

China goes Europa

Luise Kloos, editor

Next – Verein für bildende Kunst in collaboration with NUROPE – Nomadic University for Arts, Philosophy and Enterprise in Europe - organized an oasis by the name of “China Goes Europe” in Graz. Apart from the numerous economic co-operations between Europe and China, an aspect of special interest to the oasis was China’s cultural policy to establish Confucius Institutes all over the world. The oasis in Graz exhibited the historical and cultural developments of China alongside those of Europe. Students were able to learn from curators’, artists’ and economists’ experiences with, and in, China. Through a series of lectures and discussions, all participants developed deep insights into present day developments in China and the Greater China area.

During a special think tank, opportunities were charted out by discussing the Confucius Institutes and the local cultures they are situated in. Special emphasis was placed on the historic, aesthetic, cultural, economic and educational implications. This kind of exploration generated knowledge that is highly relevant to all European nations. Europe’s post-colonial points of view and attitudes were, among various other aspects, discussed and put into the context of contemporary cultural developments of Asia.

Welcoming Words

Mag. Siegfried Nagl, Mayor of the city of Graz

When nomads travel across the country, they are always looking forward to the next oasis. Therefore, we hope that this city represents a nice oasis for you. Compared to Chinese cities, Graz must seem like a very small town, having about 258,000 citizens, but we have people from many nations all over the world living in this city. I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank Mrs. Luise Kloos for having suggested the idea for this Nomadic University, and for having brought this international idea to Graz.

I have been working for this city for twelve years now, and been its mayor for seven years. The city hall of Graz has, at its main entrance, four pillars with one statue each. The two male statues represent trade and commerce, and the two female statues represent the sciences and arts. These four statues are faithful replicas of the original statues that have been lost. With this conference we would like to contribute to new projects concerning these fields - arts and education.

China is on the move, and perhaps Graz is a good starting point for this new move into the future. In Austria, tradition and progress have always joined forces to move towards the future. When the world hears of Austria, most people think of Vienna or Salzburg, but Graz too is a city of creativity. We would therefore also like to contribute to international creative networks, as we already partly did by being the European cultural capital in 2003.

Not only is one of the promoters of international networks here, the Vice-Rector of the University of Graz, Ms. Roberta Maierhofer, but we appreciate and cherish everything we have here in Graz. We have to start thinking about what will happen when economic production will move away from the West. As Wladyslaw Bartoszewski put it: “The greatest dangers for the coexistence of people are on the one hand disinterest and on the other hand ignorance. These two attitudes often contain the roots of all evil. This is as true for private life as it is for politics, because it is even more political than we think. Perhaps disinterest is the reason why people adapt too much and get used to all the suffering in the world too easily. In this world, human beings are the most important thing and we have only started on this way that everything is about the human being.”

There is a second quotation from Confucius: “The superior man in the world does not set his

mind either for or against anything; what is right, he will follow."

As I said, Graz is a city of creativity, and we have the University of Music and Dramatic Arts here. However, we do not have a university for fine arts. Being a Renaissance city, we hope to be able to establish universities dedicated to the all arts here in the future. We hope that you are able learn many things and make new friends. Concluding all my welcome speeches, I like to say: if there is anything you do not like about Graz, please tell the mayor, me. But if there are things you really like, please go around the world and tell everyone about them!

Mag. Kristina Edlinger-Ploder, Member of the Provincial Government of Styria for Science and Research, Health and Nursing Management

It is a common view that the 21st century will be economically affected and even dominated by Asia - in particular by China. At the same time there is the danger that Europe will fall behind, if it does not take strong action in view of these new developments and challenges.

There is no doubt that China is developing an impressive and formidable dynamic. A comprehensive understanding and knowledge of Chinese thought and culture are critical requirements for a fruitful relationship and cooperation. China is much more than just a future market and has to be perceived and treated accordingly.

There is little awareness of the manifold and historically developed economic, scientific and cultural connections between China, Europe, Austria and even Styria. At this present time it is imperative to create and strengthen networks between these cultures.

