



THE SUN BEHIND THE CLOUDS **Tibet's Struggle for Freedom**

a film by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam

2009, India/UK, 79 minutes

A White Crane Films production
in association with
Roland Films and Arch Communications GmbH
Co-producers: France 5 and BOS Netherlands

“In a welcome departure from many previous films about the decades-long friction between Tibet and China, "The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom" provides a two-sided view of the complex political and social dynamics within and outside Tibet. For the "struggle" in the film's title is not merely against China but also between competing Tibetan views regarding the best strategy: co-existence or independence...This is not an angry film but a notably calm, well-considered and balanced one.”

- Robert Koehler, *Variety*, 19 January
2010

“A potent update on Tibetans' 50-year struggle for justice and recognition... The subtitle of new film "The Sun Behind the Clouds" – "Tibet's Struggle for Freedom" – refers not only to the half-century dispute between Tibet and China but also to the divisions that have arisen among Tibetans around their beloved leader. The film is essential viewing for anyone who cares about the fate of the mountain region and the legacy of the Dalai Lama.”

- Sheri Linden, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 14 January 2010

SYNOPSIS (107 words)

Tibet. March 2008. The biggest uprising since China took control in 1959, sweeps through the country. Meanwhile, Tibetans in exile march on their homeland, determined to support their countrymen. This is a year of dramatic possibilities for Tibet. For more than 20 years, the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual and political leader, has pursued his Middle Way Approach: giving up the goal of Tibet's independence in return for genuine autonomy. But China has consistently rejected his proposal. Now, more and more Tibetans are questioning his strategy. Can the Dalai Lama's path of peace and compromise find a solution for Tibet? Or will the voices calling for independence prevail?

SYNOPSIS (407 words)

Fifty years have passed since the takeover of Tibet by China. The Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual and temporal leader, has lived in exile for most of his life, trying to find a peaceful solution to the Tibet issue by giving up the goal of independence in an attempt to reach a compromise with China. But his efforts have failed to yield any positive outcome, and his people are becoming more frustrated.

March 2008. Tibet erupts as the biggest uprising since China took control in 1959, spreads across the country. The Tibetan people, for one brief moment, demonstrate to the world their unhappiness under Chinese rule and their desire for freedom. But China cracks down hard on the protests. It is also the year of the Beijing Olympics.

Even as the unrest spreads in Tibet, exile Tibetans in India, frustrated by the lack of political progress, set out on a march back to their homeland, convinced that this is the only action they can take to support their countrymen.

This is a year of dramatic possibilities for Tibet. Will the marchers make it back to Tibet? Will the world stand firm in its support of Tibet even as China prepares for its biggest coming-out party? Can the Dalai Lama finally achieve a breakthrough in his efforts to negotiate a settlement with China and silence the growing voices of dissent among his own people? Can his strategy of non-violence and compromise based on his Buddhist beliefs finally find success?

In *The Sun Behind the Clouds*, Tibetan filmmaker, Tenzing Sonam, and his partner, Ritu Sarin, take a uniquely Tibetan perspective on the trials and tribulations of the Dalai Lama and his people as they continue their struggle for freedom in the face of determined suppression by one of the world's biggest and most powerful nations. The filmmakers had intimate access to the Dalai Lama and followed him over the course of an eventful year, which included the 2008 protests in Tibet, the international response to it, the Beijing Olympics, and the breakdown in talks between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government.

Set against this backdrop, the film explores the interplay between the personal and the historic, spirituality and politics, and the tension between the Dalai Lama's efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the Tibet situation based on compromise and dialogue, and the impatience of a younger generation of Tibetans who are ready to take a more confrontational course.

FILM FESTIVALS

DMZ Korean International Documentary Film Festival, Paju City, 22-26 October 2009

