

# Liao Yiwu

# 2012

Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2012  
Conferment Speeches

The spoken word prevails.

Sansal 2011  
Grossman 2010  
Magris 2009  
Kiefer 2008  
Friedländer 2007  
Lepénies 2006  
Pamuk 2005  
Esterházy 2004  
Sontag 2003  
Achebe 2002  
Habermas 2001  
Djebar 2000  
Stern 1999  
Walsler 1998  
Kemal 1997  
Vargas Llosa 1996  
Schimmel 1995  
Semprún 1994  
Schorlemmer 1993  
Oz 1992  
Konrád 1991  
Dedecius 1990  
Havel 1989  
Lenz 1988  
Jonas 1987  
Bartoszewski 1986  
Kollek 1985  
Paz 1984  
Sperber 1983  
Kennan 1982  
Kopelew 1981  
Cardenal 1980  
Menuhin 1979  
Lindgren 1978  
Kołakowski 1977  
Frisch 1976  
Grosser 1975  
Frère Roger 1974  
The Club of Rome 1973  
Korczak 1972  
Dönhoff 1971  
Myrdal 1970  
Mitscherlich 1969  
Senghor 1968  
Bloch 1967  
Bea/Visser 't Hooft 1966  
Sachs 1965  
Marcel 1964  
Weizsäcker 1963  
Tillich 1962  
Radhakrishnan 1961  
Gollancz 1960  
Heuss 1959  
Jaspers 1958  
Wilder 1957  
Schneider 1956  
Hesse 1955  
Burckhardt 1954  
Buber 1953  
Guardini 1952  
Schweitzer 1951  
Tau 1950

Gottfried Honnefelder, President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

## Greeting

Finding one's own voice is fundamentally important to all human beings. But it is not something that simply happens on its own. It is only when a child is addressed by its name that it begins to comprehend itself as an *I* and to discover its own identity by means of this self-designation. And, as we grow older, it is only to the extent that we find our own language that we get a chance to become the self-knowing author *of our own life story*.

Language is what allows people to understand their own origins and to lead their own lives. It is only when people meet through words, only when they can express themselves in person, that mutual understanding begins to take place. And this, in turn, is one of the most important preconditions for peace.

Still, it takes more than just exchanging words to find our own voices and to lead distinctive lives. It is the stories and poems, the tales and legends, the myths and the texts of revelation that open up to us a language that is more than just a means of expressing our immediate needs and desires. These stories contain a treasure that allows us to discover the fullness of what it means to be human, a fullness that makes us aware of differences and commonalities, that familiarises us with our own contingent origins and empowers us - with the help of our own voice - to secure our own way of life.

The language of *writers and poets* achieves this more than anything else. Their language breaks the spell of that which directly serves the purposes of our everyday lives. It gives the present a past and opens the present up to a possible future. It sets our imaginations free and makes criticism possible. It allows us to see that fullness of life in which we can perceive and comprehend our own lives.

It can come as no surprise, then, that we find so many poets and writers among the recipients of the Peace Prize of the German Book

Trade. It is not first and foremost the high literary quality of their work that leads them to be honoured - that excellence, of course, is recognised by the *Deutscher Buchpreis* (German Book Prize), which will be handed out this year for the eighth time. The motive behind awarding the Peace Prize is much more about the power emanating from a writer's work to bring about peace - although the artistic excellence and liberating power of a written work are, of course, closely linked.

Needless to say, the liberating power made possible by language is not limited to the language of the poet. Space for peace is also created whenever the "right" word is found - and this word is always one that leads *out into the open*, a word that does not at all intimidate, restrict, denounce or destroy, but rather encourages its own, allows others to be recognised and makes it possible to understand oneself and others. And wherever such words are present, the German Publishers and Booksellers Association sees plenty of reason to bolster them by awarding the Peach Prize.

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From the very beginning, the German Publishers and Booksellers Association has considered the goal of enabling easier access to the medium of language one of the foremost callings associated with the very good it trades in - namely, the written and printed word. This holds true whether it involves large publishing houses and small-town bookshops, or small publishing houses and big-city bookstores. Unlike any other activity of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, the awarding of the Peace Prize makes it clear that this *calling* must remain a goal that unites all of its members. Indeed, today, the splintering of written-word media is in danger of causing a splintering of markets whose comfortable virtuality would ultimately oblige us to pay the heavy cost of squandering the concrete culture of mediation

that arises in immediate conversation with the individual reader. The cost of this development would entail not only the loss of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association's "soul", but also the loss of an important channel of communication for the culture of language.

The extent to which the word of the poet can help a still-muted counterpart find his or her own voice is particularly evident when social or political circumstances deny these people a voice or reduce them to silence. This is when the word becomes a work of liberation in the literal sense because, with their newfound voice, people gain the freedom to be themselves in a very elementary way.

Today, we honour a poet who has accomplished this in a manner that has been both effective and harmful to his own freedom. Today, we award the 2012 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Liao Yiwu.

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Liao Yiwu's well-earned fame arose as a result of his interviews with "people from the bottom rung of society". In these texts, Liao Yiwu succeeds in breaking the silence of his interviewees – a silence that is the result of fate, misery and oppression. He allows individuals who would have otherwise remained voiceless to be heard.

The man who approached and interviewed these people had himself already been forced to find his own voice in the most painful of ways. Without direct access to education, he had started writing poems. One of these was *Massacre*, which was written in one night in 1989. As if able to see the future, Liao Yiwu described the violent repression of demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square the night before the massacre actually happened. The poem spread like wildfire and was followed by four years of prison for its

author. Of these years, he would later say: "All that I have are these four years of prison. It is the equivalent of a completed bachelor's degree."