One such important network in this context is NUROPE.

The oasis "China Goes Europe" opened up fascinating perspectives and gave numerous valuable impulses. (...)

Dr. Christian Buchmann, Member of the Provincial Government of Styria for Culture and Economy

It is thanks to the special engagement by Luise Kloos that a unique project like the Nomadic University has become – almost paradoxically – an institution. Paradoxically, because the idea behind a Nomadic University precludes any institutionalization in the sense of settling down in one place. This has, in fact, not happened, but the term "university" itself implies both the institutional and the general. Luise Kloos successfully manages to do justice to all these parameters while she subtly weaves her networks across the globe. She deserves continual praise for this, because the quality of the Nomadic University, its lecturers, students and the content of its programs is the exclusive product of her personal efforts. In my function as Kulturlandesrat, I have the pleasure to introduce a project that actually happened before my time in this office. Despite this, I know from experience and from lively stories that China Goes Europe was an extraordinarily engaging project that opened and sharpened our eyes, enabled lively exchanges of experiences, and provided much encouragement for the future. The numerous contacts that have been developed will, in turn, shape new projects, and serve as an inspiration for all contemporary nomads of art and culture. (...)

Prof. Chen Hangzhu, Councillor of the People's Republic of China to Graz

The city of Graz is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was the cultural capital of Europe in 2003 and is home to many cultures. Many artists and people of science meet here and exchange their ideas, and historically, the entire region constituted a meeting point of cultures - even the Romans have left their traces here. Due to this background, it is a good idea to host the Nomadic University in Graz in 2010. The political, economic and cultural relationship between the city of Graz and China has undergone a very good development during the past years. The Graz Oasis is a sign for this deepening relationship, and an expression of the

mayor's efforts to contribute to - and intensify - the good relationship between Graz and China. We highly appreciate these efforts.

Karl-Heinz Herper, City Councillor for Culture

Nomads are people who lead, for various socio-cultural, economic or personal reasons, lives that are not settled or confined to one place. In a security-oriented Europe, the word "nomad" usually evokes images of people fighting for their survival in harsh desert regions. However, such associations of nomadic life - and of the Nomadic university - with poverty and struggle seem inadequate, despite the fact that Austria's universities today are faced with conditions that one does not often encounter in the so-called civilized world; and despite the fact that the city of Graz is making legitimate demands for an expansion of its existing infrastructure of four universities. (...)

The Confucius Institute in Graz

Daniela Unger-Ullmann, Head of Treffpunkt Sprachen Graz

With the approval of the application to found a Confucius Institute at the University of Graz, it is possible to meet the increasing demand for Chinese language- and culture-instruction in Styria and the neighboring regions, and to offer an information and meeting platform for all those interested in China. Confucius Institutes have been established around the world, and today there are more than 90 of these educational institutions in Europe alone. The Confucius Institute of Graz is the second institution of this kind in Austria after the Confucius Institute of Vienna, and is a unique opportunity for expertise on all things Chinese to take root in Styria.

The Confucius Institute will be incorporated into the University of Graz through the existing structures of treffpunkt sprachen - Centre for Language, Plurilingualism and Didactics. Treffpunkt sprachen is characterized by many years of experience in language teaching and has been a research centre since 2009, focusing on language policy, documentation and didactics. In cooperation with the University of Jiangsu it offers excellent conditions to guarantee the development of a Confucius Institute.

The Confucius Institute, besides providing instruction in Chinese language and culture, focuses specifically on teaching and research, and aims to cooperate with other educational institutions and anyone in society, politics and the business world who is interested in China. This cooperation will take place on the regional and transregional level with a special consideration of Southeastern Europe. The goal is to contribute to intercultural dialogue by providing a vivid and multifaceted picture of China.

The Confucius Institute considers itself to be an institutional establishment that deals with scientific, economic and social topics in teaching and research. To promote the spread of the Chinese language, to examine issues in philosophy, literary studies, art history and cultural studies, to ensure feasibility in practice and to provide assistance to companies in initiating collaborations and projects. (...)

