attractions include The Leshan Grand Buddha, more than 35-feet tall, a miniaturized version of the original 23-story sculpture; Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses, a re-creation of the 1974 archaeological discovery of 8,000 life-size and individually carved statues of soldiers and horses that Quin Shihuang commissioned to protect his spirit after death; and the Guanyin Statue of the Goddess of Mercy.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

A Splendid China setting Florida's newest theme park a small and elegant world

Miami Herald

By Mike Browning
Herald Staff Writer Kissimmee

You cannot see the Great Wall of China from the moon, no matter what you have heard.

But you can see it from just off Highway 192 here.

Splendid China, a remarkable \$100 million collection of Chinese miniatures extending over 76 acres off Highway 192 West near Disney World, opened Saturday with fireworks, twittering flutes, keening two-string fiddles and a small group of pro-Tibetan protesters outside. One held a sign reading; "NO COMMUNISM IN KISSIMMEE!"

"We feel the inclusion of the Potala Palace hides the atrocities the Chinese have committed in Tibet," said

spokesperson Thubten Samphel. "We feel it is a false attempt to beautiful something that is totally ugly."

Inside, under brilliant Florida skies, some 60 painstakingly assembled models of Chinese buildings, temples, pagodas, rock-cut Buddhas and palaces looked curiously bright and perfect, better in some ways than the originals in China. In China there is nearly always a faint brume of coal dust hanging in the air, lending a ghostly, crepuscular quality to the light.

Here the sun comes down like a hammer, and all is revealed in an instant. Also missing: the litter of watermelon rinds, eggshells, orange peels, glistening gobs of spittle, groaning tourist buses, and mobs of local tourists swarming through a landscape pervaded by the unforgettable perfume of Chinese public latrines. These too, are among the joys of tourism in the real China.

Prices show a wonderful discrepancy as well. In 1983 it cost only a nickel to visit the Forbidden City in Beijing. Even now the price is a few dollars. But Splendid China costs \$23.55 apiece for adults, and \$13.90 for children over 4. Guided tours are extra. Some attractions require you to insert quarters to see figurines move.

Smaller - and cleaner

Besides the Great Wall, half a million tiny bricks one to two inches long, there is Beijing's Summer Palace and Forbidden City, each populated with thousands of tiny porcelain figures, accurately costumed. There is the Suspended-in-Mid-Air-Temple outside Datong in Shanxi province. There is the stone forest of Yunnan, a collection of fantastic rock shapes reproduced here with Gunitite and fiberglass. This last is smaller and a lot cleaner than the real thing, which is drowned in litter and whose rock surface are actually greasy from the millions of Chinese tourists who have clambered all over them.

And there, shut out beyond the parking lot, are the Tibetan exiles protesting the whole thing.

This too, is wonderfully accurate. For years, the exiled Tibetans have been sitting in a kind of political parking lot, in exile, in Dharamsala, India ever since a revolt was bloodily suppressed by Chinese troops in 1959.

The group is hoping, by demonstrating against the theme park, to draw attention to the plight of Tibet, and to dissuade the state of Florida from sponsoring school groups to visit Splendid China.

"The park is hoping to earn large revenues from school group visits," said John Ackerly of the Washington-based International Campaign for Tibet. We would hope that the state of Florida would not spend taxpayer's money to indoctrinate American schoolchildren with what is essentially a propagandized view of Chinese history."

A moral dilemma

In some ways Splendid China is unique amid all the tourist phantasmagoria along Highway 192, with its miniature golf courses, go-kart tracks, souvenir shops, ersatz castles and frontier forts. Alone among them, it presents the visitor wit a moral dilemma: By paying to fascinating re-creations of China's past, you subsidize China's present, repressive regime.

Splendid China has indirect ties to the communist mainland. One of it's two partners, China Travel Services of Hong Kong, paid the Beijing government for permission to reproduce the Chinese landmarks with the help of mainland artisans. The American partner in the park is American Eastern International of Orlando, a Taiwanese-American group.

