

Political Opposition as Way of Life: I have no enemies, I have love¹

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On 13 July 2017, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient Liu Xiaobo left us, under absolute surveillance and isolation. I drove eight hours from Beijing to escape police intervention and arrived in Shenyang 24 hours before he passed away.² I lost contact with his family during the final days, probably due to the confiscation of the family's mobile phone and the chaos during his last moments. Like me, some other friends and supporters of Liu Xiaobo managed to arrive in Shenyang and "accompanied" him and his family during his last few hours in front of the hospital, under heavy police surveillance and intervention. But none of his friends was permitted to see Liu Xiaobo during his final days or to attend his farewell ceremony and sea burial, which were officially arranged right after his death. Liu Xiaobo's wife, Liu Xia, and her brother are forced to disappear afterwards, and many of his supporters who publicize their memorial activity photos were questioned and/or detained by police.

People in China took to social media to express their shock, sorrow and anger on the loss of Liu Xiaobo. Through various means, they expressed their support and love for Liu Xiaobo, who was sentenced to 11 years in prison for "incitement to subvert state power" and held in confinement for eight of those years. They also showed their support for Liu Xia, an artist in her own right, who had been held under house arrest and suffered mental and physical torment for being Liu Xiaobo's wife.

Those who follow the democratic and other social movements in the Chinese-speaking world are unlikely to forget that over the past eight years, a time when authorities severely squeezed the remaining spaces for civic expression and action, a number of people, directly or indirectly, responded with dissatisfaction—even disdain—to *I Have No Enemies*, Liu Xiaobo's final statement to court in 2009.³ Some of Liu Xiaobo's friends and supporters could not accept that the "cruelty" and "cold blooded" government authority that sentenced their beloved Liu Xiaobo to jail – eventually resulting in his death -- was not an "enemy". Some netizens went as far as to mock him as "Liu the Invincible" and attack those who sympathized or supported the ideas laid out in *I Have No Enemies*. Others simply chose to remain silent on Liu Xiaobo's situation.

¹ This article was firstly published in Chinese on 28 June 2017 by Initium Media. An updated version was published on 29 June by RFI (CN), see <http://trad.cn.rfi.fr/中國/20170629-反對政治作為一種生活方式：我沒有敵人，我有愛>. This translation is revised for English audience.

² Zeng's selfie in front of Liu Xiaobo's hospital, July 13, 2017, see <https://twitter.com/zengjinyan/status/885491853570617344>

³ See translation of the final statement on NYT: <https://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/08/jailed-chinese-dissidents-final-statement/>. Quotations without references in this article are from the final statement.

It's only in re-reading every word and sentence of *I Have No Enemies* today, only through understanding this final statement, that one can truly appreciate the milestone it represents in China's opposition movement, with its broad imagining of a political movement in China's future. Only then can we live up to the aspirations of Liu Xiaobo and the many other prisoners of conscience put behind bars simply for their political beliefs or exercising freedom of speech.

The text of *I Have No Enemies* is concise at under 3,000 characters. In it, Liu Xiaobo recounts the events of his life, briefly tells of his experiences after being arrested and his views on Chinese politics, and confesses his love for his wife Liu Xia. He covers topics from the injustice inflicted on him, to dealing with anger as part of political opposition, to explorations of topics such as justice and tolerance in the anticipation of future social transformations. Finally, through the expression of love for his wife Liu Xia, he expounds on the idea that within an opposition movement, only love itself is subversive, and revolutionary, and the most important spiritual resource both for individuals and the movement itself. He reminds the reader that under one-party rule, an opposition movement is one that exists beyond the scope of political science. That is, in the absence of freedom of speech or assembly, in a situation where traditional political opposition can't be foreseen or realized, it's through the individual's desire for love and a happy life that a broader social consensus can be created, as well as connection and unity between the individual and community, allowing for the imagining and realization of broader forms of social resistance. This is the core of both the individual and political significance of *I Have No Enemies*.