Palm Springs International Film Festival, 5-18 January 2010

Voted Best of the Fest

Mumbai International Film Festival, 3-9 February 2010-01-26

Selected for the International Competition Section

One World International Film Festival, Prague, 10-18 March 2010

Selected for the Right to Know Competition Section

Human Rights Watch Film Festival, London, 17-26 March 2010

Closing Night Film

CREDIT LIST

Directed by RITU SARIN and TENZING SONAM

Produced by RITU SARIN

Written and Narrated by TENZING SONAM

Executive Producers
FRANCESCA VON HABSBURG and LAVINIA CURRIER

Music GUSTAVO SANTAOLALLA

Edited by ANUPAMA CHANDRA, MAHADEB SHI and TENZING SONAM

Camera GRAHAM DAY, JAIMIE GRAMSTON, TENZING SONAM
STEPHEN MCCARTHY, JOHN SERGEANT, DILIP VARMA and TENZIN TSETAN CHOKLAY

Sound SURESH RAJAMANI and MOHANDAS VP

Additional Editing JOHNNY BURKE and ALAN MACKAY

Associate Producers TENZIN TSETAN CHOKLAY and JOHN SERGEANT

Production Coordinator TENZIN CHOKEY GINGULD

Production Manager CLARE CORCORAN

Sound Design GISSY MICHAEL

Colourist TIM O'BRIEN

On-line Editor BEN HEATHER

Post-Production EVOLUTIONS, London

Additional Funding CAMELIA FOUNDATION and ROB LINDEMAN

Co-Producers FRANCE 5, BABETH VANLOO, BOS Holland and KARMIC FILMS, India

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ROLAND FILMS & ARCH COMMUNICATIONS GmbH

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PRODUCTION NOTES

By Tenzing Sonam

In 2007 when Ritu and I first began to talk about doing a film that would focus on the political situation in Tibet, we were very much aware that March 2009 would be a landmark anniversary, marking as it did, 50 years since the Chinese take-over and the exile of the Dalai Lama. Our initial ideas centred around doing some kind of an appraisal of the past five decades, but it became clear that for the film to have some relevance now, it would have to focus more specifically on the current situation. At this point, the Tibetan struggle was going through a period of uncertainty and confusion. The Dalai Lama's efforts to find a solution to the Tibet problem by giving up the goal of independence in return for genuine autonomy, a conciliatory proposal he called the Middle Way Approach, was failing to elicit any positive response from China. On the contrary, China had stepped up its attacks on him personally and were instituting more repressive policies in Tibet. In exile, a growing number of Tibetans were expressing their frustration with the Middle Way Approach and calling for a return to independence.

It was in such an atmosphere that we began shooting our film in January 2008. We were already in touch with the outspoken Tibetan poet and writer Woeser, who lives in Beijing with her Chinese husband, the writer and political commentator, Wang Lixiong. Woeser's open criticism of Chinese policies in Tibet and her courageous blogs highlighting the situation in Tibet, which she continued despite official harassment, were a source of inspiration to all Tibetans and she had become something like a hero for many of us. Woeser was keen to talk to us and allayed our fears for her safety if we came to film her in Beijing. We travelled there at the end of February, and spent a few days with her and Wang Lixiong. Their views on the Tibet situation and their hopes for the future were insightful and trenchant, and added a fresh dimension to our understanding of the issues at stake. Despite her reputation as a formidable critic of the Chinese regime, Woeser turned out to be an elfin character, mischievous, full of life and charmingly radiant. We felt like we had known her all our lives and meeting her was without question, one of the highlights of making the film.

Soon after our return from China, the political situation changed dramatically. On 10th March, while we were in Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama's headquarters in northern India, filming the annual commemoration ceremony of the failed Lhasa Uprising of 1959, we received news that a group of monks had mounted a demonstration in Lhasa, the first public protest in the Tibetan capital for nearly a decade. In Dharamsala, nearly 100 Tibetans had just set out on a march back to their homeland in a bid to highlight the situation there. This was also the year of China's big coming-out party, the Beijing Olympics and there was no doubt that the monks in Lhasa had timed their protest to draw attention to Tibet even as the international spotlight was beginning to focus on China. Within days, the initial protest in Lhasa had escalated and turned into a popular uprising that spread far beyond the capital, indeed, far beyond the borders of what China has designated the Tibet Autonomous Region. Ethnic Tibetan areas in the far-flung provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Szechwan and Yunnan broke out in revolt. This was the largest uprising across the Tibetan plateau since 1959.

The protests in Tibet and their brutal crackdown galvanised the Tibet movement in exile, and ignited a renewed sense of nationalism. The debate between support for

the Middle Way Approach and the desire to return to the goal of independence became more intense. Although the Dalai Lama himself remained firmly committed to his path of compromise, more and more Tibetans, especially the younger generation, were calling for independence and a tougher approach.

We followed the Dalai Lama for the next few months as he travelled to America, Germany, England and France, treading a fine line between appealing for international support for what was happening in Tibet and still keeping the door open to talks with China. A huge wave of sympathy for Tibet manifested itself across the world as supporters came out in protests and disrupted the Olympic Torch Relay in London and Paris. In San Francisco, we filmed large groups of Chinese and Tibetan supporters face each other off in tense confrontations. For the first time, we witnessed Chinese demonstrators protesting wherever the Dalai Lama went, blaming him for the protests in Tibet. But despite the crackdown in Tibet and the continued attacks against the Dalai Lama, China met his envoys in the lead up to the Olympics, sending out a glimmer of hope that the unrest in Tibet had forced the Chinese leadership to reconsider its position.