His years in prison took everything from him, including his family, friends and career. What was left was a flute. And, after serving out his sentence, he earned his living on the street with this flute. In 2009, he received a passport for the first time, but he was still not allowed to accept an invitation to attend the Frankfurt Book Fair. He was forced to rewrite his memoirs of his prison years twice because the first two versions were confiscated. Only after threats of further imprisonment if he went ahead and printed a third version did he flee into exile and succeed in publishing the book. *Für ein Lied und hundert Lieder (For a Song and a Hundred Songs)* appeared in Germany in 2011.

For the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, it is a special pleasure to be able to honour Liao Yiwu as a "writer of the people" in the truest sense of the word. He is someone who has unflinchingly and eloquently given voice to those among his people who suffer repression and oppression. It makes our joy even greater that he is able to be with us today and to receive the Peace Prize in person as part of his academic residency in Germany. As we see it, China's voice can be heard today in a way that we would have so much loved to hear it at the 2009 Frankfurt Book Fair, when China was the guest of honour.

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The German Publishers and Booksellers Association considers it an honour and an obligation to award the 2012 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Liao Yiwu.

Translation by The Hagedorn Group.

Peter Feldmann, Lord Major of the City of Frankfurt

## Greeting

Today, we are awarding the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Liao Yiwu. It is a great pleasure and a tremendous honour to welcome you on behalf of the city of Frankfurt am Main.

I cannot imagine a more favourable choice to receive this year's Prize. And I am especially pleased and grateful that Liao Yiwu is able to join us today to accept this honour in person and as a free man. Dear Liao Yiwu, the fact that you are being honoured with the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade is impressive proof that words can indeed change the world.

Words can work magic. Words can create harmony. Words can also document and castigate injustice. Words can change things! The words in your exceptional work do not belong to those individuals who seek to use them for their own purposes; they belong first and foremost to you, the author.

Friedrich Schiller famously argued that art is the daughter of freedom. And in this sense, you have gifted us your art. We celebrate you today not as a political figure, but as an outstanding artist for whom I wish one thing above all: readers. Lots of them. In EVERY country in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, which is handed out each year on the final day of the Frankfurt Book Fair, is a great symbol of freedom and human dignity. Each October, the eyes of the global literary world turn to our city. The annual award ceremony in Frankfurt am Main is a celebration of both democracy and culture. Indeed, the award is ideally suited to a city saturated in art and culture. Frankfurt considers it a joy and a responsibility - not an obligation or a burden - to cultivate its cultural legacy and support contemporary art. The award is

also fitting for a city imbued with the spirit of democracy.

We Frankfurters are very proud that the Peace Prize is handed out here, especially at the Church of St. Paul, which is known as the cradle of German democracy. Only a few days ago, we marked the annual Day of German Unity, a celebration of a goal that the Frankfurt Parliament - the first freely elected parliament for all of Germany - was unable to achieve in the 19th century: freedom and democracy for the citizens of our country.

Frankfurt is the city in which the written word and its medium - i.e. books and, more recently, CDs, mp3s and apps - enjoy the highest possible esteem. Frankfurt is the city of Goethe and Theodor Adorno. Frankfurt is home to the nation's foremost guardian of books: the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (German National Library). Also at home here are those two well-known seismographs of the economic and technical development of books: the German Publishers and Booksellers Association and the Frankfurt Book Fair.

Each year, the Frankfurt Book Fair walks a fine line between culture and commerce, between mind and money. And the last few days have shown us once again quite clearly how productive this friction can be. Despite the various crisis scenarios facing the industry, there is very good reason to pay tribute to the freedom of words here today.

As Mayor of Frankfurt, I am very proud to be able to call attention to the fact that the German book industry is highly aware of its responsibility as an important cultural medium and that today it demonstrates this commitment impressively by awarding the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Liao Yiwu.

Ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to seeing you again in Frankfurt in October. Thank you very much.

Translation by The Hagedorn Group.

## Felicitas von Lovenberg

### Laudatory speech

China's rapid development continues to amaze the entire world. The Middle Kingdom is industrious, hyper-modern and super rich. But has China become more familiar to us now that the Chinese drive the same cars, covet the same fashion labels and use the same Internet as we do? Do we know more about the home of 1.4 billion people because life in major Chinese cities has come to resemble our metropolitan lives to such a large degree? And is it proof of our cultural open-mindedness that we embrace Feng Shui in our offices and use chop sticks more or less proficiently?

One could expect me to stand here today and tell you that Liao Yiwu is a bridge builder, a person whose work deepens our understanding of the unknown China, making all the big differences seem smaller. But that wouldn't be right. The opposite is true: Liao Yiwu's own biography and his books' numerous portraits afford us a sobering, indeed disturbing look behind the façade of this great country. The contrast between everyday life at the lowest levels of society and our perceptions of modern China could not be more glaring.

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How easy it is to say that no human feeling is alien to a writer. But in this case it actually applies. For when Liao Yiwu portrays fundamental emotions - hunger, pain, fear, loneliness - he does so not only as a result of authorial empathy, but also due to his own very bitter experiences. The author need invent nothing, embellish nothing and exaggerate nothing to evoke injustice, humiliation and torture. His will to bear witness remains and is not limited to his personal fate. Indeed, Liao Yiwu describes Chinese society through the eyes of those whose voices are otherwise never publicly heard: rickshaw drivers, corpse washers, petty criminals, beggars, toilet cleaners, barmaids, monks, street musicians. These are destinies that have been lost along China's journey out of its thousands of years of

history and tradition and into the 21st century.

In his most recent work published in Germany under the title "Die Kugel und das Opium", the author shows us the country from the perspective of those who have escaped from the dungeons as he did himself. The chronicler lets the people speak for themselves, never putting words into their mouths. However, in order to allow these individuals to articulate themselves, they must first be persuaded to speak. Liao Yiwu feels obliged to a poetics of truth, an oral history of China consolidated in literature. This poet, who has sometimes referred to himself as a "recorder of time", is more than a precise listener with a phenomenal memory, as is demonstrated in his most important work. "For a Song and a Hundred Songs" is a powerful adventure novel about a man who is imprisoned to learn the meaning of fear, and who, after being released from prison, turns the tables and challenges the Chinese authorities through his books.

