

Independent Chinese PEN Center Award Ceremony
Remarks by Rep. Chris Smith
Chairman, Congressional Executive Commission on China
October 5, 2023

Excerpt of Remarks

I would like to express my great appreciation for the organizers of this event, to the Independent Chinese PEN Center (ICPC), to the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy Taiwan’s Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and especially to ICPC President Cai Chu.

As you may recall, President Cai, both you and I were in attendance at the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony, where I met you and your lovely wife Li Jie. We were there to honor a great man of courage, Liu Xiaobo, who as we all know could not be there to receive an honor he so richly deserved because he had been sentenced to, and was serving, his fourth term in prison in China.

It was because of Liu Xiaobo’s courage – the courage of so many of you independent writers, like ICPC’s first President Liu Binyan and Zheng Yi – that the Independent Chinese PEN Center came into being, over 20 years ago.

ICPC recognized a need to bring together Chinese writers living inside as well as outside China – those living in “exile” but continuing to write in Chinese with Chinese readers in mind, seeking to circumvent the Chinese Communist Party’s harsh political censorship.

ICPC believed that writers have every right to express themselves freely in literary works and essays, memoirs, and even in scribbled thoughts at

night, finding language to express hope for a China that one day would be free.

The ICPCP's promotion of freedom of expression in China was and continues to be an expression of hope for those both within China and beyond.

It is also important that you are holding your meeting in Taiwan.

For those who say that freedom and Chinese culture are incompatible, or that "Asian values" are contrary to democracy, I say look at Taiwan.

Taiwan is an example of a Chinese state that is fully democratic, a nation where freedom of expression is valued and celebrated.

And just as Taiwan is a beacon of hope and freedom, this event also sends an important message to fellow writers, essayists, and poets in China and in Hong Kong: do not put down your pens or shut down your computers. China needs to hear your voices, especially amid the darkness brought about by Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party.

Like ICPC, the Commission I chair, the CECC, dates its beginning to the early 2000s. It was established following the U.S. Congress voting to approve Permanent Normal Trade Relations status for the People's Republic of China, a vote that ultimately allowed the PRC to join the World Trade Organization and, unfortunately, delinked trade preferences from human rights conditionality.

The CECC came into being to continue to raise the issue of human rights in China.

Since that time, the CECC has sought to hold the PRC accountable to its commitments in international human rights treaties, and to hold its leaders and the Chinese Communist Party accountable for violations of

internationally-recognized human rights, including freedom of expression.

Indeed, the CECC even has a student fellowship named in honor of Liu Xiaobo.

The CECC monitors human rights through our Annual Reports, hearings, legislative initiatives, and our Political Prisoner Database. We have monitored the detention of many Chinese writers, poets, novelists, essayists, citizen journalists, editors, translators, and historians, some of whom are current or former ICPC members, including the journalist Shi Tao, who was betrayed by an American corporation, Yahoo!, which turned over documents that the CCP used to prosecute and jail him.

Our work – that of the ICPC and the CECC – is complementary.

We all want the same thing: a China free of political censorship, where writers can freely express their hopes for a future China, which is peaceful, democratic and free.

Thank you!