Meanwhile, in India, despite being initially stopped by the police, the Return to Tibet March continued to head to the Indo-Tibet border, winding its way in a remote corner of the Indian Himalayas. Its numbers had swelled to 300, and the spirits of the marchers were high, buoyed by the news coming in from Tibet. Ritu and I decided to split the filming duties: she covered the Dalai Lama's visit to Germany and England, while I accompanied the marchers, helped by our 16-year-old son, Mila. When the police blockaded the campsite of the marchers deep in the mountains of Uttarakhand state, we were trapped for ten days along with the marchers. We became a part of the march, sharing in their trials and tribulations, filming astonishing scenes of frank debate about the future of the Tibet movement. A deal was finally struck with the police and a smaller group was allowed to continue. Four months after the marchers had set out from Dharamsala, they were finally stopped by the police as they tried to enter a restricted zone in the border town of Dharchula. We were there to film their final stand and arrest.

The Olympics came and went, a public relations triumph for China. The situation in Tibet was still dire, a major security clampdown was in place, and thousands had been arrested, but the attention of the world was now elsewhere. Tibet was no longer on the media radar. Two months after the Olympics finished, China called the Dalai Lama's envoys for another round of talks, but this time, it categorically rejected his compromise offer and accused him yet again of secretly demanding independence. For the moment, the Dalai Lama's efforts to find a solution for Tibet based on his Middle Way Approach had come to an end. And what began as a year full of promise for Tibet, ended on a note of despair.

We filmed for most of 2008, gathering, in the process, more than 200 hours of footage. We filmed more than 60 interviews and shot on three continents. Because of the logistics, we ended up working with a number of different cameramen. Graham Day filmed in Beijing, the events in Dharamsala in March, and the Dalai Lama's travels to England and Germany in May. Jaimie Gramston shot the Dalai Lama's interview, other scenes in Dharamsala in July, and covered the Dalai Lama's visit to Nantes in France in August. A filmmaker friend of ours travelled incognito to Tibet in August and filmed for us there. He was among the first tourists to be allowed into the

Tibetan capital after the demonstrations in March. Steve McCarthy joined us for the second schedule in the US in September. I shot most of the Return March to Tibet and the Dalai Lama's travels in the US in April, and the rest of his visit to France in August. The film was shot on HD, mostly on the Panasonic HDX-900, with additional footage on the Sony PMW-EX1.

A chance meeting with Oscar-winning composer Gustavo Santaolalla in New Delhi, led to his asking us to show him some footage from the shoot. The situation in Tibet reminded him of his homeland, Argentina, during the years of dictatorship and he was immediately sympathetic to the subject of our film. He told us that he worked on instinct and there was something about our project that appealed to him, and promised to think about contributing some music to the film. Some time later, we met him again at his studio in Los Angeles where we showed him more footage and this time, he was ready to commit to doing the music. We had always thought of a soundtrack that wouldn't be obviously Tibetan and Gustavo's understated yet poignant compositions were perfect for the film. We were truly fortunate to get his music.

For much of 2008, while we were off filming, our editor Anupama Chandra was putting the footage together and shaping the first of many rough cuts. Later, we had additional help from Alan Mackay and Johnny Burke in London. Mahadeb Shi pitched in towards the end, and I ended up applying the finishing touches. In all, we edited over a period of a year. Gissy Michael did the sound design in Bombay and we did the on-line and all the final post-production at Evolutions TV in London.

The film was made possible through the support of our old friends and long-time Tibet supporters, Francesca von Habsburg in Vienna and Lavinia Currier in New York.

FILMMAKER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Ritu Sarin was born in New Delhi. After graduating from Miranda House in Delhi, she did her MFA in film and video at the California College of the Arts in Oakland.

Tenzing Sonam was born in Darjeeling in northeastern India to Tibetan refugee parents. He graduated from St Stephen's College and then studied broadcast journalism at the University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism.

Ritu and Tenzing have been working together since 1983, when they embarked on their first film, *The New Puritans: The Sikhs of Yuba City*. They lived in the San Francisco Bay Area and then in London for many years before moving back to India in 1996. They currently work out of Dharamsala, New Delhi and London.

Working through their film company, White Crane Films, they have produced and directed several documentaries, specialising in Tibet-related subjects. These include: *The Reincarnation of Khensur Rinpoche* (1991); *The Trials of Telo Rinpoche* (1993); *A Stranger in My Native Land* (1997); and *The Shadow Circus: The CIA in Tibet* (1998). In 2005, they completed a dramatic feature film, *Dreaming Lhasa*, executive produced by Jeremy Thomas and Richard Gere. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and screened at over thirty film festivals worldwide. Their single-channel video installation, *Some Questions about the Nature of Your Existence* (2007), was shown at Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary in Vienna and at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo and will be participating in the 2010 Busan Biennale in South Korea.