China lent the artisans and the designs for the buildings of the miniatures. Many of the street performers come from the mainland and a large portion of their wages, paid in hard U.S. currency, will be garnished by the government - a practice China routinely employs with its overseas workers. So a certain portion of the profits will flow back to the Chinese communist government in Beijing.

"What we reply to the Tibetans is that this is not a political park. We are not trying to make a political statement here," Langley said in an interview Friday.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

The pity of the political controversy is that it distracts attention from what is in many ways a tour de force of model-building. Some of the small buildings are astonishing for their pure craftsmanship.

Over and over again one is struck with the marvelous detail. The roof tiles and roof ornaments of Forbidden City model are accurate down to the last dragon whisker and dimple.

Amazing detail

The Summer palace outside Beijing has been re-created in amazing detail, with lake fringed by tiny bonsai trees, marble bridges casting reflections in the water, and the Pagoda atop the Hill of 10,000 Longevities looks very much as it does outside Beijing. The massive stone-carved Buddhas from Leshan, Longmen, and Yungang are less successful: The originals awe by their size and serenity. The copies here literally do not measure up.

But from an artistic point of view, much of Splendid China is so good that it doesn't belong here. There are no rides, no light shows, no water slides, no monsters, no trips to outer space at this park. You're supposed to walk through it quietly and admire it. Set against all the other thundering tourist attractions of Central Florida, Splendid China shines like a small, jeweled Faberge Easter egg in the middle of Jurassic Park.

The Great Wall - the Chinese call it Chang Cheng , the Boundless wall - undulates across one end of the park and is a remarkable achievement. It looks slightly out of place on a green hillocky lawn of zoysia grass - the real wall runs through very rocky, rugged country outside Beijing - but the marble bases of the towers have been done that you notice certain blocks reproduce the rusty discolorations of the original.

If a few thousand tiny weeds could be made to grow between the bricks, and few million microscopic graffiti could be scratched along the parapets, and a spill of tiny, tacky tourist shops selling T-shirts and "I Climbed The Great Wall" certificates could be clustered around its base, you would have the true wall in its aesthetic entirety.

Michael Browning was Beijing correspondent for the Miami Herald from 1983 to 1992.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Theme park takes bow as activists create row

The communist nation becomes sole owner of Florida Splendid China after U.S. partner pulls out

The Orlando Sentinel

By Annie Tin (of the Sentinel Staff)

Kissimmee

The doors to Florida Splendid China opened to a crowd of about 2,400 dignitaries and other special guests Saturday in a traditional Asian fashion.

Guests sat entranced as dancers twirled around the platform while bright orange and red dragons leaped across the stage to the beat of thumping drums.

Not everyone was impressed, though. A 10-member coalition of Tibetan Buddhists and human rights activists stood outside to protest the 76-acre park's opening.

The group, organized by the International Campaign for Tibet based in Washington D.C., is demanding that park officials remove a miniature version of the Potala Palace, a Tibetan holy place, from the theme park's offerings and delete all references to Tibet. They maintain the park whitewashes the treatment of Tibetans, Mongolians, and other minorities under Chinese rule.

"They are making it seem like everything in China is very good," said Tsengelt, who declined to give his full name because he fears retribution on his family.

"In reality the government has killed thousands of Mongolian and Tibetan peoples."

Though park officials say they have no plans to remove the palace, the signs describing its historical significance as the former residence of the Dalai Lama, who was forced to flee Tibet by the Chinese in 1959, was missing from the exhibit Saturday.

"We have temporarily removed the sign to avoid the possibility of an incident by demonstrators," said Zhang Yuan Xing, general manager of Splendid China. "It will be returned later in the week."

The park, which has more than 60 miniature versions of China's most famous landmarks, is a joint venture between China's Travel Services (Holdings) H.K. Ltd. and American Eastern International Corp. of Los Angeles.

Protesters claim the park is owned by the People's Republic of China and is being used to spread the Communist Party's propaganda to Americans.