The difficulty in preserving and developing the true self

When the individual suffers injustice, or injustice flows through society, anger is a frequent and commonly seen emotion. Liu Xiaobo paid an enormous personal price for participating in the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and sticking to his beliefs. This ranged from multiple lengthy prison sentences (including labour camp confinement) to long-term stints of house arrest, to seeing his family face heavy repercussions and being denied, in all public spaces in China, of all rights normally afforded to intellectuals. The cost of all this on the individual cannot be understated, **for when a person cannot be seen as their true self in the public space they inhabit, and as their true self cannot be present in political discourses, then they face a sort of complicity in their own murder or suicide, in metaphor and in reality.** This is what comes of the Chinese government's censorship of dissidents, of policies that keep them isolated or locked up in prison. In the visible and invisible process of shutting dissidents down, dissidents enter a state of slowly being killed in isolation. Those conscious of their situation will do what it takes to fend off this kind of murder--to preserve and develop their own true self somewhere else.

This is what Liu Xiaobo refers to in his final statement: "whether as a person or as a writer, I would lead a life of honesty, responsibility, and dignity." Honesty is put first, because a person brave enough to speak truth to power or to the public, isn't necessarily brave enough to speak truth to himself/herself, especially about their own dissatisfaction and failure of not being able to reach and interact with the public, to make an immediate and significant impact intellectually, or to pursue social action and find the courage to take action in the party-state. Particularly when political interference makes one helpless, or life spins out of control, being honest with one's self becomes much, much more difficult—far more than speaking truth

to power or the public about social and current affairs. We've seen many people--be they ordinary petitioners or high-profile individuals in China or overseas--who grow rigid after experiencing political or socially constructed injustice. They are able only to see themselves solely through the label of victim or social celebrity. Or, they constantly reinforce their own victimhood, seeing themselves as a prisoner of the state, limiting their capabilities in every respect. They declare all efforts to be futile, leading only to government repression, and in so doing they justify the "failure" of their work in the party-state, resulting in losing the ability to lead a normal life or find innovative ways to protest. Occasionally, intentionally or otherwise, they look for scapegoats or others to blame for the setbacks they face in life or activism, and drastically simplify what are in fact quite complex social and political issues. This way of coming to terms with society and one's self within a closed loop is a gradual sort of suicide of the self.

The other option is to collude in the gradual murder or suicide of the self. To sacrifice one's home and family, to simply give up imagining any other type of life or chance of resistance, to resort to single-minded opposition, and be able to protest one's political oppressors by internalizing stress, is to exist in a state of petrification. To conclude in simple words, it is to produce a self that replicates the same power relationship, way of thinking and behaviour as that of the party-state. It also eliminates the individual's capability of self-development by seeing the individual as a part of collective; the victimized and powerless Chinese under the party-state's ruling. Recent historical examples of this are seen in many survivors of the Anti-Rightist Movement, and more recently in those who took part in the Xidan Democracy Wall Movement and the many human rights defenders active since 2003. Many of these people now find themselves in the same predicament, dealing with an increasingly rigid sense of self and other challenges to personal development.

Concurrent to the first and second kind of self-imposed isolation is a third kind of dilemma. This gradual suicide or murder is set in the age of the internet and the reign of mass media. In this scenario, protesters are lost between their status as both subjects, and as objects of history. As a result, navigating relationships within their own groups and community becomes much more complex and difficult than addressing their relationship with the authoritarian state. When everyone has multiple social media accounts, particularly on platforms that favour photos and faces over reading of complex texts, protest and opposition alike are now showcased in these social media. To present a simple and direct, charismatic, subjective, and iconized self, while at the same time neglecting or overlooking the fact one is at the same time a historical object, is but a miniscule part of the randomness and complexity of what it means to be a historical object. In both the virtual communities online and communities linked to them offline— especially closed or partially closed communities —with the ephemeral and amplifying nature of social media, emotion and opinion tends to trump the importance of the content of information. Put another way, when social injustice brings individuals together into a loose or tight-knit community, mechanisms of discrimination—social inclusion and exclusion in the Anthony Giddens sense—are activated in order to keep that community intact. Under heavy political pressure, the potential for self-awareness and self-reflexivity, and systems of support are weakened, police surveillance is omnipresent and the cost of self-criticism is prohibitive, easily creating a situation that lends

itself to a certain kind of outcome. Within such a community, emotions and stances take precedence over the sharing of information or competing viewpoints; external to the group, exclusion of differing viewpoints becomes more important than opening up to allow discussion that might threaten the basis points of the group. Through everyday interactions as well as empirical research during my PhD studies, I can see that within relatively closed opposition groups, people's mutual recognition of injustices suffered very frequently prolongs the first and second kind of self-isolation. In this way, the cruelty of the authoritarian becomes a trap for those who oppose it. This sort of cruelty and absurdity makes us continuously lapse into anger, powerlessness and despair. In our family and social relationships, people who don't follow public life find it difficult to understand or share this anger and despair. As a result, protesters may grow further isolated. The more absurd authoritarians become, the more this kind of behavior can bring those who resist it further into that absurd and isolated condition, resulting in a stagnant status of preserving and developing a true self.

