

## The Society of Publishers in Asia 2012 Awards for Editorial Excellence Presentation

I'm deeply honored to be invited to give a speech during The Society of Publishers in Asia 2012 Awards for Editorial Excellence Presentation Ceremony.

My friend and mentor, Nobel peace prize winner Mr. Liu Xiaobo wrote in his book "Charter 08" that "Freedom is at the core of universal human values. Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of where to live and the freedoms to strike, to demonstrate and to protest, among others, are the forms that freedom takes. Without freedom China will always remain far from the civilized ideals." Evidently, for Liu Xiaobo, the freedom of speech and press are of the utmost importance.

Liu Xiaobo paid a heavy price with 11 years of imprisonment for the sake of himself and all Chinese compatriots by taking a stand for freedom and human rights. Likewise, I was also summoned by Chinese authorities and was interrogated, tracked, harassed and put to illegal house arrest and even secretly kidnapped and tortured to unconsciousness, until I finally fled to the United States.

Nevertheless, we have no regrets, for our cause did not fail, and our vocation has only just begun. We believe that China will eventually embark on the road to democracy, republicanism and liberty with constitutional governments, and the Chinese people will finally be released from over 2000 years of tragic dictatorial rule, and our lives and future will be as the Bible says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

In the pursuit of freedom, our ideas, vocation and goals are the same as The Society of Publishers in Asia.

In recent years, China's human rights situation has steadily declined, with last decade's positive hopes and expectations for the "Hu-Wen New Administration" vanishing. Even the hosting of the Olympic Games and the World Expo in China did not urge China to accept these universal values. On the contrary, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy has allowed the central government's regulations and ideals to gradually edge towards Fascism. Due to the fact that China's economic development deeply leverages the "subdued human rights advantage", China has become an unnatural combination of the "worst of socialism" and the "worst of capitalism". Each year, more than RMB 70 billion are spent on "stability maintenance", yet instability continues to grow within the state. The Chinese government has transformed into an interest group, and even with the change involving the eighteen powers, there is a minimal chance for top-down political reform in China. Even today the academic communities in China

and abroad cannot define a framework to describe China's political, economic, and cultural structure and ideology. Nobody can classify whether China is following a totalitarian or post-totalitarian system, and if the country is a devotee of fascism or militarism.

Under these circumstances, accurate and truthful reports of the situation in China are extremely important. Only a large quantity of first-hand reports can give us the ability to understand and research the current situation in China, and to allow us to find a way out for China's future. As such, I have the utmost admiration for all the journalists who put everything on the line and report on the so-called "sensitive issues" of China.

Since Liu's Nobel Peace Prize and the "Tunisian Revolution", there has been a significant increase of reports on the issue of Chinese human rights in the global media. As a reaction to this, authorities of the Communist Party not only tightened the control of the domestic media, but also revealed their dark side to overseas media. In the spring of 2011, police assaulted a foreign journalist in Wangfujing. Later, a reporter who went to Shandong Dongshigu village to interview the blind human-rights activist Chen Guangcheng was chastised and violently blocked, gang-like, by government officials. Recently, Al Jazeera China's English Channel reporter Chan Jia Yun (Melissa Chan) was banished from Beijing, resulting in Al Jazeera closing down all English reporting operations in Beijing. What did Chan do that was out of line as a reporter? In fact, her punishment was the result of Al Jazeera's broadcast back in November 2011, of a documentary entitled "Slavery: The evil of the 21st century – the prison slave labor documentary". The film provided a detailed look with evidence of Chinese prisoners engaging in high-intensity labor with no security, then selling and exporting the "Laogai products" into the international market. Thus, humiliated and infuriated, the Chinese government used despicable means as retaliation against Al Jazeera.

And so, as the environment for reporters in China is deteriorating rapidly, is it still possible for them to adhere to their professional principles and tell the truth?

Darkness fears the light, and not vice versa, with the light fearing darkness. With the same analogy, the Chinese government, with their illegal operations, should dread being exposed by reporters, rather than reporters fearing the Chinese government. Indeed, the CPC has a military force well trained for maintaining stability, with the power to make an innocent citizen disappear, develop a list of hundreds to be "buried alive", and the ability to revoke the working visa of any foreign reporter. They were even capable of letting 30 million people starve to death in years of good harvest, gave consent to massacre unarmed students and citizens in the capital. Is there anything they can't do? Still, we should not fear them, and quoting from the Bible: "do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul".

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the world witnessed the rapid economic growth in Asia, and agreed that the center of the world economy is shifting to the Asia-Pacific region. Yet, what is the situation of Asia's human rights, the condition of freedom and the state of democracy? Asia has the world's largest number of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian countries, and has the world's largest number of people living in a non-democratic system. Unfortunately, due to the geopolitical factors and nationalistic cultures, the more developed democratic countries such as Japan, Korea, India, and Taiwan are unable to take on the responsibility of promoting the importance of the universal value of freedom and democracy.

Consequently, as “the Pearl of the Orient”, Hong Kong stands out from the rest, as it is not only the economic and trade center of the Asia-Pacific region, but also a pioneer for freedom of press and human rights in the region. Geographically, Hong Kong is an insignificant place, but in spirit, Hong Kong has the vision to open-mindedly absorb all sides and perspectives. The Hong Kong media not only covers local affairs but are also concerned about the affairs of the Chinese mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and even interested in the entire dynamic of the Chinese society globally, taking account of the development of democracy and freedom throughout Asia. Using my personal experience as an example, after publishing more than 30 books, many published in Hong Kong, I have been most frequently reported by the Hong Kong media. As Liu claimed, Hong Kong has really lived up to its name as the “free port”, and this is the fundamental reason why The Society of Publishers of Asia was established in Hong Kong and the reason behind choosing Hong Kong as the place to present the Awards for Editorial Excellence. Indeed, Hong Kong should be very proud, for the existence of an independent non-government organization such as The Society of Publishers in Asia is the ultimate embodiment of the freedom of the press.

Conversely, the freedom of expression and publishing of local news also needs the combined support and protection from all reporters of Hong Kong. Under the shadow of “Partisans ruling Hong Kong”, the freedom of press in Hong Kong has shown signs of deterioration in recent years. Although the CCP is unable to establish a propaganda department and control news publishing at the time, through the power of big consortiums, they have gradually bought off the media and the people involved. Even if the news media in Hong Kong have yet to be muted, it is a “minefield”. Hence, defending Hong Kong's freedom of news and press is not only the responsibility of the journalists, but the responsibility of everyone in Hong Kong, for if we lose an inch of freedom, we will also lose a foot of rights for all citizens, for the two are intimately interdependent and vital for each other. As the English poet John Donne said, “For I am involved in mankind; Therefore send not to know; For whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.”

This is the ultimate meaning and philosophy behind the SOPA Awards for Editorial Excellence.

After witnessing how the people of China can only express their hatred through their eyes because they are silenced out of fear, the young writer Han Han pessimistically stated that “the path to North Korea was paved by the silence of everyone”. Still, the SOPA Awards for Editorial Excellence set our gaze towards a brighter future, a path towards freedom paved by the fortitude of each individual. As African-American civil rights leader Martin Luther King pointed out years ago in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people”. We will have to break out of this vicious cycle. And to do that, we will all have to do our part and give our effort, so what we feel will not be remorse, but pride.

Today, every submission, every winner of every award this evening, along with all our valued guests and founders of The Society of Publishers of Asia can proudly declare that we have all strived as a league and will continue our combat for the future.