In the opinion of these authorities, the poet took an irrevocable wrong turn on 4 June 1989, the day of the bloodbath on Tiananmen Square, when he circulated his poem "Massacre". The previous night Liao Yiwu had hurriedly written it out and recorded it on tape; his almost visionary verse seems to anticipate the bloodbath that would take place hours later when the military violently put an end to the student demonstrations on the Square of Heavenly Peace. Like all of Liao Yiwu's poetry, the highly expressionistic poem is easily understood; the agony and the horror provoked by the poem have great immediacy - not without warrant is "Massacre" repeatedly compared to Paul Celan's "Death Fugue" in both its impact and meaning. The poem nearly cost Liao Yiwu his life and catapulted him onto the world's literary stage; but, at the time, the young avant-garde poet, who up to that point had not thought much about politics, penned "Massacre" as a vehement response to a Canadian friend's accusation that he loved neither his country nor his compatriots.

The authorities, however, saw no patriotism in his verse; they threw him in prison for “disseminating counterrevolutionary propaganda”. When he was released after four years and just as many prisons, Liao Yiwu took up the life of a street musician with the flute that he had learned to play in prison. And he systematically continued what had become a means of survival during his imprisonment: talking with people situated at the lowest strata of society. His interviews, collected in a volume titled “Interviews with People from the Bottom Rung of Society”, provide an urgent portrait of non-globalised China, a counter-narrative to China’s official portrayal of itself as an economic power. The authorities quickly regretted allowing the initial publication of this book in his home country, and Liao’s work has since been officially unavailable in China. Due to its repeated confiscation by the authorities, his extensive memoir, “For a Song and a Hundred Songs”, had to be written three times before it was finally able to be published abroad. His request to travel outside of the country was denied seven times, with heightened public notice three years ago when China was the guest country of the Frankfurt Book Fair. It has since become forbidden to mention his name in his native land.

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Those who did not keep quiet during and, above all, after the Tiananmen Square massacre were banished to a place where China thought even Liao Yiwu would be silenced: the margins of society, a realm where those who were not still physically and spiritually broken by their prison time would find an audience only of people like themselves. Because after being imprisoned, whether for two, four or fourteen years, no one returns to his old life. Liao Yiwu attests to this fact in “Die Kugel und das Opium”, a collection of conversations that he conducted in secret, requiring great effort and risk to do so. Most merely exchange their small prison for a big one while losing their work, their wives and their homes; many are forced to move in with and live off their elderly parents or to roam the country as homeless vagabonds. Their bodies may have escaped the executioner, but what ultimately threatens to demoralise them is the constant ineffectiveness of their suffering, not only because the expectation that the June 4 insurgents would be rehabilitated and compensated has not

yet been fulfilled, but also because no one takes any interest in the so-called “rowdies” of June 4 – except the secret police. And Liao Yiwu.

For many years he tracked down victims of the official historiography and, with much patience, convinced them to talk. He presents these fatal lives using the raw material of the individual portraits. He once described how painstaking and tedious this literary process is: “There is nothing particularly aesthetic about meeting these protagonists. They are very ordinary people, struggling, fighting for their existence and their survival. There are often only a few captivating minutes in a story; you have to pick the essential bits. It’s like being in a dark cave: suddenly you notice a light in the dark, a mouse hole with two tiny glinting eyes peeking out. Then I can’t tear myself away.” The same is true for his readers.

His newest book conveys to us both the anger and sadness as the bloodstains and memories of 1989 continue to fade with each passing year. “The masses, which seemed to lose their senses in lunging into the country’s transformation, became so pragmatic overnight, so united in their love of money”. Liao Yiwu denounces this historical amnesia that replaced memory with wealth. After being released, convicts find this shift in mentality to be particularly glaring. As the street fighter Doug Shengkun expressed: “Life outside has changed so dramatically, the city has changed so dramatically, but above all, the people have changed so dramatically; we were gone for too long, they didn’t prepare us for this. We are yesterday’s people! We are rubbish! We are forgotten!”

Liao Yiwu fights to prevent the people of June 4 from being forgotten, along with those who carried China’s economic and technological revolution on their backs. He tirelessly documents what the Communist Party wants not to be written. We can recognise how effectively those people ostracised and repressed by the booming Middle Kingdom have been silenced when we consider the fact that the author needed seven years just to gather his material for “Die Kugel und das Opium”. He was unable to publish many interviews because his interviewees later became fearful and withdrew their consent; others didn’t want to rehash their memories of times past. Was it really worth it? That

brief moment of revolt that could not bring back the dead, but for which most have sacrificed their entire future?

To get an idea of the reprisals prisoners of the regime could expect, one need only read of the ordeals suffered by Liao during his own imprisonment, as he describes in “For a Song and a Hundred Songs”. Inspired by Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s “Gulag Archipelago” and its equal in terms of shock value, the work is at once a novel of personal development, a passion narrative and a heroic epic. Liao Yiwu starts off with his beginnings as a hippy poet who cared nothing for politics and strove so hard to emulate Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg that no metaphor was glaring enough. Then literally over night, with his poem “Massacre”, his affectations were displaced by existential rigor. Confined in close quarters with murderers, criminals, lunatics and rapists, his odyssey through various prisons mired him in an inferno of filth, hunger and unspeakable brutality. But remarkably, while its material could not be any more gruesome, “For a Song and a Hundred Songs” is neither hopeless nor pessimistic. Among the living dead and with prose fighting sadism and torture, Liao finds the appropriate dimensions for his words, which become ever more confident, graphic and sensual. The physicality of his descriptions spare no detail, as the scars and cracks in his skin create an exceedingly specific indictment of a regime that remains distant and abstract. But on hundreds of pages full of agony and pain, there is still room for humour and subtle irony. In circulation among the prisoners is an extensive “menu” of indigestible “meals”, which is even more perfidious than one the Marquis de Sade might have devised. Liao Yiwu almost relishes in reciting it. For example, menu item 11, “Lamb skewers, served hot”, involves the following, still comparatively harmless torture: “A cotton strip soaked in oil is wrapped completely around all the captive’s toes, the end of the strip is lit and then extinguished, creating a gradual glow.”