The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom is their most recent work. The 79-minute film had its North American premiere at the Palm Springs International Film Festival in January 2010 where it was voted one of the Best of the Fest films.

For the past 20 years, the subject of Tibet, in all its many aspects has been their primary focus. Through their work they have attempted to document, question, and reflect on, the issues of exile, cultural identity and political aspiration that confront the Tibetan diaspora. Tenzing has also written at length on these issues. At the same time, they have consciously made an effort to dispel some of the more romanticised and exoticised representations of Tibet and its culture that have found currency in the Western imagination, by taking a more intimate, sensitive and realistic perspective.

Ritu and Tenzing are married and have two children.

JOINT FILMOGRAPHY (Producer/Director)

- 2009 *The Sun Behind the Clouds*, DVCPRO HD, 79 minutes
in association with Roland Films and Arch Communications GmbH
Co-producers: France 5, BOS Holland
- 2007 *The Thread of Karma*, HDV/Digibeta, 50 minutes
Co-producer: BOS Holland
- 2007 *Some Questions on the Nature of Your Existence*, HDV, 25 minutes
commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Gallery,
Vienna
- 2005 *Dreaming Lhasa*, 35mm, 90 minutes
Executive Producers: Jeremy Thomas & Richard Gere
2005: Toronto International Film Festival
San Sebastian International Film Festival
- 2000 *rights...& wrongs*, Digital Beta, 5 minutes
Tibet Museum, Dharamsala, India
- 1999 *Big Treasure Chest for Future Children – Tibet*, Beta SP, 26 minutes
- 1998 *The Shadow Circus: The CIA in Tibet*, Beta SP, 50 mins
a White Crane Films production for BBC Television
- 1997 *A Stranger In My Native Land*, Hi8/Beta SP, 32 mins
- 1997 *Fish Tales*, Beta SP, 33 mins
- 1994 *The Trials of Telo Rinpoche*, 16mm, 50 mins
a White Crane Films production for BBC Television
- 1992 *Tibet*, Video, 15 minutes
The Royal Academy of Arts as part of an exhibition, "Wisdom &
Compassion:
The Sacred Art of Tibet", London, 18 September to 13 December
- 1991 *The Reincarnation of Khensur Rinpoche*, 16mm, 62 minutes
- 1986 *The New Puritans: The Sikhs of Yuba City*, Video, 27 minutes

REVIEWS

The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom (Documentary -- U.K.)

By Robert Koehler

Variety, Jan. 19, 2010, 4:00pm

A White Crane Films presentation in association with Roland Films and Arch Communications. Produced by Ritu Sarin. Executive producers, Francesca von Habsburg, Lavinia Currier. Directed by Ritu Sarin, Tenzing Sonam. Written by Sonam.

In a welcome departure from many previous films about the decades-long friction between Tibet and China, "The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom" provides a two-sided view of the complex political and social dynamics within and outside Tibet. For the "struggle" in the film's title is not merely against China but also between competing Tibetan views regarding the best strategy: co-existence or independence. Such a broad-minded perspective should help Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam's film travel far and wide on the fest circuit, with first-class production values making it especially ripe for vid and TV sales.

"The Sun Behind the Clouds" has already generated some publicity in the wake of China's decision to remove two Mainland-produced films from the Palm Springs Film Festival, including Lu Chuan's "City of Life and Death," when the fest refused Chinese demands not to screen the docu. Whether the move will have a chilling effect on "Sun's" American fest prospects remains to be seen, but the brouhaha is ironic given that Sarin and Sonam are less concerned with dwelling on past Chinese injustices than on internal Tibetan disputes.

Chinese authorities were probably set off in part by the film's inclusion of remarkable clandestine footage from the 2008 unrest in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, marking the largest revolt since the 1959 rebellion against China's imposed rule and occupation.

This material proves an exception in what is not an angry film but a notably calm, well-considered and balanced one. These qualities also ran through "Dreaming Lhasa," the pair's previous film and only narrative work, but that film's cliches are avoided in this reportorial context. As longtime documenters of the Tibetan struggle, Sarin and Sonam (who provides thoughtful narration) are in an excellent position to capture every side of the Tibetan question, with their considerable personal access to the Dalai Lama as well as to those in the grassroots movement opposing what they consider his accommodating stance vis-a-vis China.

A brief background history explains China's entry into Tibet in the 1950s and the Dalai Lama's eventual exile. His efforts to find a so-called middle way with the large power is explained as integral to Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, which continually seeks to find the golden mean in all walks of life. It's also born, to no small extent, of his many years as the standard-bearer and face of the Tibetan people and the target of official Chinese criticism.

