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[:: Return to issue.](#)

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## **On Goethe's Path. A celebration of U.S.-German-Chinese ties.** *By Walter Pfaeffle*

Invited by the Friends of the Free University, Berlin (FFUB), American, Chinese and German guests met for a black-tie gala in Manhattan. Goethe already knew the outcome, having once stated that we all have the same interests.

Germany's national poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said after reading a Chinese novel that "the Chinese people think, act and feel almost exactly like us; and we soon find that we are perfectly like them." Those lines were written in the early 19th century; Chinese Consul General Liu Biwei cited them recently in New York.

The occasion was an evening celebration of friendship and ties between Germany, China and the United States in mid-October, hosted by Friends of Free University Berlin (FFUB). More specifically, FFUB, a non-profit, brought together their friends and supporters to celebrate the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the Berlin university last April.

Modeled after the Goethe Institutes, the Chinese Berlin center is the only one of its kind in Germany and one of 20 worldwide. Its purpose is to promote the Chinese language and culture within the setting of a German university that was established with American support in the early days of the Cold War.

"This well-timed event reinforces the links that are continually being forged between China, Germany and the United States at all levels," FFUB's Executive-Director H el ene Sostarich-Barsamian said at the sellout reception and dinner held at the plush Cipriani banquet hall in Manhattan.

In his Venetian Epigraphs, Goethe mentions China as the only country outside Europe where his writings are popular. Goethe's works were translated by many celebrated Chinese writers and poets in the first quarter of the 19th century. Conversely, Chinese writers were published in Germany as early as 1766.

Guests at the black-tie gala included representatives of the three governments as well as business leaders from companies such as Siemens and Lufthansa. Also present were Germany's new UN envoy Thomas Matussek and the German Consul General Hans-J urgen Heimsoeth. New York-based Dance China NY highlighted the evening with their performances of eight traditional Chinese dances.

FFUB was founded in 2003. "Through its partnerships, initiatives and projects, it aims to create lasting bonds between the cultures and peoples of the world," according to Director Sostarich-Barsamian. The fund-raising group recognizes major supporters at their annual Transatlantic Bridge Award ceremonies. Past award recipients were architect Norman Foster and Klaus Schwab, the founder of the prestigious World Economic Forum held annually in Davos, Switzerland.

Other projects include renovation of the Henry Ford building, the lynchpin of what later grew to be the Free University Berlin campus for which the group helped raise \$2.5 million. The renovation is expected to be completed next spring.

In 2005 FFUB launched "The Kofi Annan Fellowship in Global Governance" with the help of the United Nations Secretary-General himself and the UN Global Compact. The endowment goal is \$1.5 million. FFUB also has been instrumental in initiating and implementing the recent partnership between the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive and the Free University Berlin. The archives capture 52,000 Holocaust survivor testimonials thanks to movie producer/director Steven Spielberg's vision. They will be made available to scholars and researchers throughout the community of EU institutions of higher learning.

As FFUB receives no funds from the German government, Sostarich-Barsamian appealed to alumni and others to support their efforts financially, as do alumni of Oxford University or Cambridge. "The Free University Berlin may not have the centuries-old history of those institutions, and FFUN may only be three-and-a-half years old, but it has the energy and vision that are essential for even greater future accomplishments," she said.

- Walter Pfaeffle is a German-born journalist who lives in New York.



PATRICK MCMULLAN/JIMI CELESTE/PMC