
THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS IN CHINA

Panel Discussion

Wednesday, September 26, 5 p.m.



**National Endowment
for Democracy**

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Václav Havel

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Since 2016, **The Vaclav Havel Library Foundation** recognizes writers who share Havel's passionate commitment to human rights and have suffered unjust persecution for their beliefs. The award for a Courageous Writer at Risk is given each year to a writer of a distinguished work of fiction, literary nonfiction, biography/memoir, drama, or poetry, who is courageous in dissent and has been punished for challenging an oppressive regime.

The winner of the **2018 Disturbing the Peace, Award for a Courageous Writer at Risk** is Chinese author, reporter, musician and poet – **Liao Yiwu** (aka Lao Wei). As a vocal critic of China's Communist regime, he spent four years in prison after publicly reciting his poem "Massacre" in memory of the victims of the Tiananmen Square military on June 4, 1989. He currently lives in Germany, under asylum but will be attending the award ceremony at The Bohemian National Hall in New York on September 27, 2018.

In his books *The Corpse Walker* and *God is Red*, Liao Yiwu recounts the stunning life stories of ordinary men and women who live at the margins of Chinese society – Christian believers as well as oddballs and outcasts who have been battered by life and state repression yet who have managed to retain their irrepressible personality, invincible spirit, and innate human dignity. These stories raise the inevitable question that Vaclav Havel persistently posed as an underground playwright: Can a totalitarian state prevail against the human spirit it tries so hard to stifle? Liao Yiwu will be joined in this discussion by Liu Xia, an artist herself and the widow of Nobel Laureate and Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo; and by Professor Andrew Nathan, a leading China specialist and human rights advocate. The discussion will be moderated by Carl Gershman, the President of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Carl Gershman

Carl Gershman is President of the National Endowment for Democracy. In addition to presiding over the Endowment's grants program in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Latin America, he has overseen the creation of the quarterly *Journal of Democracy*, *International Forum for Democratic Studies*, the Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows Program, and the Center for International Media Assistance. He also took the lead in launching in New Delhi in 1999 the World Movement for Democracy, which is a global network of democracy practitioners and scholars. Mr. Gershman is currently encouraging other democracies to establish their own foundations devoted to the promotion of democratic institutions in the world.

Andrew J. Nathan

Andrew J. Nathan is Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science at Columbia University. His teaching and research interests include Chinese politics and foreign policy, the comparative study of political participation and political culture, and human rights. He is engaged in long-term research and writing on Chinese foreign policy and on sources of political legitimacy in Asia, the latter research based on data from the Asian Barometer Survey, a multi-national collaborative survey research project active in eighteen countries in Asia.

Nathan is chair of the steering committee of the Center for the Study of Human Rights and chair of the Morningside Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Columbia. Nathan's books include *Peking Politics, 1918-1923*; *Chinese Democracy*; *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, co-edited with David Johnson and Evelyn S. Rawski; *Human Rights in Contemporary China*, with R. Randle Edwards and Louis Henkin; *China's Crisis*; *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security*, with Robert S. Ross; *China's Transition*; *The Tiananmen Papers*, co-edited with Perry Link; *Negotiating Culture and Human Rights: Beyond Universalism and Relativism*, co-edited with Lynda S. Bell and Ilan Peleg; *China's New Rulers: The Secret Files*, co-authored with Bruce Gilley; *Constructing Human Rights in the Age of Globalization*, co-edited with Mahmood Monshipouri, Neil Englehart, and Kavita Philip; *How East Asians View Democracy*, co-edited with Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, and Doh Chull Shin; and *China's Search for Security*, co-authored with Andrew Scobell.

Liao Yiwu

Liao Yiwu also known as Lao Wei, (born 16 June 1958 in Sichuan), is a Chinese author, reporter, musician and poet. He is a critic of China's Communist regime, for which he has been imprisoned. His books, several of which are collections of interviews with ordinary people from the lower rungs of Chinese society, were published in Taiwan and Hong Kong but are banned in mainland China; some have been translated into English, French, German, Polish and Czech.

The exiled Chinese writer Liao Yiwu is the son of schoolteachers in Sichuan Province who were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Mr. Liao left home at the age of 10, took a succession of jobs and eventually became involved in avant-garde poetry. In 1990, he was arrested after publicly reciting his poem "Massacre" in memory of the victims of the Tiananmen Square military crackdown on June 4, 1989, and spent four years in prison. After his release,

he wrote several books under pseudonyms, all of which were banned in China but sold well on the underground market. His “Interviews With People From the Bottom Rung of Society” was published in Taiwan in 2001 and became his first book to appear in English, in 2008, as “The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories, China From the Bottom Up.” A memoir of his prison years, “For a Song and a Hundred Songs,” was published in English in 2013.

Though he lives in Germany under asylum, his works have been shared underground inside China, where he remains known.

Liu Xia

Liu Xia is a poet, artist and founding member of the Independent Chinese PEN Center. Her husband, poet, literary critic and human rights activist Liu Xiaobo was serving an 11-year prison sentence for “inciting subversion of state power.” In 2010, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Two months before the awards ceremony, Liu Xia disappeared under extralegal house arrest, where she has remained with no access to phone, Internet, or mail, and where around-the-clock security prevented her from seeing visitors. When her husband was diagnosed with late-stage liver cancer in June 2017 and released on medical parole, Liu Xia was reportedly able to visit him. However, since his death in July, she has not been seen in public for several months. In May 2018, Liao Yiwu, the Chinese author and poet living in Germany and friend of Liu Xia, reported, with Liu Xia’s permission, that she was suffering debilitating clinical depression, after the Beijing government had broken multiple promises that she would ‘soon’ be free to travel, including, in early April 2018, an arrangement made by Heiko Mass, the German Foreign Minister, to facilitate her travel to Germany.

After substantial pressure from German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the international community, Liu Xia was finally given her freedom to leave China. She arrived in Berlin on July 10, three days before the anniversary of the death of her husband, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, who had been under unofficial and illegal house arrest for eight years. Although never charged with a crime, Liu Xia lost her freedom due to her husband’s 11-year prison sentence for drafting a petition calling for democracy and human rights in China.

English translations of Liu Xia’s poetry by Ming Di and Jennifer Stern have been published by PEN America, Chinese PEN, the BBC, the Guardian, the Margins for the Asian American Writers’ Workshop, Poetry, the Poetry Society of America, and Words without Borders. Liu Xia’s photographs have appeared in galleries throughout the world.

Translator: Wen Huang