At the same time, the film amplifies the voices of the holy man's many critics among his own people, from famed poet Woenser to activist Jamyang Norbu. Much of this may be new to many Western audiences, whose primary view of Tibet tends to be through the Dalai Lama's well-publicized paradigm. The film doggedly covers a 2,500-kilometer march for independence in advance of the 2008 Beijing Olympics as well as a telling debate that arises between marchers over tactics and themes.

The arguments over independence (does it even make sense anymore in a Tibet that will soon see Tibetans become a minority of the population?) or middle-way co-existence (is this a surrender that ensures Tibetan cultural and political eradication?) animate the people in front of the filmmakers' many cameras, but they also seem to reflect a generational divide, with younger Tibetans-in-exile leading the independence charge.

The extensive lensing crew, based in various countries, conveys the sense of a film that's everywhere at once. A supporting solo guitar score by Gustavo Santolalla smartly cuts against audience expectations of a specifically Tibetan soundtrack.

Camera (color, DV), Graham Day, Jaimie Gramston, Sonam, Stephen McCarthy, John Sergeant, Dilip Varma, Tenzin Tsetan Choklay; editors, Anupama Chandra, Mahadeb Shi, Sonam; music, Gustavo Santolalla. Reviewed at Palm Springs Film Festival, Jan. 12, 2010. (Also in Mumbai Film Festival.) Running time: 79 MIN.

(English, Tibetan, Mandarin dialogue)

The Sun Behind the Clouds – Film Review

By Sheri Linden

The Hollywood Reporter, January 14, 2010 04:52 ET

"The Sun Behind the Clouds"

Bottom Line: A potent update on Tibetans' 50-year struggle for justice and recognition.

PALM SPRINGS -- The subtitle of new film "The Sun Behind the Clouds" -- "Tibet's Struggle for Freedom" -- refers not only to the half-century dispute between Tibet and China but also to the divisions that have arisen among Tibetans around their beloved leader. The film is essential viewing for anyone who cares about the fate of the mountain region and the legacy of the Dalai Lama.

The documentary's North American premiere at the Palm Springs International Film Festival received a bit of a publicity boost after Chinese film authorities requested its screenings be canceled and, in protest of the fest's refusal to do so, withdrew two Chinese movies from the lineup. But regardless of attempted power plays against it, the film is notable for its focus on an extraordinary year in Tibet's history and on Tibetans themselves -- historians, writers, activists, all eloquent, impassioned and living in exile. Chief among those exiles is the 14th Dalai Lama, 74-year-old Tenzin Gyatso, who granted the filmmakers considerable access. He's seen in prayer, in new interviews and in his world travels as ambassador of peace.

Co-directors Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam have been making films about Tibet for 20 years. The latter, who also narrates "Clouds," is himself a first-generation exile, born in 1959, the year of the failed uprising against the occupying Chinese and the beginning of the Dalai Lama's India-based government-in-exile. In 2008, the filmmaking pair hurried to catch up with a number of dramatic events: worldwide protests centering on China's vaunted "coming-out party" to the world as host of the Olympics and, more significant, the biggest uprisings in Tibet since 1959.

The doc's talking heads make clear that the Dalai Lama's position as a spiritual leader who also is a political figure creates a profound dilemma for him and his people. They're incompatible roles, some argue, and the leader himself indicates he wouldn't disagree with that assessment. Discussing his Middle Way -- the compromise policy he adopted in the late 1980s that forsakes the fight for political independence while insisting on meaningful cultural autonomy -- his eyes betray a deep sorrow. Not only does his proposal continue to be rebuffed and misrepresented by the Chinese government, but it has done nothing to lessen his people's pain.

In the urgent context of the battle to save an endangered way of life from what one commentator calls China's "imperialist cultural invasion," the effectiveness of the Dalai Lama's high-profile visits with world leaders is debatable. The film shows him laughing with Prince Charles, addressing the German parliament, speaking with Chinese journalists in Seattle. However potent he is as a symbol, many activists interviewed for the film believe he could put that symbolism to better use. Some would have preferred, for example, that he had joined the 2008 march to Tibet through India, a months-long protest against China that the filmmakers track quite affectingly.

As with any protracted struggle for human rights, the tension between ideals and political reality is not easily resolved. There's an undeniable pragmatism to the Tibetan leader's approach; China, he says, can provide the economic development Tibet so desperately needs. But those who remain committed to independence, particularly younger Tibetans, see his notion of global interdependence, however essential to Buddhist philosophy, as out of touch.

The well-crafted film benefits from the understated lament of Oscar winner Gustavo Santaolalla's score. But the main melody here is the voices of the Tibetan people. Whether the Dalai Lama will leave them in a better position remains unclear. But when Chinese authorities are still trying to silence filmmakers, there's no doubting his wisdom when he notes that China is "powerful but lacking in self-confidence."

