

## Lee Ming-che: The long fight

Written by Taipei Times  
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China on Tuesday sentenced Taiwanese human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲) to five years in jail for “subverting state power.” When he was detained in late March, it was announced that he had been “pursuing activities harmful to national security.”

What he actually did was peacefully discuss the merits of democracy in a group chat on the messaging platform QQ and work with a company he had established with his codefendant, Chinese national Peng Yuhua (彭宇華), to promote human rights.

Were Lee and Peng guilty of subversion of the Chinese state as charged, in an attempt to overthrow the socialist system? Was the sentence proportionate to the crime? These questions are beside the point.

As with many political trials in China, Lee’s was a performance, aimed at sending a message to anyone who would threaten to destabilize the state and the power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

It was aimed at those who Beijing regards as secessionists, namely pro-independence advocates in Taiwan and Tibet, and the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

People can make what they like of Lee’s “confession” — who knows what he was subjected to and what threats were made?

In the six months prior to his trial, Lee was kept in “residential surveillance,” incommunicado and in unfamiliar surroundings, and subjected to interrogation by the Chinese secret police, while his family and the Taiwanese government were left in the dark about his whereabouts.

Following the trial, Lee’s wife, Lee Ching-yu (李晶瑜), said that her husband “took a risk, despite knowing the dangers.”

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The reason Lee Ming-che risked his freedom was because he was convinced of the importance of what he was doing.

If his “crimes” sound innocuous enough, it is unlikely that he ever thought that Chinese authorities would take that view. He was well aware of the nature of the CCP and the uncompromising response it would have.

In 2009, Chinese human rights advocate and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) was sentenced to 11 years in prison for “inciting subversion of state power.” He had contributed to the writing of Charter 08, a manifesto released in 2008 calling for more human rights, freedom of expression and democratic elections in China.

Liu was imprisoned on several occasions for his part in the Chinese democracy and human rights movement. Charter 08 was a direct challenge to the CCP’s one-party state rule. He would have known the fire and fury he was inviting by writing it, but he wrote it anyway.

As part of her statement after the trial, Lee Ching-yu said that “striving for human rights for the underprivileged is a necessary dedication to promoting the progress of human civilization” and “a price must be paid in the pursuit of an ideal.”

That is the point. It is a dedication for which there is a price that you must feel is worth paying.

In terms of human rights, Lee Ming-che’s conviction is repugnant. In the context of the Chinese regime and its desire to retain power, it makes perfect sense. The sentence seems disproportionate, because it was not about the circumstances of the “crime,” it was about the severity of the message it sends.

David probably knew he could defeat Goliath. Liu, Lee Ming-che and countless others who have stood up to the merciless actions of the CCP knew they would be trampled. They did what they did, because they knew they were laying the groundwork for those who will continue the struggle after them, and that their struggle was worth it.

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They have demonstrated admirable courage.

Those with convictions as strong as Liu's and Lee Ming-che's will not bow to threats of imprisonment and state violence.

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