Bu Ma Chi Man, vice chairman and general manager of China Travel Services, denied that claim at a press conference Saturday.

Speaking through an interpreter, Man said the only association his company has with the Chinese government is that it is a registered business in Hong Kong.

Four top officials from China's Communist Party attended Saturday's ceremonies and lauded the opening of the park.

The park opens to the public today at 10 a.m. It has replicas of China's most famous landmarks, including a half-mile version of the Great Wall of China, the Lunan Stone Forests and the Forbidden City.

Although there are no menacing sharks, thrill rides or cartoon characters at this park, visitors can enjoy live entertainment, acrobats, dancers, and authentic Chinese foods. Admission is \$23.55 for adults, and \$13.90 for children, ages 5 to 12.

Many of the local and state officials who attended the ceremonies said they believe the park is only the first step in strengthening relations between China and the U.S.

"This is a monumental day for tourism in Florida," said state Rep. Alzo Reddick, D-Orlando. "I'm hoping this signals future trade, exchange and tourism. It marks a new degree of maturity between us."

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

China theme park not so splendid, protesters say
The \$100 million, 76-acre Splendid China park opens to the public today.

The Bradenton Herald

Kissimmee

The newest theme park in Florida's land of make-believe represents 5,000 years of Chinese history on a small scale, but not everyone is happy about it.

Most of the featured attractions are authentically detailed, miniature versions of the originals. And the \$100 million, 76-acre park is considered more of an outdoor museum than the customary rides-and-thrills playground in this area. Two years in the making, Splendid China opened its ornately carved gates to specially invited guests and the news media Saturday. It opens to the general public today.

However, several Buddhist monks from Ithica, N.Y., staged a demonstration outside the park protesting the inclusion of a replica of the Dalai Lama's Potala Palace.

The centuries-old palace nearly was destroyed when China invaded Tibet in 1959. The Chinese government closed it down as a religious center, and it is now open only to tourists although it is still regarded as the world's most sacred place for millions of Buddhists.

The protest was limited to eight people, all wearing Western style clothes, holding signs on a road leading to the park gates.

Just minutes away from the front door of the granddaddy of tourist attractions, Splendid China is somewhat of an experiment - striving for a portion of the vacation time and money of the millions of travelers who flock to the world's of Mickey, Shamu, and Jaws.

The park near Walt Disney World will rely on culture, history, and the craftsmanship of Chinese artisans to entice visitors.

General Manager Ma Chi Man of China Travel Service Holdings, part owner of the park, called the attraction "a way for people of the world to better understand China. There is a lack of understanding overseas of China."

Man said, however, that his Hong-Kong registered company is not an agency of the Chinese government, "but we cooperate in business; our main interest is to increase tourism" to China.

The Chinese government operates its own travel service within the country's borders, and this is separate from CTS Holdings.

Man would not comment directly on whether the park sought to temper any criticism in this country about individual human rights in China. He also said he was "not concerned" about the protest since the Potala Palace "is a part of China that we are showing here."

Splendid China makes a virtue of smallness, as opposed to its neighbors: The replica of the Great Wall has 6 million domino-sized bricks and undulates for half a mile at heights ranging from knee to chest.

Scores of landmarks - the Forbidden City, the Brooding Leshan Buddha, the Manfeilong Pagoda - and thousands of figurines are replicated in painstaking intricate detail, many to a 1/15th scale.

"Its like taking a National Geographic tour of China, except that it won't take two years," says park President George Chen. "we want to capture the sense of excitement and feel of Marco Polo's travels.

Chen and the park's chief marketing director, Carl Reynolds, expect about 1 million visitors a year, just a fraction of the 12 million or so drawn by the Magic Kingdom next door. However, even that estimate may be overly optimistic, say tourism experts who doubt Americans can be drawn in large numbers to view beautiful but static displays, winding landscaped paths, graceful bonsai trees and artful archways and bridges.