Despite odds, controversial Tibet tale told

By Bruce Fessier

The Desert Sun, Palm Springs, California, January 12, 2010

I've been dazzled so far by festival documentaries dealing with big, important topics. "The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle For Freedom" is the film China didn't want us to see. But it's more than a look at the Dalai Lama's trials and tribulations, as its synopses says.

It really examines the concepts of Tibetan independence, for which 200 Tibetans were killed in protests against China in 2008, and "meaningful autonomy" under China, which the Dalai Lama supports, although he says if China rejects autonomy, all options should be considered.

The film makes a strong argument for independence, but notes that Tibet was a feudal society before the 1959 rebellion that sent 100,000 Tibetans into exile. Chinese students fear it would return to a serfdom with a Buddhist aristocracy if it became independent.

Co-director Ritu Sarin, who has documented the Dalai Lama for 20 years, told me after the screening the Dalai Lama would prefer to retire than hold political office in Tibet to ensure a separation of state and religion. But China is trying to control who will succeed him by gaining authority over the Buddhist monks who would recognize the Dalai Lama in his next incarnation. Co-director Tenzing Sonam says that reincarnation issue "needs to be questioned."

The festival did the filmmakers a big favor by flying them from India to promote this North American premiere. They thanked it "for taking a stand on our film" and expressed sympathy for the Chinese directors who had their films pulled by China, saying "they are the real victims."

"The Sun Behind the Clouds" repeats at 4 p.m. today at Camelot Theatres. The directors are seeking a distributor to take the film worldwide.

OTHER PRESS

China and Tibet Skirmish at a Film Festival

By Edward Wyatt

The New York Times, January 9, 2010

LOS ANGELES — In celebrity wattage and as a showcase for the art of cinema, the Palm Springs International Film Festival has not garnered the attention typically bestowed upon similar carnivals at Cannes, Sundance or even, say, Toronto. But the Palm Springs festival has now earned a different kind of laurel: a bona fide diplomatic incident.

China formally told the festival this week that two Chinese films were being withdrawn from its program in protest of the scheduled screening of a documentary about Tibet and the Dalai Lama. While Chinese officials told the festival's director that the filmmakers themselves had decided to withdraw their state-financed works, many China experts believe that it is the state sending a message, rather than the individuals.

There is added intrigue over the more prominent of the two films that were withdrawn from the Palm Springs festival: "City of Life and Death" (also known as "Nanjing! Nanjing!"), a critically acclaimed fictionalized account of atrocities committed by the Japanese occupiers of Nanjing in 1937. Written and directed by Lu Chuan, one of China's top box office successes, the film has drawn criticism in China for what some people there have called its sympathetic portrayal of Japanese characters.

Tibet has long been a cause célèbre in Hollywood, particularly among actors and some prominent filmmakers. At the same time, the big movie studios, which are all part of international corporate conglomerates that are trying to do business in China, in recent years have appeared to steer clear of major projects on Tibet that would inflame tensions and threaten their interests there.

National Geographic Entertainment announced in August that it had acquired the North American distribution rights for "City of Life and Death" and that the film would be released in theaters in 2010. But people involved in that deal said that a formal agreement was never signed, leaving National Geographic on the sidelines of the current dispute. The company said it still intends to release the film in theaters later this year.

The current wrangle is only the most recent protest by Chinese officials that the arts, and film specifically, are being used as a weapon to meddle in their internal affairs. In August, two American filmmakers were blocked from traveling to China to present their documentary about the more than 5,000 children in Sichuan Province who died when a 2008 earthquake caused numerous schools to collapse. Computer hackers and demonstrators took aim at the Melbourne International Film Festival in Australia in July to protest its screening of a documentary about a leader of Muslim Uighurs in the Xinjiang region of northwest China, where some 200 people were killed in ethnic

violence last summer. And at last fall's Frankfurt Book Fair, a diplomatic struggle emerged over the fair's invitation to two dissident Chinese writers to speak at its official program honoring China.

Darryl Macdonald, the director of the Palm Springs festival, said in an interview that the Chinese consul general in Los Angeles traveled to the desert city on Wednesday. The official told him that the directors of the two films, rather than the Chinese government, which financed the films, had decided that they would not allow their work to be screened unless the festival canceled its scheduled showing of "The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom."

That documentary, by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam, follows the Dalai Lama over a year through protests over the status of Tibet that were timed to coincide with preparations for the Beijing Olympics.

The Chinese officials "repeatedly said the assertions presented in 'The Sun Behind the Clouds' were all lies, and they reminded us that the United States government had an official position that Tibet is a part of China," Mr. Macdonald said. "I told them that we have freedom of expression in this country, and that we would not allow any foreign country to dictate what films we should or should not play."

