



**China Centre Tübingen Opening Ceremony, 21.04.2016**

**Welcome Speech: Jun.-Prof. Dr. Matthias Niedenführ**

Honoured Rector Professor Bernd Engler,  
Honoured Chairman, Professor Karl Schlecht  
Honoured Embassy Counsellor, Professor Dong Qi,  
Honoured guests, esteemed colleagues,  
Dear students, dear friends,

On this beautiful spring day we are now opening the China Centre Tübingen. You can plan many things, but not such picture-perfect weather, so we gratefully accept it as a gift from the heavens. Spring symbolises a beginning, just as this opening ceremony represents the beginning of CCT. Today was preceded by long preparation and whether or not this “painful birth” would be a success was up in the air quite a few times. Now, that this day has finally arrived, my – our - joy is all the greater!

Before I introduce to you our guest of honour and keynote speaker, please allow me to express a few words of gratitude to those who have helped bring us to this moment.

The rectorate - dear Mr. Engler, dear Mr. Assmann - as well as the foundation - dear Mr. Schlecht - have shown great perseverance and endurance. I therefore want to thank you for the trust I have been given, trust which I see not only as a compliment but also as a guideline and commitment for the future.

Here, I also want to highlight Professor Klaus Leisinger, member of the board of trustees of the Karl Schlecht Foundation, who has from the outset helped us in the process of establishing the centre both as a highly esteemed colleague and as a mentor. He can't be with us today due to a family matter.

My thanks go to all colleagues in our department, especially to Prof. Achim Mittag for his untiring efforts at all stages of the preparations for setting up CCT.

I am looking forward to working together with Professor Helwig Schmidt-Glitzner, the designated Director of the centre. We have already established sound work coordination.

CCT will be located on Hintere Grabenstrasse and thus in the immediate vicinity of the World Ethos Institute and the Erich Fromm Institute.  
The World Ethos Institute was founded almost exactly four years ago, the Erich Fromm Institute in January last year. It is my wish for CCT to establish close cooperation with our neighbours and learn from their experience.

A big thank you goes to everyone involved in the preparatory work for the founding and the ceremony:

- Colleagues from University Administration
- Staff of the Karl Schlecht Foundation (especially Dr. Phillip Bocks and Ms. Jenni Werner)
- Mrs. Danwei Zhu-Mittag and her friends who have been making Chinese dumplings for days
- Our musicians Nikola Lutz, Ms. ZHEN Fangzhang and Ms. YU Lingling
- And finally, of course all our helpers for today's celebration.

At this moment, my CCT comrades-in-arms, Dr. Alisa Jones, Martin Fricke, Kirsten Arns, Matthias Kraitschek and Theresa Stubhan, are still busy preparing everything for our subsequent reception.

And finally, I don't want to forget my wife and family who have accompanied me on this journey with their support and patience throughout this intensive time.  
My special thanks go to them all.

Many years ago, my teacher Michael Lackner – who sadly is prevented by illness from attending today, equipped me with these wise words, which I found to be true again and again during my time at the ECCS in Beijing:

He has made the observation that there are three kinds of students who study China:

The first category refers to the students who never really arrive in China. Even when spending a longer period of time there, for example in the course of their semester abroad, they aren't able to build up a relationship to the country and the people. China always remains foreign to them.

The second category goes to China and entirely sinks into this other world. Those students are so inspired that they often stay in China for good.

But it is the third category that makes the greatest contribution to Chinese Studies. They manage a difficult balancing act. On the one hand they retain a scientifically necessary distance from their research subject; on the other, they are close to the Chinese world and have discovered something in it that fascinates them, inspires them, something they love and that gives them the motivation to work with China for a long time – maybe for a lifetime. These students thus unite **scientific distance and personal closeness**. They stand, virtually, on both sides of a deep cultural ditch and become **bridge builders between Europe and the Chinese world in the fields of academia, economics and culture**.

I hope that CCT can contribute to opening up this third way of accessing China for young people in particular, but also for all others who are interested.