To overcome such thinking, the owners have added restaurants; live entertainment, such as Mongolian wrestling, acrobats, and martial arts; and shopping.

Many of the restaurants and shops are in the Suzhou Gardens, a life-sized replica of an urban area known as the water city. Its "main street," leading from the entrance, is patterned after one about 1300 A.D.

Chen and Reynolds say that travelers to Central Florida are a diversified lot who will welcome the chance to get away from the hustle and bustle of the more traditional attractions.

They believe, too, that Splendid China will attract many foreign visitors, who take more easily to museums and passive cultural attractions than Americans do.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Transcript of WMNF Radio News 12/20/93

Announcer: Good afternoon, this is the WMNF Drive Time news at 88.5 in Tampa St. Petersburg, I'm Twila Hudda. A \$100 million theme park opened in Central Florida yesterday, demonstrators carrying Tibetan flags and signs stood for a moment of silence on the causeway at the park's entrance. They are protesting the parks recreation of the Tibetan Potala Palace, the palace was the home of the Dalai Lama and the home to Tibetan monks until 1959 when the Chinese government bombed the palace and killed Tibetan buddhist monks. No information about the Chinese occupation can be found in the theme park as 88.5 WMNF's Bill George reports.

Bill: Journalists, photographers, park security and officials walked silently along with four Buddhist monks as they entered the park. Park officials warned them not to hand out literature or disturb sightseers. Standing in front of the Potala Palace, the monks prayed in silence with tears streaming down their faces for thousands of Tibetans who died since the Chinese occupation. Tibetan monk, Ngawang Choephel fled the Potala Palace 30 years ago when it was bombed by China.

Choephel: The Potala Palace symbolizes Tibet, Tibetan culture Tibetan civilization this one doesn't because this one is in a way set up to sort of do propoganda for the Chinese and this one has become a part of Chinese culture but the real one in Tibet truly symbolizes Tibet and Tibetan civilization.

Bill: The audio box, part of the \$500,000 sound system was silent and the sign in front of the Potala Palace replica had been removed. For the last 50 years the Chinese occupation of Tibet has been ignored at Splendid China. The 76 acre attraction has recreated 60 of the nations historical monuments including a miniature replica of the great wall. Demonstrators who spent the week in protest came from all over the United States, Tibet and Mongolia. Tsengelt who was jailed for demanding Mongolian autonomy says the park insults Mongolian culture.

Tsengelt: We couldn't accept this thing, everything is wrong here.

Bill: added the people working at the park who were supposed to be from Mongolia, did not even speak the language. The \$100 million showcase of Chinese culture and 5,000 years of history fails to mention China eliminating much of Mongolian and Tibetan indigenous culture. The Chinese government reportedly owns a 50% interest in the attraction. Publicity agent Frank Langley considered the day a success, the only glitch being traffic congestion.

Langley: Well as you go through this park you'll see that it's a cultural attraction and entertainment attraction, it is not a political attraction, it does not have a political statement at all and as such we do not make a political statement.

Bill: The protest ended when a police officer detained John Ackerly director of the International Campaign for Tibet. Ackerly was warned not to return to the park.

Ackerly: They said if I ever came back on the property again I'd be arrested but they gave no reason for why I was issued the warning. I don't think I have done anything to trespass and I have obeyed all the rules that they asked of me. They asked that we not obstruct traffic, they asked that we not distribute literature, I haven't done any of that.

Bill: Protesters hoped to prevent schoolchildren from coming to Splendid China, they plan to continue demonstrating until officials remove the Potala Palace exhibit.

For WMNF I'm Bill George.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Newest Attraction attracts protesters

Buddhist monks and others quietly protest the opening of Splendid China near Orlando

The St. Petersburg Times

Laura Griffin; Times Staff Writer

Kissimmee

They stood on the road outside Splendid China - Florida's newest theme park - in their maroon robes and sunglasses and held signs that decried oppression and genocide.

The protesters at this tourist attraction were quiet and serious - hoping to educate tourists to the atrocities China committed against their countries.