Local Nomads

Andrea Wolfmayr: On the Train. Notes of a Commuter

It gets narrow, very narrow.

Everyone is in trouble and in small employments where they get less and less, have to perform more and more, invest time, strength, nerves, and then say thank you for just... Transport costs rise, mobility and flexibility are pre-supposed. Watch out that we don't give you a very different turn! Europe costs us much. This peace, this wealth is really taking it out

of each of us. No luxury-life of democrats anymore, but stretch towards the ceiling, which is made of glass. And still the big-wigs drive soundlessly with their shiny cars not washed by themselves, with leather seats, muted music and champagne that they can drink in peace, after all, it's a company car with a driver. I talk as if I was going to join the Communists any moment. But my own little rag of a white shirt is washed a thousand times, the faded jeans, the white jacket is easily five years old, and the bracelet I bought when I lived with my ex in Düsseldorf, which is easily ten years ago. Well, I own other things. A home. Which the bank will own until I'm seventy. But time flies in the morning. The sleeper's mobile phone signals a message. But finally sun! This at least is one joy. I handled our households quite well this morning, Maria comes and will take over the rest. Beautiful summer countryside. Grateful for that. Every day working off a bit more, soon I'm done. Forest idyll-door closed, behind shutters I vaguely recognize someone. Funny, every day the same thing differently. Want to watch good movies with Oz again and do something together. We can't manage our houses anymore. If there is no time, for both of us. This weekend Manfred for him, Nike for me. What remains? 68.9 today. Slowly down again, then. By the way, today Margit and I met Johann H, we walked towards each other in the passage. Me, totally bashful like a thirteen-year-old, looking and quickly looking away again. We talk. I am black and white, Margit has freshly washed, wet hair. What difference the weather makes. In the sun everything looks so different! Shining. Like our faces. I hope for Joanna that her job will work out, and this won't take forever either, just a transition until the end of her studies.

Knigge for China

Hong-Ling Yang, Language Teacher, Graz

1. What Confucius Said

The teachings of Confucius deal both with service to society and with the fulfillment of one's domestic, everyday duties connected to each individual's social position. For Confucius, service and duty were closely connected to the individual's realization and inner assimilation to the Dao and to heaven. We learn that human beings can only work for the benefit of their families, nations and the world if they have first learned to develop their own virtues. We also learn that we should not do to others what we do not want others to do to us.

2. The Greeting – Ninhao

A newly arrived delegation is greeted according to their position in society or the company, starting with the most important person, or otherwise according to seniority or simply in order. The principle of 'Ladies First' does not apply in China. When picking up a Chinese business delegation at the airport, care needs to be taken that the person sent has the same rank as that of the leader of the arriving delegation.

3. Introductions in China

3.1. In contacts with Chinese business people, the European business person should always display seriousness and respect. If women participate in negotiations, then their function and responsibility should be clearly pointed out.

3.2. The handshake has been adopted from the West, and generally constitutes the accepted form of greeting today. Europeans notice that Chinese handshakes are usually not strong, but can last several seconds. When the Chinese greet, they avoid direct eye contact and direct their eyes slightly downwards. This is a sign of honor and respect.

3.3. Intensive, direct eye contact from our side can be perceived as uncomfortable by the Chinese.

3.4. Handshakes are always followed by a ritual exchange of business cards. It is thus

important to always bring enough business cards. Ideally, the business card's text should be in English on one side, and in Chinese on the other. It is important that one's own title or function is mentioned on it. It is recommended to consult experts in the translation of business card texts, because certain Chinese characters may have a better, more positive meaning than others.

The classical procedure for the exchange of business cards is to hand over and receive cards with both hands. One's own business card should be held by the corners so that the business partner can directly read the text. It is important not to put away the received card immediately, but to intensively read/study it for several seconds (even if it is printed only in Chinese) in order to show one's respect.