The danger of anger

Under one-party rule, with one's self-development constantly under threat, we are all confronted with anger. Anger arises when I, or we, encounter injustice and, believing that the world should be just, never see justice arrive. Instead, amid our hopelessness and fear, I, or we, find someone to blame (a person, an organization, a system), and in giving voice to our anger and sharing that anger with others, I and we, gain the strength to carry on, along with greater determination to pursue justice and greater capacity to exact revenge. Anger, in a social movement, is often the best fuel for social mobilization, and to strengthen alliances. Yet, from psychologists to the philosophers of ancient Greece, researchers have demonstrated the dangers of anger. Prominent contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum has discussed this in great detail in works such as *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. Anger is the child of fear, Nussbaum noted in her recent [2017 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities](#), in which she explored the idea of protest without payback and succinctly pointed out the errors of anger: the error of misguided anger, the error of status, the error of payback, and the fourth error of anger in which we often blame others for things when in fact no one is at fault. Of course, as an emotion, anger can be fleeting, but it can also solidify into a moral sentiment that affects individual behavior over the long-term. How anger is utilized and transformed depends on the individual subject themselves.

Liu Xiaobo realized how commonly this kind of anger in an opposition movement is ultimately converted into hatred. And it's likely he saw such hatred, among many people but especially within dissidents, directed at the Chinese Communist Party regime, manifesting in some cases in tooth-gnashing hatred for individual government officials. As a result, the political movement is at the risk of replicating existing power structures rather than the reconfiguration of power reproduction from dominated structure to partnership. Liu Xiaobo reminds us, that "hatred is

corrosive of a person's wisdom and conscience; the mentality of enmity can poison a nation's spirit, instigate brutal life and death struggles, destroy a society's tolerance and humanity, and block a nation's progress to freedom and democracy.” Rather than hatred, both within himself and members of an opposition movement, Liu Xiaobo instead opts for love.

In my specific case, when I was held under long-term house arrest and surveillance, I was unable to end the injustice, struggling to not let the prolonged sense of powerlessness and anger throughout that period to turn into hatred. I spent about ten years trying to deal with my feelings toward these plainclothes officers who directly restricted my freedom of movement, intervened in my private life and prohibited me from public life, work and activism. I tried very hard that not to give in to feeling disgust and anger toward the guards, which reduced my capabilities of sympathy and self-care. I have tried my best to behave as a normal person rather than losing abilities of trusting the others and interacting with the general others. I avoided becoming the opposite side of their same coin, or someone whose behavior, as a result of injustices faced, was no different from that of the oppressors. I tried very hard to not being transformed into a revolution machine rather than a real human being who could be vulnerable while holding her/his dignity. It took me nearly ten years to start to learn how to truly see the guards and others who infringed on my basic human rights: with mercy and tolerance, and as a normal part of my body, my life, and of a political movement, something with which one must co-exist. This experience has helped me understand the bravery, wisdom and cultivation in Liu Xiaobo, to be able to say, after having long lived under surveillance, house arrest, imprisonment and solitary confinement, “I have no enemies.” A faith was delivered in Liu Xiaobo’s 2nd June 1989 Hunger Strike Statement, in which he wrote “We do not have enemies! Do not let hatred and violence poison our wisdom and China’s democratization process.”

The forgiveness Mandela showed those who held him prisoner sounds lofty; in the work of Liu Xiaobo, he captures it this way: “None of the police who monitored, arrested, and interrogated me, none of the prosecutors who indicted me, and none of the judges who judged me are my enemies. Although there is no way I can accept your monitoring, arrests, indictments, and verdicts, I respect your professions and your integrity...”

This is not to say the people who suppress Liu Xiaobo are civilized, reasonable or justified in their methods, as these consistently violate basic legal and humane standards. Rather it is for us to understand the statement “I have no enemies” in the context of Liu Xiaobo’s arrest and sentencing, and further understand how that sentiment differs from Liu Xiaobo’s political commentary and writings prior to his arrest. Liu Xiaobo’s statements refer to the nature of non-violent resistance, and a path of resistance for politicians otherwise unable to amass power in a fixed system of one-party rule.