Officials at the Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles did not respond to repeated requests for comment Thursday and Friday.

Some American experts on China's political and cultural atmosphere say they doubt that the filmmakers decided without prompting to withdraw the films. The second film is a comedy titled "Quick, Quick, Slow," directed by Ye Kai. The film's producer, Zhang Lanxin, had been expected to attend the festival.

Stanley Rosen, the director of the East Asian Studies Center at the University of Southern California, said in an interview that his experience with Lu Chuan, which includes having dinner with the filmmaker when he was writing the script for "City of Life and Death," makes him certain that the withdrawal of the film "was basically a decision of the Chinese government."

"There is no way that he could continue having his films in international festivals and be successful in China" without succumbing to pressure to have his film withdrawn, given that the government financed the film and must approve all Chinese films that are exported, Dr. Rosen said.

The Associated Press published excerpts of a telephone interview with Mr. Lu on Thursday in which he said he "unconditionally accepted" the decision to withdraw his movie.

"This incident involves national interest," Mr. Lu told the A.P. "National interests trump everything. When it comes to national unity, I think the attitude of all Chinese is the same." Asked if the withdrawal of the films interfered with artistic freedom, Mr. Lu said, "It's really, really hard for me to answer that question."

One American filmmaker who does business in China, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preserve his business interests there, said he believes that the directors could have asked for their films to be withdrawn knowing that not to do so would endanger their careers in China. “We have this belief in America that film tells truth to power,” the filmmaker said. “I think the Chinese directors were looking at it as they didn’t want any guilt by association.”

Kenneth G. Lieberthal, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, noted that Chinese President Hu Jintao once served as Communist Party chief for Tibet. “Tibet is an issue that is especially neuralgic for Beijing,” he said, adding that he would have been surprised if Chinese officials had not objected to the film.

Dr. Rosen said that “City of Life and Death” has attracted some criticism in China, because it portrays one Japanese character who was part of the occupation force as having a bout of conscience over Japanese atrocities and eventually killing himself.

In a statement issued Thursday, National Geographic said the withdrawal of the film from the festival was “unfortunate,” adding, “We’re proud of the film and we hope people will see this important movie when it opens in theaters later this year.”

China Snubs Palm Springs Fest Over Tibet Doc
by Brian Brooks
Indiewire, January 7, 2010

In a move that has become more common for Chinese films traveling the worldwide festival circuit, two films from the world's most populous country that had been selected to screen at the 21st Palm Springs International Film Festival have been withdrawn in response to the planned screening of documentary, "The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom," which focuses on the Dalai Lama and the occupied country.

"Sun Behind the Clouds" follows the Dalai Lama's trials and tribulations and over an eventful year, including the 2008 protests in Tibet, the long march in India, the Beijing Olympics, and the breakdown of talks with China.

"After meeting with representatives from the Chinese government regarding their request to cancel our screenings of 'The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom,' we have respectfully declined their request," PSIFF Director Darryl Macdonald said in a statement. "I'm saddened that the Chinese film authorities have chosen to withdraw their films from PSIFF, as the festival is an international cultural event whose mandate is to present a wide cross section of perspectives and points of view. That said, we cannot allow the concerns of one country or community to dictate what films we should or should not play, based on their own cultural or political perspective. Freedom of expression is a concept that is integral both to the validity of artistic events, and indeed, to the ethos of this country."

In 2009, the Chinese withdrew their slate from the Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia's largest in protest of a screening of Uighur documentary, "The 10 Conditions of Love." It was also alleged that the country hacked the MIFF's website.

Celebrating its 21st anniversary, PSIFF was founded in 1990 by then-Mayor Sonny Bono. This year's edition includes over 180 films from approximately 70 countries.

**Chinese film pulled from Palm Springs fest
China Film Group yanks 'City of Life and Death'
By Jonathan Landreth
The Hollywood Reporter, Jan 6, 2010, 01:12 AM ET**

BEIJING -- State-run China Film Group has pulled "City of Life and Death" from the Palm Springs International Film Festival to protest the event's inclusion of a film about the Dalai Lama, director Lu Chuan said Wednesday.

The episode is the latest incidence of the Chinese government interfering with the participation of Chinese films at international festivals.

Festival director Darryl Macdonald said he had rejected a request by Chinese government representatives to cancel the screening of "The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom," a documentary by directors Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam.

"We cannot allow the concerns of one country or community to dictate what films we should or should not play, based on their own cultural or political perspective," Macdonald said in a statement.

Also withdrawn from Palm Springs was debut Chinese director Ye Kai's film "Quick, Quick, Slow," a comedy about elderly amateur dancers.