The business card represents the person it refers to. For this reason, no crumpled or dirty cards should be used. Business cards should not be stored in one's wallet in the back pocket, since this is considered unclean, but in a special container in the breast pocket of a shirt or the inner pocket of one's jacket. It is considered very impolite to make notes on received business cards! (...)

Learning about “The West”

Lichia Saner-Yiu, CSEND, Geneva

The symbolic meaning of “the West” has gone through different versions of iteration in China. The so-called “West”, formerly meaning close neighbours reachable on the horseback in the steppe (Western territory, 西域) is now seen as the distant place (Western direction 西方) across the ocean, e.g. North America & Western Europe.

Throughout history, exchanges with the West were sometimes voluntary, and at other times imposed. The Great Wall demarcated the boundary towards the Western Territory. This Wall was built, rebuilt and maintained throughout dynasties since the 5th century B.C. The most recent renovation was in the 90's due to the destruction caused during the Japanese invasion. Remnants of the wall are mostly from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD), extending over 8,851.8 Kilometres. The Great Wall manifests in its majestic and silent way the push-and-pull relationship with the western neighbours sharing the same continent.

Active contact to the tribes situated to the west of China was mostly maintained via trade. This was also the gateway through which the contact between China and the Far West was established and intensified. Chinese pioneers desired to know and learn about from people in the West. (...)

Myth and Art

Paul Zwietnig-Rotterdam, Artist, New York

May 29, 1945 at six o'clock in the morning, it was raining in Amsterdam. Two police officers knocked at the door of Han Van Meegeren, painter, to declare his arrest for high treason against the state. His name had been found in connection with papers showing the sale of Dutch master paintings to the Nazis during the war. It was especially the sale to Hermann Goering of a Vermeer painting that put Van Meegeren under suspicion of collaboration with the enemy. After weeks of denial Van Meegeren confessed to the crime, but with inclusion of a statement that stunned the world even in those hectic postwar times: the painting in question was not a Vermeer, it had been painted by Van Meegeren himself and he claimed to have done other newly discovered works by De Hooch and Frans Hals. The greatest nightmare of all, however, was his assertion that it was him who had painted Vermeer's famous “Christ at Emmaus”, which had already been hanging for seven years in the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam. When this canvas appeared on the market in 1937, its authenticity

certified by the most outstanding experts in the world, numerous publications spoke of the ultimate masterwork of Vermeer, it sold to the museum for the incredible price of 550.000 guilders. The painting became the centerpiece of the 1938 exhibition of 450 Dutch masters. Enormous crowds of visitors were led to a separate room with carpets on the floor so as not to disturb the silence of contemplation and the feeling of mystical serenity emanating from the work as if from an altar, as critics described it. It became the most popular painting in Holland, said to contain all the elements of the holy, the mystical and the spiritual which convert the viewing of art into a pilgrimage to a sacred shrine wherein man's inner state is liberated from worldly anxieties, healed by a wondrous, religious spirit. (...)

The Emmaus painting is a rather arbitrary arrangement of bodies which share no more than bread, freshly baked, and the table around which they sit. Mary Magdalene's roughly painted face appears not to have found its proper place within the pictorial space. The soft face of Christ with its swollen lips beats the plane brutally in coloration. The clothing of the figures is all the same, rough blankets sewn together with thick seams. Christ wears a morning coat, freshly ironed as if he wore it for the first time. The objects on the table are dead matter without aesthetic life, boring, freshly polished utensils that make the onlooker believe that there is a place for eating here. The wall of the room, modeled from light to dark, gives the impression that the room had not been painted for a while or that the figures are placed on a dirty stage. A light rectangle a la Vermeer pushes from the left into the picture as if it were an afterthought. Instead of bringing light, it is a dirty area. Figures and other objects are isolated phenomena that meet as in a blind rendezvous of foreign elements. They don't allow the eye to rest in contemplation of the totality of the work, but point to the division of objects in the world, their separate existence, like a snapshot that allows only momentary vista of a vanishing scene, like the first sentence of an unfinished story. (...)