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One’s past plays no role in prison; a poet is worth no more than a man who dismembered his wife. But in just such a place, where his live body is stripped of its “romantic poet skin”, Liao Yiwu develops a radical poetics in whose context he is no exception. “To understand something

precisely, to feel it in one’s bones, one must drill into it like a fly, abhorrently buzzing, and one must be incredibly careful”. However, “you do this filthy job your entire life, like the doctor from antiquity who diagnoses the suffering of his epoch by the taste of people’s excrement.”

In this sense, Liao Yiwu’s “For a Song and a Hundred Songs” is a breathless balancing act along the threshold of pain, free of any trace of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. After two suicide attempts, Liao’s forced humiliation and brutalisation became a means to perform resistance even before he began writing about his experiences. And then, as soon as his writing began, it became the last bastion of self-preservation even in the face of overwhelming existential doubts with respect to the relevance of his words: “I, that was a leftover, twirled by a formless tongue, I didn’t want to be swallowed and digested, I reached out my hand to say “No!”

Liao Yiwu later called his time in prison one of his four mentors. Although he was unable to attend university, he unquestionably holds several degrees in the science of survival and has chosen to designate all of his experiences – some of which almost cost him his life – as necessary lessons for his literary work. His prison years are his fourth and hopefully final master course. The three others: hunger, existence as a person without residence status, and homelessness.

Psychologically, Liao says, he is still in prison today. This is manifest externally in his decision, for fear of bugs and scabies, to never again let his hair or beard grow. Because, in the prisons, at the hour of his greatest humiliation, he made a pledge: whatever the cost, he will testify in writing to his “unique way of living”: against the government. “When an individual engages in a game of risks with the state, power is distributed very unevenly, but this doesn’t necessarily mean that I have to lose”. The price he must pay for this is high. When he fled his native land on 2 July 2011, his exit forestalled the renewed prison time he was threatened with if he ever published “For a Song and a Hundred Songs” in the west. He has lived in exile in Germany ever since.

Liao Yiwu embodies a resistance performed by heart. Indeed, it is based “on a terror located

at a deeper level than the long confinement and the physical agony". It is the fear of being forgotten, of having lived and suffered in vain - a fear he shares with all those affected by the events on Tiananmen Square. "We hope that those on the outside remember and appreciate that we are trapped in this reality because of our conscience, because of justice, because of truth".

Liao Yiwu's critique applies not just to the reality of today's China, but even more to the unresolved past within that reality - a past that is in constant danger of being manipulated: "In line with the requirements of state power, fundamental historical facts are continually altered, replaced or discarded whenever necessary... But the individual's memory of his humiliation runs deep in his blood; it instinctively influences what he says and how he acts - such stigmatisation can never be wiped away" Besides Liao Yiwu, countless other political prisoners have been forced to learn this same painful lesson, including such prominent people as his friend and Nobel Prize winner Liu Xiaobo and the artist Ai Weiwei.

Liao Yiwu's fixation with China's oppressed is imbued with the author's deep attachment to

his country, its people and its traditions - a motivation often lost amid political labels such as "critic of the regime" and "dissident". In collecting individual histories, Liao Yiwu restores dignity to the countless people that China's rulers wish to quietly relegate to the "rubbish heap" of history. In doing so he remains true to his belief that people need someone "who raises his voice in the name of reality" more urgently than they need someone to speak in the name of history. This way of writing becomes an act of self-respect and, indeed, a means of reclaiming his own dignity. Liao Yiwu concludes "For a Song and a Hundred Songs" with this hope. His work being widely read is the only guarantee that his dignity can never again be taken from him.

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My esteemed Liao Yiwu, I bow to your courage, your resolve and your perseverance. May the Peace Prize embolden you in your conduct and in your work.

Translation by The Hagedorn Group.



## Certificate

The German Publishers and Booksellers Association  
is awarding its 2012 Peace Prize to

**Liao Yiwu**

In doing so, the association and its members have chosen to honor a Chinese author who continues to wage an eloquent and fearless battle against political repression and who lends a clear and unmistakable voice to the downtrodden and disenfranchised of his country.

In his prose and poetry, Liao Yiwu erects an evocative literary monument to those people living on the margins of Chinese society. The author, who has experienced first-hand the effects of prison, torture and repression, is an unwavering chronicler and observer who bears witness on behalf of the outcasts of modern China.

The manuscript of his work »For a Song and a Hundred Songs,« in which he tells of the brute force and dehumanizing conditions in Chinese prisons, was confiscated repeatedly by authorities. In response, he rewrote it several times and was eventually able to publish it in exile. As a Volksschriftsteller (»people's author«) in the most comprehensive sense of the term, Liao Yiwu is an unrelenting advocate of human dignity, freedom and democracy.

German Booksellers and Publishers Association

Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Gottfried Honnefelder

Frankfurt am Main, Church of St. Paul

October 14, 2012

## Liao Yiwu

This empire must break apart.

Once upon a time, there was a nine-year-old boy called Lu Peng, who was in the third grade at Shun Cheng Jie primary school in Beijing. On the night of 3 to 4 June 1989, curiosity led him to sneak out of the house, behind his parents' backs. Riots were raging in the streets. Lu Peng was hit and struck down by a bullet head on. Many others died at that same moment in the hail of bullets. But he was the youngest.

