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# Liu Xiaobo and the Nobel Peace Prize: Readings and Reactions

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*When we heard of Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Peace Prize win last week, we quickly reached out to a variety of China Beatniks and asked for either their reactions to the news or links to any writings they had done on Liu in the past. Below are some of the responses we received.*

- [Geremie Barmé](#), the Australian National University

"China's Promise" (*China Beat*, January 2010):

On Christmas Day 2009, as a momentous year of anniversaries drew to an end, the Beijing authorities announced that Liu Xiaobo had been sentenced to eleven years in jail for 'inciting subversion'. According to media reports, this was the longest term given to any offender accused of this particularly nebulous crime since it was introduced in 1997. Ironically, for the two decades since the tragic denouement of the 1989 mass protest movement that pressed for media freedoms and basic rights Liu's has been a voice of reason and decency. Like patriots who had agitated for the party to make China a modern and civil nation in the 1940s, activists like Liu, and the thousands who signed the Charter 08, have used peaceful means and public protest to appeal to Chinese authorities to respect their own constitution.

As China continues on its path to become a major world influence, it is important that we remain heedful of the complex realities of China's society and the varying demands of its citizens. As international criticisms of China's failure to realize a social and political transformation concomitant with its economic achievement, the Chinese authorities have become increasingly anxious to present their monolith version of Chinese reality to the world as the only truly Chinese story worthy of our consideration. The Chinese Party-state, with the support of many citizens nurtured by a guided education and media industry, is now investing massively in presenting what it calls the 'Chinese story' (*Zhongguode gushi* 中国的故事) to the rest of the world. However, in doing this, it constantly limits and censors the variety of stories and narratives that make up the rich skein of human possibility in China itself. To many it would appear self-evident that no political force can or should claim to represent in its entirety or in perpetuity such human richness.

See also this 1990 essay, "[Confession, Redemption, and Death: Liu Xiaobo and the Protest Movement of 1989](#)" (originally published in *The Broken Mirror: China After Tiananmen* and republished in the March 2009 issue of *China Heritage Quarterly*).

- [Anne-Marie Brady](#), University of Canterbury

It is important to understand that when news like this breaks, "frames" and "tifa" (standardized formulations) are already in place that guide the Chinese media. I doubt there'll be any big banner headlines in China about the prize (at least not negative ones), as the usual strategy is to downplay such events if they reflect unfavourably on China. And as to what the average person in China will think about it all, apart from select circles in Beijing, most of the rest of the country aren't quite sure who Liu Xiaobo is, and I doubt they'll get all stirred up by Charter 08 as a result of the prize. I've been on the road a bit this last month and everyone is talking about the economy these days—how tough things are getting as costs go up—to most, Liu represents another era remote from their realities. Personally I think he is a great guy, tough, principled and determined. I met him just before his re-arrest in 1996.

Regarding availability of information in China online about Liu getting the award, here in Wuhan my internet connection closed down for a few minutes when I did a search in Google.cn in Chinese on his name. When it started again I did a search in Chinese for Nobel Peace Prize and the same thing happened again. It also happened when I switched to Google.co.nz, my usual access to Google, though I could search for Nobel Peace Prize in English from there. I'm staying in a foreign expert's apartment with better than average internet access, though no proxy server. You can never assume that if you can see things in Chinese outside China people inside can access them.

- [Perry Link](#), University of California, Riverside

["A Nobel Vision of a Better China"](#) (*Wall Street Journal*, October 9, 2010):

In 2005, China's President Hu Jintao issued a classified report called "Fight a Smokeless Battle: Keep 'Color Revolutions' Out of China." The report warned against allowing figures like Boris Yeltsin, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa or Aung San Suu Kyi to appear in China. It borrowed the Chinese idiom "blast the head off the bird that sticks its neck out" to recommend that, when troublemakers appear, "the big ones" should be arrested and "the little ones" left alone.

This formula appears to have been put into practice in November 2008. Shortly after Chinese police discovered that people were signing Charter 08 online, the Communist Party Politburo held a meeting at which Charter 08 was officially declared to be an attempt at "color revolution." Accordingly, Mr. Liu became "the big one" to target.

There is irony here. The other "color revolution" leaders named in the Hu report had strong political organizations behind them: Mr. Yeltsin was a high-ranking Soviet official, Mr. Mandela led the African National Congress, Mr. Walesa led Solidarity, and Ms. Suu Kyi led a political party that had already won a national election.

Mr. Liu, by comparison, was a free-floating intellectual. If he turns out to be a "big one" of the kind Mr. Hu fears, then Mr. Hu can only blame himself for having made him so. By awarding him the Peace Prize, the Nobel Committee and Communist Party have become unwitting partners in producing what China's democrats and political dissenters have most needed: a leader of transcendent moral stature to rally around.

**Tags:** [Anne-Marie Brady](#), [Geremie Barmé](#), [Liu Xiaobo](#), [Nobel Peace Prize](#), [Perry Link](#)