Wild Vegetation

Paul Zwietnig-Rotterdam, Artist, New York

In late June or early July of 1889, Vincent Van Gogh created a pen and ink drawing that is markedly different from his earlier work. It shows a remarkable thrust into unknown regions of abstraction far removed from the expectations of his style and from Impressionist painting at the time. The image develops an unexpected distance from recognizable subject matter and reaches a degree of visual autonomy that makes questionable its title "Wild Vegetation in the Hills", probably invented by Van Gogh's oeuvre cataloger Baart de la Faille. One is tempted to place the work into the period of Kandinsky around 1910 or into the oeuvre of an artist of our time. From a contemporary perspective the drawing has a timeless modernity no longer comparable with the efforts of an Impressionist working in front of nature, attaching himself to visible subject matter even if the depicted objects serve no other purpose than as material for artistic innovation and abstract manipulation of form.

Wild Vegetation is not the re-creation or the abstraction of a phenomenon of nature. It is the presentation of an autonomous object whose content is contained within its own nature. The character of the drawing resides in short, curvilinear scribbles that follow neither an identifiable shape nor serve a traditional landscape space. The linear marks act as structural elements for the articulation of the picture plane. Applied evenly with little distance from one another, these elements create an energetic pattern not dissimilar to the "all-over painting" practiced half a century later. The drawing evolved from an activity that concentrated solely on the sensuous material as if the playful spirit of the artist observed from the outside, or from

a distance, how the scribbles assembled almost automatically and create a mesh-work of lines totally at ease, completely immersed in its own making. The result is certainly not the product of a strict intention nor is it the reproduction of objects imagined or re-created from memory.

Six months earlier, in the autumn of 1888, memoir was a hotly discussed topic when Gauguin visited Van Gogh in Arles. Gauguin insisted that a higher degree of abstraction and a more truthful display of stylistic features could be accomplished only if the artist kept his distance from outer appearances. In a letter to his brother Theo, Vincent wrote in December of 1888, "Gauguin, in spite of himself, and in spite of me, has more or less proved to me that it is time I was varying my work a little. I am beginning to compose from memory, and all my studies will still be useful for that sort of work, recalling to me things I have seen... I am going to set myself to work from memory often, and the canvases from memory are always less awkward, and have a more artistic look than studies from nature, especially when one works in mistral weather."

Wild Vegetation is not only a variation of Van Gogh's drawing style, but the clear proof of his ability to push abstraction with the audacity of a genius to the highest peak at a time when no one expected an artist to allow his fantasies to erupt spontaneously, apply an almost automatic working method and force the beholder to come up with his own conclusions about what he sees and what the perceived is supposed to mean. The aesthetic idea in Wild Vegetation is no longer in conflict with or dependent upon empirical data, seen or imagined. Van Gogh's style emerges from the drawing-action as a raw force that distributes pictorial elements almost randomly and allows the entirety of the work to come into being as if automatic. Liberated from the often uncertain and hazy connections to past experiences, the aesthetic idea is now situated in the physical existence of the work itself. In this respect Wild Vegetation can be distinguished from the aesthetic ideology of the late 19th century that envisioned the essential character of artistic production in the symbiotic relationship between artistic principles and the measure of nature.

Cypresses in a Starry Night, by comparison, completed two weeks before Wild Vegetation in June of 1889, is still indebted to interactions between memory of a landscape and the impulse to make a rendering according to traditional notions of how objects should be depicted and located in pictorial space. Cypresses in a Starry Night evolves from short, linear marks that follow the contours of objects in an imagined space. A shallow illusion is created by gradually diminishing sizes of depicted images from the foreground into a deeper space of the sky. Invented constellations of linear structures and marks of the pen derive from the representation of something existing. Despite the presence of visible subject matter the artist pursues the abstract quality of the work by carefully controlling the application of strokes. He avoids overlapping and merging of linear marks which easily occur when working with pen and ink. The pictorial space is invigorated by texture and dynamic elements as if they had erupted from an inner boiling, as if a celestial command had opened the pores of reality and allowed initially separate elements to construe themselves in a newly found world. A fantastic illusion stands in front of our astonished eyes. (...)