Since 1989, from his expressions of opinion and dissent, to grassroots organizing (such as founding the Independent Chinese PEN Center, building a loose network for mutual support of dissidents facing persecution, using his personal connections to assemble a core team of patient and loyal dissenters), to taking the lead to publish Charter 08, Liu Xiaobo's various experiences in prison and under long-term surveillance and house arrest have led to a number of shifts in his thinking. The most recent arrest and sentence makes clear the government and authorities have no intention to work with dissenters to negotiate a path forward. By stating he has no enemies, Liu stayed out of any power struggle, and instead made a declaration of his philosophical stance, beliefs and way of life.

Politics as way of life

The Liu Xiaobo, in my opinion, who said he has no enemies, is much freer than any one of us. He is freer because he was able to avoid being controlled by anger, and leave behind the current framework of political discourse and ways of thought. Liu Xiaobo built his opposition movement outside of the current Chinese political framework through dignified resistance, and at the same time treating Chinese government officials and other bodies of power as equal opponents, keeping dialog open, as well as foreseeing the future arrangement of transitional justice. His opposition movement wasn't one of life or death struggle. Instead of enemies his movement had opponents who could be negotiated or compromised with, either in cooperation or on equal footing for public interest rather than merely power transfer. The basis of *I Have No Enemies* is that it overcame the way many dissidents deliberately place blame for all injustice on a particular political system, or one ruling party, a group in power, their remarks or even the culture of opposition. Regardless of whether it is in an authoritarian state or a democratic society, to so commonly and readily encourage this kind of culture has the ultimate effect, through democratic mechanisms, of propelling the sort of person who lacks both responsibility and ethics into a country's highest seats of leadership and power. In democratic societies, working to overthrow one's opponent is both common and legal. The same of course can't be said of the cruelty seen during times of crisis within authoritarian systems. The goal of Liu's opposition movement, however, was not to seize power, but rather to bring improved changes within society, the political system, and culture. This is why only a politician with both ethics and a sense of responsibility knows his opponent is not his enemy. The "godfather" types of moralists, theorists, social activists and every other kind of "hero" find pleasure in expressing their anger and condemnation, and telling others the way things ought to be. When configuring their political platform and actions, however, instead of considering the perfect ideal of how things *ought* to be, politicians should engage even more with the practical realities of achieving those political objectives. They should seek to minimize the sacrifice and other costs society and individuals pay, and use rational calculation and strategy to achieve greater effect.

In the less than 3,000 characters in his final statement to court, and in the brief instant that statement was revealed to the world, Liu Xiaobo went suddenly from someone with insurmountable obstacles to ever gaining political power, to someone in a far better position than those he was up against. Not only did he win the moral sympathy of bystanders, he also successfully won over the majority of his future political movement. *I Have No Enemies* shows Liu Xiaobo's breadth of mind, but even more importantly provided vision and structure for China's future opposition movement, as well as tremendous spiritual resources. This final statement shows the maturity of Liu Xiaobo's political thought, and his transformation from a simple protester to that of an important contemporary politician, one of reason and capability, who took responsibility for the consequences of his political actions. What Liu Xiaobo shows us is that in politics, as a vocation and way of life, one not must not only possess ethics of conviction, but in China especially under one-party rule, one must also possess the ethic of responsibility. Adopting an ethic of responsibility is key for a social protest movement to be able to transform into a true movement of political opposition.

Indeed, when you say you have no enemies, the authoritarian has no choice but to make you one; when you advocate for government policies and political dialog, the authoritarian who is your opponent will not only disregard them, but will even put you in prison. The sense the majority of the public has at the moment is one of moral conflict, at seeing what cruelty Liu Xiaobo has had to bear under the current political system. Few have had the chance to fully appreciate the far-reaching significance of Liu Xiaobo's actions. The policies and demands of independent political figures are made publicly, which is to say they appeal primarily to discussion both at home and overseas, and appeal to a public that is at a loss amid their fear and indifference. Public opinion and those with no political affiliation will gradually come around and pay you attention. The force of the political opposition will expand, not only through the impact of its morality and bravery, but also on the reputation of its politics and administrative governance. This is far more important than the acceptance or even understanding of one's opponent. It's also what I mean when I say that if Liu Xiaobo's final statement had been allowed in court for the public to understand, those set against him would have suddenly lost their advantage. The reason for this is that the final statement wins over those of the public who look on and hesitate, but all the while dream of a much better life. It gives strength to the political opposition, and wins it credibility; these things together are far more important than acceptance from those in power.