In July, Chinese directors came under government pressure to withdraw their films from the Melbourne International Film Festival to protest a film about the life of Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer, who, like the Dalai Lama, is considered a separatist by Beijing.

In Sept, the controversial Australian documentary about Kadeer, called "Ten Conditions of Love," was dropped from the Kaohsiung Film Festival in Taiwan after organizers felt pressure from Beijing, which considers the self-governed island a renegade province.

"My feelings are very complicated," Lu told The Hollywood Reporter. "On the one hand I'm very grateful to the film festival for giving my film greater exposure, on the other hand, when it comes to Tibet and politics, we directors have no choice but to stand together with our film company."

State-run China Film is the largest producer and distributor of films in China and holds great sway over the careers of many young directors who have come up under its influence.

"City of Life and Death," about the Nanjing massacre of Chinese citizens by invading Japanese troops in 1937 earned 180 million yuan (\$26.5 million) at the Chinese boxoffice in 2009, catapulting Lu into the commercial limelight.

Soon after, Lu was signed by the Creative Artists Agency in the United States, which then brokered China Film's sale of the film last year to National Geographic, which hopes to screen the film theatrically beginning in March.

"It's my dream that the film get a theatrical distribution in the U.S." he said, hopeful that such a deal was near to closure.

Lu said an official from China Film's foreign affairs department tried to reach him last week while he was on holiday with his family to explain why the company would boycott Palm Springs by pulling the film, known in Chinese as "Nanjing! Nanjing!"

"She didn't give me the name of the government department that demanded China Film pull the movie, but she intimated that it had to do with Tibet and politics," Lu said, adding that he hoped at some later date to discuss the episode in private with whomever made the decision to pull his film.

The China Film official, reached by telephone, said the issue was "complicated" and declined further comment and permission to use her name in print.

"Sun Behind the Clouds" is scheduled to screen in Palm Springs this week.

"I have absolutely no knowledge of the film they're talking about," Lu said.

Another film about Nanjing, the German-Chinese co-production "John Rabe" was scheduled to show at the festival. The Chinese half of that film was the Beijing based Huayi Brothers Pictures, the first publicly-listed movie company in China.

The festival runs Jan. 5-18.

**China blocks access to movie site
IMDb.com unavailable since Wednesday, cause unknown
By Jonathan Landreth
The Hollywood Reporter, Jan 8, 2010, 06:37 AM ET**

BEIJING -- Access to IMDb.com was blocked in China this week, adding the movie business Internet portal to a fast-growing list of banned Web sites featuring user-generated content, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

The site, fully named the Internet Movie Database, is owned by online bookselling giant Amazon.com, and claims over 57 million monthly visitors.

Readers looking for everything from movie trivia to settle bets to job opportunities on projects in development can access the site in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.

But there's no Chinese-language edition of IMDb and industry insiders here say they can't understand why it's been shut down for since Wednesday.

One Hollywood executive here, speaking on condition of anonymity, noted in disbelief that her friends at the state-run China Film Group rely on IMDb all the time.

Typically the government's censorship efforts focus on trying to block China's 338 million Web users from accessing online pornography and violence. The government seldom reacts to queries about blocking foreign Web sites or gives any official notice when such action is taken.

For clues to Beijing's beef with IMDb, a quick scan of the site turned up plenty of information relating to politically sensitive search terms such as "Dalai Lama" and "Rebiya Kadeer" -- the names of members of two exiled ethnic minorities considered separatists by China's one-party government.

For instance, IMDb lists "The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom," a 2009 documentary whose planned screening this week at the Palm Springs International Film Festival caused the state-run China Film Group to pull two of its films from competition in protest.

Likewise, typing "Kadeer"-- persona non-grata for her alleged masterminding of recent violence in western China's Xinjiang region -- turns up the IMDb listing for "China: Rebirth of an Empire," a 2009 documentary featuring Kadeer and exiled Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng.

Neither film's IMDb listings has any comments at all. But Web watchers in China say that increasingly it's the potential to display offending user-generated content that matters.

"China's censors are most interested in blocking sites with user-generated content and comments," said Jeremy Goldkorn, founder of Danwei.org, a Beijing-based media-watching Web site that itself was blocked on July 3, two days before ethnic tensions in Xinjiang boiled over in to a bloody riot.

Social networking site Facebook was shut in China on July 8 because it was disseminating Kadeer's separatist propaganda, according to Dong Guangpeng, a media adviser to China's cabinet based at Tsinghua University.

Facebook remains blocked, as do YouTube and Twitter. Meanwhile, plenty of information about Tibet and Xinjiang -- and other potentially sensitive topics - is readily available on any number of other sites such as iTunes, Google and IMDB-owned Amazon, whose representatives in China could not be reached for comment.

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