

Liu Xiaobo's Significance for China's Democracy

Statement submitted by YANG Jianli to the Dec.12, 2102 CECC Hearing on Liu Xiaobo

It is a great honor for me to speak about the significance of Liu Xiaobo in a democratic change in China. I want to begin by asking this question: Why is China, a seemingly increasingly assertive world power, afraid of a single man like Liu Xiaobo? Why is it afraid of a moderate document like Charter 08, a manifesto authored by Liu Xiaobo and his colleagues in China demanding for political reform?

The answer can only be that the rulers of China understand just how unjust, therefore weak, their system is and how significant Liu Xiaobo is for a democratic change.

Liu Xiaobo and his colleagues recognize there are two Chinas. They have tried to bring together these two severely separated Chinas and construct a society built upon universal values of public political life.

By “two China”, I am not trying to distinguish "mainland China" from "Taiwan." Geographically there is only one entity of mainland China, but politically, economically, sociologically, and even sentimentally, it has largely broken into two societies.

Over the past 20 some years after Tiananmen Square, the CCP regime has established a two China structure and one of the two Chinas, which I call China, Inc. is formed by

1. Red Capitalists
2. Marriage between Power and Capital
3. Shares open to domestic and foreign capitalists
4. Shares free to intellectuals

Today, China Inc. is dazzling the entire world with its wealth, might and glory. It dominates the public discourse that outside observers believe that it represents China—the whole of China.

The truth is there is another society named China, a society constituted of over a billion Chinese who are virtually slave-laborers working for China, Inc. I call this second China the under China.

How do these two Chinas differ?

1. Unprecedented wealth gap between the Chinas.
2. Citizens of the under China are unable to enjoy basic benefits or constitutionally afforded civil and political rights.
3. The elite monopolize over power, capital, and information.
4. The two Chinas no longer speak a common political language.
5. The two Chinas have no common political life.
6. The underclass have grown more and more discontent and distrustful of the elite.

On top of the traditional lies and violence, which every autocratic ruler uses, the CCP regime has developed new tactics to maintain the two China structure which is comprised of: One body: sustaining economic growth at all costs to maintain the regime's ruling legitimacy

Two wings: appeasing the elite with corruption and suppressing the powerless with rogue police

Two claws: purging citizen advocates like Liu Xiaobo and blocking public opinion.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to just see the severe division of the two societies of China. We must envision the emergence of a new, democratic China: the third China which is represented by people like Liu Xiaobo.

Liu Xiaobo's Nobel honor indicates the international recognition of the Chinese democracy movement represented by Liu Xiaobo. This, among other gestures, will even eventually help strengthen the hand of those inside the communist bureaucracy pushing for reform. Liu Xiaobo has become the symbol of democracy in China and moral courage and determination in struggling for that goal. Simply because of such a symbolism, his continued imprisonment presents itself a footnote to the vow made in President Hu Jintao's political report at the recent Party's 18th Congress that the leadership would "never take the evil road of changing flags and banners" – code for abandoning one-party rule. This vow dispelled any doubts about the party's resolve to keep its political monopoly.

But we must remember the CCP does not have the only say about China's future. Liu Xiaobo and his symbolism represents another force that will help shape the future of China as well as an alternative road in China, the evil road in the minds of China's leaders perhaps. And, this force is becoming increasingly viable.

The most important sign is the recent intellectual awakening evidenced by the return of the democracy debate which has been at the center of the public course around China's leadership change. More and more intellectuals, who were generally co-opted by the regime not long after Tiananmen and had been acting as defenders of the China's one party system, have come to realize and acknowledge the value of Liu Xiaobo and ideas and beliefs which are embodied in Charter 08. The intellectual recognition that the status quo is unsustainable is always the first and vital step towards changing it.

Despite the division I talked about earlier, there are two often overlooked consensus among Chinese from both societies. The first is that the present China is not "normal," indeed "absurd", a word Liu Xia kept saying in her first and totally unexpected media interview in 26 months of her illegal house arrest. The second, perhaps agreed upon to a lesser degree, is that China will eventually become normal through democratic means.

To find a common ground to lay the foundation for the third China, we must create a political language based on universal values that can bridge the gap between the two Chinas. And that is exactly what Liu Xiaobo, and Charter 08, has been intent on accomplishing.

Change is unlikely to happen first from within the CCP regime which values stability-above-all. A breakthrough for a democratic change will surely come from the people.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Liu Xiaobo has a remarkable impact on the hearts of the people inside China and over the past years the civil movement has become increasingly mature, skillful, and resilient as evidenced by many cases including Chen Guangcheng, Ai Weiwei, and Wukan villagers.

Liu Xiaobo with Charter 08 is a banner. Backed by large numbers of its real-name signers from diverse segments of society, the Charter will continue to transform individual protests into a long-lasting movement that demands across-the-board, systematic change.

As the non-governmental forces grow and the civil protests escalate, the struggle for power among different factions with the communist regime will become more pronounced. Once the external pressure

reaches a critical mass, the rival factions within the CCP will have no choice but take the voices of the citizens seriously and seek their support to survive.

The release of Liu Xiaobo will help signal the coming of that change.

When a large-scale movement takes place again, as it did in 1989, we will need leaders to play the roles that Mandela, Havel, Walesa, and Aung San Suu Kyi have played in the political changes of their respective countries. We will need a group of civil leaders who can disrupt the political order and establish itself as the legitimate voice of the people in negotiations with the state. Liu Xiaobo, as a widely accepted leader both at home and abroad, will surely play a unique role in forming such a group, which was most needed but lacking in our 1989 Tiananmen movement.

Therefore, working toward his freedom is vital for a democratic change in China. I am particularly encouraged by the strong support for Liu Xiaobo and Charter 08 from world human rights leaders and activists. Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in November of 2010. For the first time, there is hope for reform in Burma. In seeking the Liu's release, we hope and struggle for the same in China.