According to the eyewitness reports of a group around Ding Zilin, who has made it her mission to shed light upon the events of that night, Lu Peng was also the youngest of all of the victims of the Tiananmen massacre. A bullet pierced his chest and he died instantly, on the spot. News of his death spread like wildfire through Beijing that same night. Countless enraged individuals swarmed the streets, irrespective of whether they had been asleep or actually didn't want anything to do with politics. They erected barricades to hold back the military vehicles and hurled Molotov cocktails and stones at the soldiers, armed to the teeth, who were there to enforce the curfew. Little Lu Peng lay stretched out on a flatbed lorry, surrounded – like a hero – by numerous protestors. Wordlessly, the streets bore witness to the massacre. That night, countless people were unable to hold back their tears because of this unknown child. How many of them were branded by the State as “counterrevolutionary troublemakers” from one moment to the next at that time?

In the blink of an eye, 23 years have passed. In my book *Bullets and Opium*, now also available in Germany, Lu Peng is at the top of the “list of 202 casualties of the Tiananmen massacre”. He will forever be nine years old. I would like us never to forget that. Which is why I have recorded the news of his death.

But here, today, I would like to announce the news of another death – that of the Chinese empire. A country that massacres little children must break apart – that is in keeping with the Chinese tradition.

### **Dieses Imperium muss auseinanderbrechen.**

Over 2,500 years ago, in his work the *Tao Te Ching*, our revered forefather, the philosopher Laozi spoke often of two entities at once weak and yet superlative: a newborn child and water. The newborn stands for the propagation of the human race, and water for the expansion of nature. Looking after a child means preserving the primary energy, the *qi* of humankind. Accordingly, in the Chinese healing practice *qigong*, it is essential to begin by freeing oneself of all troubling thoughts and gathering the *qi* life-energy in one's abdomen in order to return to the original state of an embryo in the womb. Laozi goes one step further, describing humanity's desire for home, for the return to the native land, which is as important to old people as a mother's breast is to an infant. Satisfying this basic human desire requires no “great nation”; rather, what is needed is a country divided into small units. The philosopher Laozi was an apologist for “divisionism”. For him, the ultimate utopia is a “small country with few people”. In his eponymous text, he writes: “The small neighbouring countries are so close by that their inhabitants can see each other, hear each other's dogs bark and chickens cackle. Yet the people grow old and die, without ever having paid each other a visit”.

The smaller a country is, the easier it is to govern. If a country were no bigger than a village, its inhabitants could easily find a president, drink and pee together, or discuss politics together. A wonderful notion. If a strange guest appeared from a distant land, especially from a distant land the inhabitants had never heard of – it could be Germany, or the United States – the news would spread at lightning speed, and there would be great excitement and a wonderful atmosphere of self-satisfaction in the air. Yao and Shun, the divine forefathers of China, were in the habit of mingling with the people in many forms, and were as interested in politics as in farming. For this reason, all the great thinkers of Chinese history since Laozi – Zhuangzi, Confucius and Mencius – have showed them respect.

**Dieses Imperium muss auseinanderbrechen.**

The dictatorial Chinese empire of today was originally composed of countless smaller splinter states - up until the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States period. It is true that, during that time, the fires of war raged constantly and one state was always occupying or annexing the other. Yet historians agree that it was a previously unsurpassed time of glory, a time of unprecedented political, economic and cultural blossoming; never since has there been the same degree of freedom of speech and debate, with science and the arts engaged in eager competition. The well-known "Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought" refers to this period. And today? Today, after having turned every aspect of tradition on its head, the Communist Party goes forth, usurping and shamelessly distorting the intellectual legacy of the "Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought", setting up Confucius Institutes around the world. Haven't they read the classics? Don't they know that Confucius wasn't a "Chinese nationalist" but an inhabitant of Lu's small state? Confucius was 56 years old when he picked an argument over political questions with the ruler of his state. Fearing for his life, he took flight in a mad rush, only to remain living in exile, roving through a whole range of states on his travels. It was only when he was 70 that he was granted permission to return to his homeland. Seen in this light, Confucius should be considered the spiritual forefather of the politically persecuted, and what are called "Confucius Institutes" today should, for all intents and purposes, be known as "Confucius Institutes for Exiles".

A similar example is the poet Qu Yuan, a prominent unorthodox thinker from the late Warring States period. Disappointed and frustrated because his home state Chu had been usurped by a king from Qin obsessed with the idea of "one kingdom under heaven", he threw himself into the Miluo River and drowned before his "country was destroyed and his family dispersed". Qu Yuan left behind countless influential poems, full of love for his homeland, which every Chinese person to this day knows by heart. The poet's true home was the area around Lake Dongting in Hunan province -not the Chinese empire, which, through bloody annexation and great suffering, forcefully chains together so many regions and peoples. "However long the

path may be, I will not stop seeking and questing in every direction." In memory of this uncompromising artist, to this day the popular custom persists of celebrating the Dragon Boat Festival on the anniversary of Qu Yuan's death. Every year for this "water festival", people board dragon boats, race each other through the waves and throw *zongzi*, a culinary specialty from the state of Chu, into the water - so that Qu Yuan's soul may savour them.

**Dieses Imperium muss auseinanderbrechen.**

The nominally united Chinese empire has left enormous bloody trails throughout history. Unsurpassed in terms of atrocity, the empire's first unifying figure, Qin Shi Huang, spent his entire life waging wars in every direction and swallowing up neighbouring states to expand his territory. It is said that the population of this territory shrank by two-thirds under his rule. His two major deeds will ensure that the name of the first Emperor of Qin will stink to high heaven for all eternity: the building of the Great Wall and the burning of books, which went hand-in-hand with the murdering of scholars. The erection of the Great Wall was meant to prevent people from having contact with the outside world, turning China into the ultimate prison. To this end, the entire country was forced into slave labour in the service of this massive project. In turn, the burning of books and murdering of scholars were intended to cut people off from their own traditions. The Emperor of Qin cunningly published a "Call to All Scholars", with which he lured 460 philosophers from all parts of the country to the capital, only to have them buried alive - while burning every last one of centuries' worth of classic works. Two thousand years later, he won great praise from a new despot by the name of Mao Zedong. Mao boasted: Qin Shi Huang interred just 460 Confucians, whereas we have done away with tens of thousands of counterrevolutionaries. The likes of Qin Shi Huang cannot compete with that.

