Strengthening Malaysia-China ties via art and culture

By Rebecca Chong

KOTA KINABALU: The School of Arts of Peking University, China and the Sabah Institute of Art (SIA), have collaborated in organizing the Art and Cultural Exhibition to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the bilateral relationship between China and Malaysia, in the hope of strengthening their relationship through the expression of art.

The exhibition displays various art works from 48 chosen artists from Peking University as well as masterpieces produced by the SIA for three days until May 2, at the School of Arts of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), here.

Also collaborated in the exhibition were the China Painting and Calligraphy Association of Kota Kinabalu, Kota Kinabalu branch of Chinese Ink Painting Society, and the School of Arts, UMS.

It is the first art exhibition held in Sabah to commemorate the anniversary of diplomatic ties, following several exhibitions already held in Peninsular Malaysia such as 2014 Silk Road Chinese Artwork Exhibition, Mobile painting Exhibition at UNIMAP, Pahang, UITM Perlis, and the Gala Show at National Art Gallery.

Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister, Datuk Seri Panglima Masidi Manjun, was represented by his assistant minister, Datuk Pang Nyuk Ming, in officiating at the event yesterday.

Masidi said that Malaysia was the first Southeast Asian country to establish diplomatic ties with China back in 1974, and in 40 years, relationship between both nations have been steadfast in good times and unwavering in trying times.

“We hope that this exhibition could be one of the platforms to strengthen these relations particularly given the trying times we are confronted with since the last few months,” Masidi said in his speech, referring to the missing Malaysia Airline aircraft MH370 and the recent abduction case in Semporna which both involved the citizens of China.

Masidi said that the two-way tourist flow has reached three million annually, and Malaysia has become one of the popular tourist destinations for Chinese holiday makers.

He said that the cultural exchange between the two countries had reached a new profile with the establishment of a Malay Research Center in Beijing, and the setting up of two Confucius Institutes in Malaysia.

The exhibition also brings 16 artists and students of Peking University, accompanied by several professors to do sketching and painting artwork depicting the scenery, indigenous group in Sabah as well as floral motifs.

“These paintings will later be displayed in China and this would be the most fascinating display the artists could showcase on behalf of Sabah, and I hope these artworks would give a purer impression of Sabah,” Masidi added.

According to Director of School of Arts, Peking University, Professor Chen Xin, the 16 students and artists from his university were supposed to be a group of 48 people, however, due to the recent missing flight and abduction incidents, the other 32 people had cancelled their trips.

During the opening ceremony yesterday, Chen said he hoped to see improved relationship between China and Malaysia, including Sabah, through the expression of arts in both countries, as the artists get to know each others' cultures, and learn from each other, through art.

Also present during the event was Chief Executive Officer of the SIA, Dato’ Dr Wilson Tong Tung Yung.
Artist from Peking University, China, Lv Chang Jun (left) and Wilson from SIA producing a painting together, witnessed by Pang (centre).