"End Chinese Genocide in Tibet," one sign read. "Free Mongolia," read another. No communism in Kissimmee," was written on another.

After standing outside for three hours, four Buddhist monks paid admission and silently walked through the park until they reached the replica of the Potala Palace, once home to some of the monks, as well as their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

At the palace, which sparked the controversy that brought the monks to Florida from as far away as New York, Wisconsin, and Atlanta, they stood in silent prayer for those killed in the Tibetan uprising in 1959, when many were forced to flee Tibet.

And they wept.

"It hurts very much to see this palace here," said Tsering Namgyal, a monk from the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Ithica, N.Y. "To see it and to know I can't go inside. It is like a palace for children."

The owners of the \$100 million park say that is exactly whom it is for and hope to bring school-children in by the busloads. They see it as a cultural and entertainment park, not a political statement.

And they say, they see no place for tales of oppression, massacre and genocide in a theme park.

The park is a joint venture between an American real estate development company and the China Travel Service, a Chinese quasi-governmental agency based in Hong Kong.

The ownership upsets the Mongolians and the Tibetans. They are offended that, after destroying their culture, China is now showing it off as its own.

"They destroyed our culture not only in my country, but here in your country, a country of freedom," said Tsengelt Gonchigsuren, who is from Inner Mongolia and now lives in New Jersey. "I am very angry."

"Chinese culture is very good," said Thubten Samphel of the Office of Tibet in New York. "It is not necessary for China to use other people's culture to prop up theirs."

Once inside the park, the protesters became an attraction of sorts themselves. Tourists joined the throng of reporters and photographers who followed them past the exhibits.

Though the crowds seemed sparse, park officials were pleased with attendance, estimating about 3,000 visitors on the first day.

The monks were allowed their protest and silent prayer because they didn't bother the visitors.

"This is a cultural and entertainment attraction. We don't make a political statement and we reserve the right to refuse entrance to anyone who attempts to make a political statement," said Frank Langley, the park's publicist.

The Buddhist protesters, about 50 in all, had wanted to picket at the front gate, where they could distribute bumper stickers and leaflets "to tell the other side of the story" to visitors. They were told they could be arrested for trespassing, said John Ackerly, director of the International Campaign for Tibet. So they were left on the roadway to try to get the idea across. At least one family agreed.

The Tobins from Toronto turned their car around after the protesters explained things to them. They already had seen most of the theme parks around Orlando and thought they would give Splendid China a try.

"We've changed our minds," said Warren Tobin. "I didn't know all this was going on here. I agree with them."

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Palace Protest: Pickets Greet China theme park opening

Tampa Tribune by Ann Bakkalapulo, Tribune Staff Writer

12/20/93

Kissimmee-- Chodak Dsmpl edged toward the miniature replica of the Potala Palace, set on a high mound at the just-opened Splendid China theme park.

The 30-year old Tibetan monk, dressed in the traditional maroon robe, stopped, then slowly strode around the display where a thousand figurines re-enacted a spring-time scene 200 years ago in his ancestor's homeland. He wept uncontrollably, shielding his face as cameras clicked and protesters in the background chanted "Free Tibet !" Dsmpl walked through the park with three other Tibetan Buddhist monks. They and more than 50 others had come to protest Sunday's public opening of the attraction, a \$100 million joint venture between American Eastern International Corp. of Los Angeles and China Travel Services Ltd. of Hong Kong, a Chinese government travel agency.

Splendid China, patterned after the original Splendid China in Shenzhen, China, across the border from Hong Kong, features 60 small copies of historic sites and landmarks, including the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, home to the venerated spiritual leader Dalai Lama who was forced out of his homeland by Chinese occupation forces.

The demonstrators say the attraction misrepresents Tibetan and Mongolian life; that the Chinese government has glossed over the ravages of occupation in those two areas. They claim the park wasn't put in attraction-rich Florida just to make money, that it is a political statement from the communist government of China. They want the displays concerning Mongolia and Tibet to be removed.