Mao Zedong understated the case. According to historical records, in assiduously developing the new China, the Communist Party strove to follow the first Emperor of Qin's example and, ideally, to cut the people off from all their traditions. In the midst of initially peaceful land reforms came the sudden call to eliminate the exploitative class, and more than two million land-

owners, country squires and representatives of the people's communes were shot. The intellectual stratum of the rural population was essentially obliterated, though the majority had already yielded to the new rulers anyway. But the Communists insinuated that they were involved in "sinister machinations"; apparently, Mao and his ilk believed it was no longer possible to transform these stubborn old heads into contemporary new ones.

Murdering people. That was the method upon which the new state was founded. It was tacitly understood, from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping. During the great famine between 1959 and 1962, nearly 40 million people starved to death across the country. No sooner had Mao Zedong begun to fear for his power than he was already sounding the alarm to fight real and imagined enemies, and brainwashing the population. From 1966 to 1976, during the Cultural Revolution, between 20 and 40 million people were tortured to death; once again fearing for his throne, Mao had called for an even more forceful attack against the enemies and an even more thorough brainwashing of the people. At every possible occasion, the great Chairman admonished the people that nothing - not even deadly catastrophes - was as terrible as "division of the people, loss of the Party and nation". And the people surrendered themselves and meekly sank into an abyss of suffering. The warnings of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Ceausescu, Kim Jong-il, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi to their people were not very different. The rhetoric of tyrants. One united dominion and territorial imperviousness - that is what the ultimate trump card of dictatorship looks like. How many crimes have been openly committed in the name of these goals?

### **Dieses Imperium muss auseinanderbrechen.**

In June 1989, once again feeling that its power was at risk, the Communist Party mobilised 200,000 soldiers to massacre the city of Beijing. While armoured military vehicles rumbled through the streets there and the volley of gunfire could be heard around the world, in the far-away capital of Sichuan province, Chengdu, a poet cowered among piles of old books, reading the writings of the philosopher Zhuangzi.

It seems just a heartbeat ago that, because of the dissemination of my poem "Massacre"

after that night, I wandered into and back out of prison... I once encountered another old writer by the name of Liu Shahe, whom - in 1957, long before I was born - Mao Zedong had also suspected of "denigrating the Party", declared an enemy and thrown into prison because of a poem. He told me: the wounds that a stroke of fate like that inflicts upon you never heal. We are no longer poets; we have become witnesses of history. He quoted a story from the work of Zhuangzi - another witness of his times, like us:

Once upon a time, there was a state called Jia that was surrounded by the enemy. The attackers moved in closer and closer. Soon they had captured the capital, and all its inhabitants could do was to flee from the murdering, pillaging hordes. Among the fleeing masses was an old hermit by the name of Lin Hui. He hid an enormous, extremely valuable piece of jade against his chest. Suddenly, from the ruins at the edge of the city, the cry of a newborn arose. Terrified, the masses paused. But the troops were at their heels, the battle cries already ringing in their ears and, panicked, they continued to run for their lives. Only Lin Hui stopped running and bent down to pick up the child. But the piece of jade at his chest was so big and heavy that there was no way he could carry the child without giving up the stone. He did not hesitate; he chose the child - to the surprise of everyone, who called him an idiot. How can you give up a treasure to saddle yourself with a lifetime of drudgery?, they asked him. Lin Hui answered: It is heaven's will.

\*

Heaven's will: that means preserving the truth for future generations. The rise and fall of states, and the division and reunification of territories may be recorded in the chronicles of history - but heaven's will outlasts all else. This true legacy of our history lies forgotten in the midst of ruins - crying helplessly like the newborn Laozi and Zhuangzi wrote about - whenever rivers and mountains vanish, whenever a Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping calls for murder. It requires someone like the hermit Lin Hui who feels a sense of obligation towards tradition - someone willing to renounce all current and future profits to pick up and carry this child on his flight from death, someone willing to patiently raise and educate it until its intellect grows so

sharp that it may become a guardian of memory, carrying on – in secrecy – the tradition of recording the truth.

I, too, carry on the tradition of remembering. I want to share my accounts of the victims of the massacre with humankind – in Chinese, English or German – just as I want to share my thoughts regarding the breaking up of the Chinese empire. I don't know how many more years it will take until I can return to the land of my beloved forefathers. Which is why I would like to pay them an early tribute here, in this sacred church of St. Paul, in front of Germany's assembled elite. In particular I'd like to honour the master Sima Qian, the most venerable of this group, who was castrated by the ruling powers because he embraced the truth – which, like a fragile orphan, sought shelter with him – during another period of sanctimoniousness, the Western Han Dynasty. His body was no longer able to procreate, but his soul defied this humiliation. His great historical work *Shiji*, the "Records of the Historian", together with another great work, the *I Ching* by King Wen of Zhou, accompanied me on my flight from the Chinese dictatorship.

#### **Dieses Imperium muss auseinanderbrechen.**

Children and the truth have always been closely connected in history. A dynasty that is so degenerate that it massacres children and tortures the truth – such a dynasty's days are numbered. Yet the shrewd tyrant Deng Xiaoping resorted to a trick: in the spring of 1992, he made a historical trip to Shenzhen in the South, where he announced the opening of the Chinese market in order to save his Party from the political crisis. I would like to repeat here what I already wrote in *Bullets and Opium* about contemporary China – a China in which I felt homeless in my own country. The suffering grew ever worse and the people ever more benumbed, while the Chinese economy increasingly flourished.