Love as itself

With the enormous individual and social price to be paid for initiating a political movement, the one thing that kept Liu Xiaobo going was love. Given the very transitory, cosmopolitan and globalized nature of modern life, the effects the ties of blood and geography traditionally have in keeping one's self in check are slowly dampened—although these ties are still quite strong in China. Under China's current political situation, the social security system is weak, and the welfare support system is heavily privatized. Natural and public resources belonging to society are, with few exceptions, monopolized by those in power, meanwhile the burden of society has gradually shifted down onto the individual to bear. When social, political and economic

structural problems lead to individual misfortune, this is often seen as a problem with the individual. Yet, in both democratic and non-democratic countries, the personal is political, and the same question presents itself: what is one to rely on for the stability and security needed to develop the self?

The answer is in intimate relationships in personal life. Specifically, it is the desire, pursuit, creation, preservation and development of love. The kind of love that drives people, to yearn for a better, happier and worldly life. In China, both the individual and the worldly are highly politicized. For a taste of that normal life, however, for love, and to keep and develop the individual within themselves in spite of all the politics people will still try and create new possibilities,--fighting the control the current regime holds over everyday life. As the Chinese government continues to centralize power and space for civil society sharply recedes, the opposition movement grows old and more distant from the public, slowing down and even showing signs of stagnation. Initiating and participating in an organized opposition party movement under the cruel party-state ruling, looks impossible, is highly costly, and may seem irrelevant in the view of much of the public Yet protecting loved ones and what one has had, e.g. property rights, and improving own current life, are natural and appreciated ways of daily behaviour. Therefore, I advocate that love provides an unfailing source of subversive and revolutionary strength. This was the gist of what I was able to tell in *Chinese Love Story: Two Dissidents Living under the Shadow of Secret Police*.⁴

In his final statement, Liu Xiaobo expresses this kind of impenetrable love for his wife Liu Xia: “My love is hard, sharp, and can penetrate any obstacles. Even if I am crushed into powder, I will embrace you with the ashes.”

Even as he served time in labour camps, Liu Xia married Liu Xiaobo and stayed with him through multiple and lengthy periods of house arrest. In this as well as the love poems Liu Xia and Xiaobo wrote each other, collected and published by their friends, we can see that even in the coldness of politics, and in the face of serious injustice—even when that long-awaited justice never comes—there can still exist a romantic love of deep mutual knowing, of shouldering adversity together and being a source of uninterrupted strength.

We can see that even through the most inhumane conditions, Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia were able to lead "a life of honesty, responsibility, and dignity". During the last days of Liu Xiaobo in hospital, even under absolute surveillance and without freedom of movement, contrast to the visual/audio materials released by the state authority, Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia were able to have their own subjectivity which showed in a photo circulated by their friends.⁵ While I read Liu Xiaobo's final words written on 5 July 2017 for Liu Xia, my sadness and anger were cooled down, and comforted. I see through his own words that Liu Xiaobo's agency and subjectivity are not destroyed by the state's cruel imprisonment and isolation, and the threat of death. On the contrast, his final writing shows his wisdom, courage, freedom and love, or in his academic

⁴ Sami Sillanpää, *Chinese Love Story: Two Dissidents Living under the Shadow of Secret Police* (Kiinalainen rakkaustarina: Kapinallista elämää salaisen poliisin varjossa), 2013 (Finnish, WSOY), 2014 (German,Dannish).

⁵ See the photo: <https://twitter.com/zengjinyan/status/882805369944264704>

words “transcendence of aesthetics” while facing the limitations of being human. He is a philosopher who practices his belief in real life, actualizing his personal and political transgression as a free will and a free human being, under extremely restricted conditions. That is his legacy to all of humanity.

It’s this same love that enables people who choose to stay in China and fight, to hold strong, sing and, when the time is right, rise up again in resistance.

“I am sentenced to a visible prison while you are waiting in an invisible one. Your love is sunlight that transcends prison walls and bars, stroking every inch of my skin, warming my every cell, letting me maintain my inner calm, magnanimous and bright...”