"Its been very upsetting to us because there is no freedom in Tibet," Dsmpl said.

John Ackerly, a Washington D.C., lawyer and director of the International Campaign for Tibet, said unsuccessful attempts were made to talk with park officials before the Sunday demonstration.

Splendid China officials denied the park carried a political message. They said it was intended only to showcase unique areas of their Asian nation and proclaimed Sunday's opening was a success with 3,000 people admitted by mid afternoon.

Outside the park entrance, protesters passed out literature and waved signs at motorists that read "Destruction is not 'Splendid' and "China Out of Tibet." An Osceola sheriff's deputy watched from a parked department car.

"It's a Chinese attempt to beautify what is ugly in China," said Thubten Samphel of the Office of Tibet in New York City. "We feel that the tourists should be educated about China."

The Chinese occupied Tibet in 1950. For nine years, the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of the Tibetans, tried negotiating peaceful coexistence with his people and the Chinese. When that failed, he and thousands of others fled in 1959 to India, establishing their government-in-exile in Dharamsala.

The Chinese gutted all but 10 of Tibet's 6,254 monasteries, and about 1.2 million people have died in combat and through massive famines caused by collectivized farming and diversion of Tibetan grain to China. "The Potala Palace represents the bad things the Chinese are doing in Tibet," said monk Ngawang Chojor, 59, who lived in a monastery at the palace. "This is an attempt to destroy our history."

Chojor, Dsmpl and fellow monks Tsering Namgyal and Jampa Rinpoche, living temporarily in Ithica, N.Y., turned their backs to the miniature palace and prayed. Across the fence, protesters waved signs and chanted.

The picketing outside Splendid China began Saturday, during an invitation-only grand opening.

Demonstrators were back at the entrance Sunday by 10 a.m., 15 - among them the monks - left their signs and leaflets behind and bought tickets for \$23.55 apiece.

"You are welcome to do everything that a normal visitor does," Haven Riviere, the parks' operations director, told them, "We're not here to make a political statement; we're here to portray the people of China."

Security guards kept pace with the monks.

Susan Henson of St. Cloud said she was aware of the protest before coming to the park, but didn't know the details. She had noticed informational signs at all the displays but the Potala Palace. Park officials said they removed it to prevent defacing.

"Its wonderful in there," said Henson. "If there's anything legitimate to the protest, I don't see why they don't compromise and give some more information. It'd be better for everybody and we'd be better informed."

Chinese musicians played ethnic music as visitors wandered through the well-manicured, 76-acre park that took two years to build. Here was a miniature Great Wall, there the Mausoleum of Genghis Khan.

Also taking the tour was Tsengelt Gonchigsuren, 26, who moved to New Jersey from Inner Mongolia eight months ago. Back outside, he once again held up his country's flag and a "Free Mongolia" sign.

"It's a contradiction to confuse the outside world," he said. "The Inner Mongolia situation is like Tibet. We have no religious rights, cultural rights. The Chinese destroy Mongolian culture here, in your country in this park."

"This is wrong."

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

New Florida Theme Park Based on Chinese History Opens to Protest

New York Times : National Report

National Report

The New York Times

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1993



New Florida Theme Park Based on Chinese History Opens to Protest

At Splendid China, a new park with a Chinese history theme in Kissimmee, Fla., monks prayed near a replica of the Potala Palace of the Dalai Lama. They joined demonstrators who protested China's control of Tibet, where the palace is. The building was nearly destroyed when China invaded Tibet in 1959. The Chinese Government closed the palace as a religious center, and it is now open only to tourists although it is still regarded as the world's most sacred place for millions of Buddhists.

At Splendid China, a new park with a Chinese history theme in Kissimmee, Fla., monks prayed near a replica of the Potala Palace of the Dalai Lama. They joined demonstrators who protested China's control of Tibet, where the palace is. The building was nearly destroyed when China invaded Tibet in 1959. The Chinese Government closed the palace as a religious center, and it is now open only to tourists although it is still regarded as the world's most sacred place for millions of Buddhists.

Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Park's Tibetan Display Draws Buddhist Protest Miniature Palace creates Huge Controversy

The Washington Post

by William Booth, Washington Post Staff Writer

12/21/93

Kissimmee, Fla. Dec. 22 --

Florida's newest and most diminutive tourist attraction, a theme park composed of miniature replicas of palaces and gardens called "Splendid China," is creating a huge controversy because of its depiction of Tibet.

The \$100 million, 76-acre attraction includes a miniature Forbidden City and even a small Great Wall, built of 6 million tiny bricks. But it also contains a replica of the Potala Palace, holiest of shrines for Tibetan Buddhists and former home of the exiled Dalai Lama in Lhasa, Tibet.

To those Buddhists and to Dalai Lama followers, that replica, several feet high, is an abomination and part of a grand propaganda scheme.

"When I saw it, I was very upset, and I was weeping," said Tsering Namgyal, a Tibetan Buddhist monk who came to the park last weekend in his flowing robes to protest.

The furor about Splendid China comes amid heightened awareness about whether theme parks, including Disney's America near Haymarket, Va., can relate authentic history, wars and all, and accurately address slavery, oppression and occupation.

Namgyal and fellow monks decry what they see as an insidious attempt to whitewash China's brutal invasion and occupation of their mountain country since 1949 and the communist government's repression of Buddhism there.

"We stood before the replica and said a silent prayer for the Tibetans who have lost their lives since the occupation," he said.

Like other visitors, the monks paid \$23 a piece to enter for Splendid China's grand opening Sunday, but they were warned against making a disturbance. Outside, their supporters chanted and displayed signs reading "China Out of Tibet!"

The monks and their supporters call Splendid China "a propaganda park" that portrays "a fantasy China" and is more make-believe than nearby Disney World.

To the park's creator - China Travel Services Ltd. of Hong Kong, a company with ties to the government in Beijing - the Potala Palace reproduction is "one of the visual highlights" of the attraction, "projecting its majesty and grandeur like a beacon."

Not so, said Ngawang Chogur, who studied and lived in the Dalai Lama's monastery in the Potala Palace before the Tibetan spiritual leader left the country in 1959.

"It is not suitable," Chogur said. "The Potala Palace is the most important religious and political symbol of Tibet, and they are just covering that up and showing a little replica and pretending that it is part of China, and that is not true."

In Tibet, the palace is open to tourists. Some Buddhist monks pray and chant there, but Namgyal and other monks said the Chinese government forbids them from using the palace to train monks and nuns.

Here in Kissimmee, the palace replica sits on a mini-mountain, surrounded by hundreds of five-inch-high porcelain figurines of happy Tibetans. In this unusual park, which has no amusement rides but features 150 wandering entertainers, a sign describing the palace was removed temporarily by officials concerned about its defacement.

According to the International Campaign for Tibet, a Washington-based advocacy group, Splendid China "is part of extensive external propaganda campaign carried out by Beijing...to depict the purportedly idyllic existence of Tibetans, Mongolians, Uighurs, Maos, and other peoples whose cultures have been suppressed, and in some cases obliterated, by the Chinese."

Chi-Man Ma, who lives in Hong Kong and is chairman of Florida Splendid China Inc., said the park is not propaganda but a display of Chinese history and culture. "We want the world to know China," he said through a translator. "This is not a political statement."

Ma, saying "Tibet is part of China," added that he believes people in China and Tibet are free to practice their religious beliefs.

Ma said he planned the park and determined what buildings should be reproduced in miniature. He denied critics' assertions that the Beijing government has master-minded the attraction.

John Ackerly of International Campaign for Tibet countered that while Ma's company is based in Hong Kong, it is closely tied to and partly owned by the Chinese government.

Spokesman for Splendid China describes China Travel Service as a "quasi-government" corporation, and Ma said the park's purpose is to generate tourism in China.