Throughout the world, people are convinced that China's economic boom will necessarily bring with it political reforms, turning a dictatorship into a democracy. As a result, all countries that once imposed sanctions on China because of the Tiananmen massacre now want to be the first to shake hands and make deals with the executioners. Even though these very execution-

ers are still detaining and killing people, new blood stains are still being added to the old ones, and new atrocities are still being committed that make the old ones pale in comparison. In the process, simple people, who must live their lives between blood and atrocity, lose what little is left of decency.

Misery and shamelessness are interdependent. They determine our past, present and future. After the Tiananmen massacre, the bloody oppression continued – against the families of the victims of the massacre, against Qigong groups, Falun Gong, the China Democratic League, objectors, dispossessed farmers, the unemployed, lawyers, underground churches, dissidents, the victims of the Sichuan earthquake, signatories of Charter 08, supporters of the Jasmine Revolution, Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongolians... The cases continue to pile up and tyranny endures at a high level. Your hands may tremble the first time you murder someone, but the more you kill, the more you feel obliged to keep killing and the more nimbly you swing your sword – and with every death blow the balance sheets of the economy only get stronger and stronger. One could say that without the Tiananmen massacre, there wouldn't have been reform policies – which taught us to love money rather than our country. Without the sinister machinations of corrupt speculators the cities wouldn't have expanded so rapidly, there would be no vacant properties, no civil servants who fled or were chased away because of shoddy construction projects, and no miserable profiteers.

The executioners are prevailing because the entire country has become their slave. There is indiscriminate pillaging and devastation – the shocks reverberate to the core. And foreign investors are told: Welcome, do come in – come and build factories here, make deals, build high-rises and establish networks; as long as you don't put your finger in the wound by bringing up human rights, you can do and make whatever you like. You may have laws and public opinion where you're from, but here you can wallow in the mud with us. Come and pollute our rivers and air, poison our food and groundwater; come and help yourself to our cheap labourers and make them toil night and day on the assembly line like machines. The more you ensure that the Chinese develop physical and psychological cancers, the higher your profits will be. The best

business opportunities await you here, in the world's biggest rubbish dump.

Under the guise of free trade, Western consortia make common cause with the executioners, piling up more and more dirt. The influence of this value system of dirt, which places profit ahead of everything else, is getting out of hand around the world. Those in China with money and connections simply leave behind their battered and poisoned country and go abroad to savour the sun, freedom, equality and fraternity in a clean environment. Perhaps they even join a church, to ask Jesus - nailed to the cross by other dictators in history - to forgive them for their sins.

More and more Chinese people will discover that there is neither justice nor equality even in the democratic West; and that there, too, greedy functionaries and other profiteers act shamelessly, in keeping with the motto "to the victor belong the spoils". And it won't be long before they will all be following this example and, in a not too distant future, every corner of the world will be full of Chinese swindlers eager to leave their homeland at any cost.

This empire's value system has long since collapsed in on itself, and the only thing still holding it together is the profit incentive. At the same time, these vile chains of profit are so far-reaching and intertwined that the free world of economic globalisation is bound to become hopelessly entangled in them.

#### **Dieses Imperium muss auseinanderbrechen.**

Yet, ever since that night 23 years ago that turned into a bloodbath, the fate of this empire has been sealed: it must break apart. The list of the massacre's victims, headed by nine-year-old Lu Peng and the Tiananmen Mothers' resistance lead by Ding Zilin, will stand as an epochal lesson. The recently deceased Václav Havel once spoke of the power of the powerless. The only thing left to China's frustrated powerless under changing dictators is the oral transmission of the truth - and that, too, is very much in keeping with our tradition. When the first Emperor of Qin had the Great Wall built, with no concern for the fact that workers were dying in the process, the powerless seized on the parable "Young Meng Jiang weeps at the Great Wall", which has been

passed down to the present, to curse him for all time. The Great Wall may continue to be a popular tourist destination, but in the story of Meng Jiang it has long since collapsed under the weight of the young woman's tears.

Confucius once stood by a torrential stream and found himself sighing deeply - an allegory for painful memories of times gone by, and an allegory for the pain felt upon receiving news of the following deaths: On 21 June 2003, a three-year-old girl called Li Siyi starved to death in Jintang county in the city of Chengdu. Her mother had been arrested and incarcerated for 17 days on suspicion of drug abuse. The little girl had simply been left to her fate. On 13 October 2011, in the city of Foshan in Guangdong province, two-year-old Wang Yue was hit by a car and left lying on the street. The girl was still alive. Two additional trucks ran over her. Videos recorded by eyewitnesses with their mobile phones and posted on the Internet show seven minutes going by during which 18 people walked heedlessly past the little girl without stopping to help her. Finally an old female rubbish collector pulled her off the street and brought her to hospital, where she later died.

Blood grows cold quickly and hearts harden. But, back then, in the case of nine-year-old Lu Peng, our blood continued to boil in our veins for a long time.

Is this how modern Chinese behave, who've been brainwashed by the executioners with their economic policy? Yet who are "the Chinese"? In China, people tend to say: I'm from Sichuan, I'm from Sha'anxi, I'm from Guangdong, or I'm from Beijing. And Chinese who, like me, live abroad say: I'm from America, I'm from Germany, I'm from Tibet, I'm from Romania. If someone from Taiwan said to me "You Chinese all have a master mentality", I would answer, "The China you're talking about has nothing to do with my Sichuan."

On the night of my flight from China, I had a conversation with a native of the border region of Yunnan province. He told me: Yunnan is different from Sichuan - we can be out of the country faster than you can leave your province; in the blink of an eye, we can be in Vietnam, Laos or Burma for a cup of tea. It would be much more practical if Yunnan, Vietnam, Laos and Burma

became one country; certainly easier than a trip to far-away Beijing or Shanghai – that’s a whole other world. I told him he sounded like a traitor. You’d sell your country that easily? How much is such a country worth?, he asked. Can it be sold?

