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THE SEATTLE TIMES NEWSPAPERS IN EDUCATION PRESENTS

Exploring Asia: Human Rights

This series explores contemporary human-rights issues in Asia.
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denied there were any dissidents in China and stated that presenting the award to Liu was inciting others to engage in criminal activities.

For 20 years, Liu engaged in political activities designed to promote peaceful change in China, first during the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement and most recently by co-writing Charter 08, which called on the Chinese Communist Party to guarantee judicial independence and civil liberties and open the political system to peaceful competition for power. In both instances, Liu was imprisoned.

In its Peace Prize announcement, the Nobel Committee noted the nearly unmatched progress made in reducing poverty and expanding political participation in China over the last 30 years. But with China's rise, the Committee said, came increased responsibilities. It condemned China's violation of international human rights conventions China had signed and its own constitution, which grants basic freedoms of speech, press, assembly and association to its citizens. The Committee saw Liu's activism as attempting to advance universal human rights and honored him as the foremost symbol of the struggle for rights in China.

In the United States, basic human rights are associated with the Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments to the US Constitution). In international law, basic human



Dr. Liu Xiaobo, 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.
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"... there is no force that can put an end to the human quest for freedom, and China will in the end become a nation ruled by law, where human rights reign supreme."

— from "I Have No Enemies: My Final Statement," Liu Xiaobo, December 23, 2009.
Translation J. Latourelle.

rights are defined more broadly in a number of international declarations and covenants. China has signed all major agreements; the United States has not. For its part, Chinese leaders — perhaps drawing on traditions associated with Confucius — argue that the most basic right of any society is that of development. They claim that acting for the good of society as a whole, to ensure domestic order, is more "basic" than granting primacy to individual rights.

For the ruling Chinese Communist Party, individual rights as understood in the US undermine the unity necessary to bring about the revitalization of China, and Party leaders believe that elections and other forms of disagreement manifested in society will only cause discord and chaos. Moreover, Chinese leaders claim, human rights in China are much better now than they were 35 years ago.

One can indeed find these values expressed in Chinese political thought stretching back thousands of years, but these views also conveniently serve to justify continued dictatorship by the Communist Party. If the Party sets and enforces the rules, people like Liu Xiaobo fear that it will never open itself up to criticism or peaceful competition for power.

Liu's prize symbolizes international support for those calling for the rapid improvement of human rights in China. Few outside of China expect that the prize will bring about dramatic changes in the short run. But it is well understood — by reformers both within and outside of China — that the prize signifies international solidarity with people in China trying to change the system and that the Committee hopes it will encourage others to pick up Liu's mantle.

In world history, most currently established human rights were established by political struggle: They had to be won, not granted from on high. Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Peace Prize is a skirmish in the long battle to establish human rights in China.

Chapter 5

Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize and Human Rights in China

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On October 8, 2010, the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced it had named Liu Xiaobo [pronounced Leo She-ow (as in how) bo (as in boat)], an imprisoned Chinese democracy advocate, as the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Leaders of many democratic states and human rights activists warmly welcomed Liu's award and called for the end of his incarceration. The Chinese government, for its part, roundly condemned the award,



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