My Future is not a Dream¹

Peter Pakesch, Head of Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz

To realize an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art - and exclusively of contemporary Chinese art - is a great challenge these days. It raises, inter alia, the question as to the value of nationality-based displays of art. In recent times, the subject of China has become a talking point in all sorts of respects - indeed, almost too much so, but then there has scarcely been

anything previously to match the radical changes and breakneck speed of change in a whole culture, a whole nation and an economy of this size. And the process has been taking place with the world paying close attention to every possible aspect of it. In the period during which the present exhibition will be on, in Austria alone there will be at least four other exhibitions of note dealing with China's history, culture and contemporary art.² This serves as a measure of the widespread attention paid to China in the West, and of the West's great fascination with the historical, cultural, political and economic developments in this country.

The present exhibition, "China Welcomes You... Desires, Struggles, New Identities", is thus about our fascination for a major new and hitherto unknown player in the global arena of art. In the recent years, China has distinguished itself for the vitality of its art scene, occupying a unique creative zone between grand old traditions and the search for total renewal and topicality.

It was less than ten years ago that exhibitions first drew our attention to young Chinese artists who interested us because they went beyond exercises in folklore and official state art.³ Even before that, artists from China had made appearances in Western events, but it was not until we were offered exhibitions with representative figures from China itself and from the art scene there that we began to get a more comprehensive view of what was going on in China and what was driving it. Around the same time, Western collectors were starting to take an interest in what Chinese studios were producing, making sense of the information available to them and – of necessity – making selections. In a European context, the outstanding pioneer in this respect was collector Uli Sigg, who was also Swiss ambassador to China at the time and had come to know the country very well over the years. The importance of the effect that the collectors had should not be underestimated.

In a country like China, the basic structures that furnish artistic output with resonance and continuity are (or were at that time) lacking. Thus the collections brought together a diverse – and initially of course highly uneven – corpus of works that enabled the art world to study and chew over the phenomenon in greater depth. The importance of this was evident from the Mahjong exhibition of the Sigg Collection in 2005 at the Kunstmuseum in Berne, where we were treated to probably our first reliable over-view of contemporary art in China. (...)

The Colonial Gap

Antony Fredriksson, Dept. of Philosophy, Åbo Akademi University

When we think of colonialism we usually have in mind a power-structure, a political history of oppression and exploitation that occurred from the 16th century onward as a venture of the Western world. In this presentation I want to examine a perhaps more elusive problem of interaction between cultures that is related to, but goes beyond this specific historical political project of colonialism.

A common way of addressing the problem of colonialism can be formulated into the following question: how can we describe the other without using our own culturally acquired framework of knowledge? How can we describe the other with a language that is our own without distorting, misunderstanding, subjugating or exploiting the other? To paraphrase Claude Levi-Strauss, if this gap is not bridgeable it will entail that all situations where two cultures come in contact with each other, will result in the other being subjugated, thus all interactions between cultures will result in some form of colonialism. Here it is important to note that this question already presupposes a gap between the own and the other. Although the question quite rightly points out that colonialism is related to a problem of understanding and that this phenomenon works through a privileging of the so called master narrative, the language of the colonizer, the question still seems to indicate that there is something inevitable in this

power structure. In this way the colonial gap becomes a model of how cultures deal with each other. In this presentation I want to find a way out of this line of thinking. (...)

Some examples of ‘non-market oriented’ Chinese contemporary art

Monica Dematté, Sinologist, Italy

In the last 10 years or so, Chinese art has entered the international contemporary art market, gradually gaining an important place and high market value. At the same time, the impact of Chinese industrial production and export on the global economy has changed the perception of China abroad, and the Chinese people’s self esteem has largely improved.