In ancient times, Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia and Taiwan were all foreign countries for China. When the Tang Dynasty Princess Wencheng was married off to Tubo, which is now Tibet, it caused as much of a stir as a young woman from Shanghai marrying an American during the Republican Period. Why must Tibetans today publicly burn themselves alive time and again? If Tibet could simply be a free country sharing borders with Sichuan and Yunnan rather than being oppressed by a distant dictatorship in Beijing, no one from that buoyant population on the high plateau would have reason to harm himself that way.

This inhuman empire with bloody hands, at the root of so much suffering in the world, this

infinitely large pile of rubbish must break apart.

So that no more innocent children die, it must break apart.

So that no new mother blamelessly loses her child, it must break apart.

So that China’s helpless and homeless migrant workers no longer need to toil as the world’s slaves, it must break apart.

So that we may finally return to the home of our ancestors and watch over their legacy and graves in the future, it must break apart.

This empire must break apart, for the sake of peace and the peace of mind of all humanity – and for the mothers of Tiananmen Square, for whom I wrote the following song.

### **The Mothers of Tiananmen**

My child  
How are you doing in paradise?  
Your mother’s heart  
Bloomed in an open field long ago.  
The shots have died away, the blood has dried,  
My child  
Come back quickly from this dream.

My child  
Are you celebrated in the hereafter?  
The snowflakes fall thickly,  
And colour your mother’s hair white.  
The currents flow, but the tears have run dry.  
My child,  
Are you lonely in the hereafter?

Mother,  
Whom are you speaking to there outside your window?  
Please warm your child  
With the light of the lantern.  
Infinite is the world of humans, pale green the grass on the graves.  
Mother,  
What good are your laments?

Translation by Siobahn O’Leary.

### **Contact**

Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V.  
Geschäftsstelle Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels – Martin Schult  
Schiffbauerdamm 5, 10117 Berlin  
Tel. 030/2800 783-44, Fax 030/2800 783-50  
Mail: [m.schult@boev.de](mailto:m.schult@boev.de)  
Internet: [www.friedenspreis-des-deutschen-buchhandels.de](http://www.friedenspreis-des-deutschen-buchhandels.de)

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1950	Max Tau - Adolf Grimme	1980	Ernesto Cardenal - Johann Baptist Metz
1951	Albert Schweitzer - Theodor Heuss	1981	Lew Kopelew - Marion Gräfin Dönhoff
1952	Romano Guardini - Ernst Reuter	1982	George Kennan - Carl F. von Weizsäcker
1953	Martin Buber - Albrecht Goes	1883	Manès Sperber - Siegfried Lenz
1954	Carl J. Burckhardt - Theodor Heuss	1984	Octavio Paz - Richard von Weizsäcker
1955	Hermann Hesse - Richard Benz	1985	Teddy Kollek - Manfred Rommel
1956	Reinhold Schneider - Werner Bergengruen	1986	Władysław Bartoszewski - Hans Maier
1957	Thornton Wilder - Carl J. Burckhardt	1987	Hans Jonas - Robert Spaemann
1958	Karl Jaspers - Hannah Arendt	1988	Siegfried Lenz - Yohanan Meroz
1959	Theodor Heuss - Benno Reifenberg	1989	Václav Havel - André Glucksmann
1960	Victor Gollancz - Heinrich Lübke	1990	Karl Dedecius - Heinrich Olschowsky
1961	Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan - Ernst Benz	1991	György Konrád - Jorge Semprún
1962	Paul Tillich - Otto Dibelius	1992	Amos Oz - Siegfried Lenz
1963	Carl F. von Weizsäcker - Georg Picht	1993	Friedrich Schorlemmer - Richard von Weizsäcker
1964	Gabriel Marcel - Carlo Schmid	1994	Jorge Semprún - Wolf Lepenies
1965	Nelly Sachs - Werner Weber	1995	Annemarie Schimmel - Roman Herzog
1966	Kardinal Bea/Visser 't Hooft - Paul Mikat	1996	Mario Vargas Llosa - Jorge Semprún
1967	Ernst Bloch - Werner Maihofer	1997	Yaşar Kemal - Günter Grass
1968	Léopold Sédar Senghor - François Bondy	1998	Martin Walser - Frank Schirrmacher
1969	Alexander Mitscherlich - Heinz Kohut	1999	Fritz Stern - Bronislaw Geremek
1970	Alva und Gunnar Myrdal - Karl Kaiser	2000	Assia Djebar - Barbara Frischmuth
1971	Marion Gräfin Dönhoff - Alfred Grosser	2001	Jürgen Habermas - Jan Philipp Reemtsma
1972	Janusz Korczak - Hartmut von Hentig	2002	Chinua Achebe - Theodor Berchem
1973	The Club of Rome - Nello Celio	2003	Susan Sontag - Ivan Nagel
1974	Frère Roger - (keine Laudatio)	2004	Péter Esterházy - Michael Naumann
1975	Alfred Grosser - Paul Frank	2005	Orhan Pamuk - Joachim Sartorius
1976	Max Frisch - Hartmut von Hentig	2006	Wolf Lepenies - Andrei Pleşu
1977	Leszek Kołakowski - Gesine Schwan	2007	Saul Friedländer - Wolfgang Frühwald
1978	Astrid Lindgren - H.-C. Kirsch, G. U. Becker	2008	Anselm Kiefer - Werner Spies
1979	Yehudi Menuhin - Pierre Bertaux	2009	Claudio Magris - Karl Schlögel
		2010	David Grossman - Joachim Gauck
		2011	Boualem Sansal - Peter von Matt
		2012	Liao Yiwu - Felicitas von Lovenberg