I feel that in this historical period the highest value is accorded to the economy: materialism is the yardstick by which everything is measured, with only a few sporadic attempts to oppose it. Even on an individual scale, our lives are governed and determined by material concerns and needs. We appear free, but are in reality slaves of many induced burdens that prevent us from enjoying the time that could be devoted to achieving spiritual/intellectual independence and creativity. Art has always somehow been connected to money, if not the market, but I doubt that those masterpieces which are still able to move and inspire many people even several centuries after their creation have been conceived only in order to fulfil a material need or quest.

Chinese art in the last century has had a rather unusual and somewhat unnatural development. From the May 4th movement with its western-oriented ideas, to the Lu Xun wood engraving ‘campaign’ with its declared social role, to the ‘revolutionary/socialist’ support and celebration of the Communist Party’s ideals, art has been clearly and openly considered as a ‘way’, a ‘tool’ to propagate ideas with social/political/nationalistic aims. (...)

Golden Rules of China

Werner Wiedenbauer, BioDiesel International AG

1. Everything is possible
 2. Nothing is easy
 3. Western business logic does not apply
 4. It is a fun project if there is no deadline
 5. You must persist - things will come your way eventually
 6. Patience is the essence of success
 7. “You don’t know China” means that they disagree
 8. “New Regulations” means that they found a new way to avoid doing something
 9. “International Regulation” means they are mad at you
 10. “Basically, No Problem” means BIG problem
 11. When you are optimistic, think about Rule Nr. 2
 12. When you are discouraged, think about Rule Nr. 1
- and Don’t Worry - Be Happy

Introduction to doing business in China

Wan Jie Chen, SINOpex, Graz

Europe is about the size of China. 114 times Austria would be China. China’s economy is developing fast, with gigantic proportions. I will tell you a Chinese joke called “presidents visiting China”:

George W. Bush, Mr. Putin and the former president of China drive in an Audi A8 to an intersection. George W. Bush knows that he wants to turn right – the capitalistic way. Mr. Putin thinks about whether to turn left or right – communism or capitalism – but eventually turns right. The Chinese president also comes to the crossing and seriously thinks about where to turn. Now, if you have a superior in China, he usually tells you what to do. So he calls his superior and asks him which way to turn. The superior tells him: „Oh, you are stupid!! You indicate left and turn right!“

This little joke also indicates the importance of hierarchy in China. As long as there is a superior, you ask him what to do instead of deciding on your own. This hierarchy dates back to Confucius, who stood for hierarchical family values. This means that if you are doing business in China, it is important to talk to the superior. In other words: the person having the highest rank is the one you should talk to when you have problems. So top-down is better than bottom-up. (...)

Think Tank

Conducted by Raymond Saner, CSEND, Geneva

The goal of this Oasis, and especially of the Think Tank, was to learn more about China; how Euro-Chinese or Sino-European relations have evolved over time; and how the relationship between Austria and China impacts life on both sides of the Eurasian continent. The relationship between Austria and China, and specifically between Graz and China, is undergoing many changes and developments. At the time of the Oasis, plans were discussed about setting up a Confucius Centre in Graz, a city with 40,000 students, high-tech companies and a well-established cultural life. Therefore, discussions amongst the participants of the Think Tank dealt with general questions regarding the current and potential future bonds between Graz and China.

The basic concept of a Think Tank, which was already developed and used in previous Oases, is to encourage the expression of creativity inherent in all participants through interactive discussions, resulting in ideas that an individual alone would rarely come up with.

The group of participants within this Oasis – “China Goes Europe” – had an especially high potential, as they had already taken part in several Think Tanks in the past, like the Think Tank for the “Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra”.

The Think Tank of this Oasis consisted of three phases:

- During the first phase, the goal was to identify experiences, knowledge and thoughts that the participants had about China.
- In the second phase, a SWOT-Analysis was organised with the objective of finding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the context of cultural and economical exchanges between Graz/Austria and China.
- During the third and last phase of the Think Tank, participants were invited to generate synergies between arts, culture and commerce. (...)