

The third chapter of this section spotlights the China–Korea border, specifically the political, economic, historical and cultural significance of Mount Changbai/Baekdu for both Chinese and Koreans. In this insightful piece, the author discusses the commodification of water in the context of a culturally loaded environment, from the use of hot-spring spas as a tactic to redirect Korean “obtrusive acts of worship” (p. 200) to the muting of national origin in the marketing efforts of Korean and Chinese water-bottling companies. Cultural sensitivities, she concludes, remain potent beneath the ostensibly “open and porous borders enabled by consumerism and the globalization of culture” (p. 202) and retain the capacity to erupt into open discord.

As Lu herself notes (pp. 30–31) the third section of the book is akin to an atlas or cartographic encyclopaedia of China’s 36 border entry points. Each location is illustrated with one map and accompanied by a one-page description providing a brief history of the site as a border crossing, as well as its current role and levels of infrastructural development. Given the atlas format, each entry is inevitably succinct. But the large maps include very useful information about checkpoints – information that is often difficult to obtain reliably. Through their inclusion of roads, infrastructure and topography, the maps also show at a glance the disparity and disequilibrium between the two sides in terms of urbanization levels and land use.

In her concluding remarks, Lu writes that the book is more closely aligned with her imagined geography than with the reality of China’s borderlands (p. 301). While it is true that any book attempting a study of all of China’s borders will necessarily only offer a partial view, *Shifting Sands* does a truly impressive job. In its inclusion of history, cultural meanings and economic developments, the book describes a complex, emerging and truly transformative geography. With the author writing across temporal scales, *Shifting Sands* is also able to anchor contemporary developments within a broader historical trajectory and as such offers more than a mere snapshot. It is a book that is likely to remain relevant for many years and that will serve as a valuable introduction to studies of Chinese nation-building and territorialization. Its unique approach will also make it a useful reference for scholars in border studies.

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## I Have No Enemies: The Life and Legacy of Liu Xiaobo

Perry Link and Wu Dazhi. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. 568 pp. \$34.95; £30.00 (hbk). ISBN 9780231206341

Jean-Philippe Béja

CNRS-CERI Sciences-Po, Paris, France

Email: [jeanp.beja@sciencespo.fr](mailto:jeanp.beja@sciencespo.fr)

Despite the banality of its title, *I Have No Enemies: The Life and Legacy of Liu Xiaobo* is not just another book on Liu Xiaobo. It is the best biography ever written on the Nobel Peace Prize laureate. If Liu Xiaobo were still alive, he would learn a great deal about himself in Perry Link and Wu Dazhi’s beautiful book. The authors have not only studied the huge corpus of Liu’s writings; they have interviewed almost everyone that has met him since his birth in Changchun in 1955. The result is a wonderfully researched book on one of the most prominent intellectuals of our times. It is also a detailed history of the relations between intellectuals and the Party in the reform era.

Perry Link and Wu Dazhi present a vivid account of Liu’s childhood. A mischievous child, Xiaobo started to smoke secretly during the Cultural Revolution and, left to his own devices, became a rebel



who led other kids to persecute “class enemies” (pp. 46–47). The difference with many of his contemporaries is that he later acknowledged and confessed his misdeeds and excesses. Drawing on interviews with his childhood and youth friends, and on the many articles he himself wrote about his early life, the authors depict a small gang leader who dared to break taboos and confront paternal authority, paying the price when his father did not hesitate to beat him. They also show how his stay in Inner Mongolia, where his parents were exiled during the Cultural Revolution, made him sensitive to the plight of ethnic minorities. There, in the steppes, at a young age for the time, he discovered love: he was attracted to the model student Tao Li, the daughter of a colleague of his father’s, who became his reading partner (p. 54). This relationship was to develop until the two got married in 1984.

After his family returned to Changchun, Liu was sent to the countryside where he became aware of the terrible living conditions of peasants. During his stay in the commune, he read everything he could lay his hands on, starting with the works of Marx, Lenin and Mao. He had to content himself with these books as he could not access the prohibited books that other educated youths could find in less isolated places.

After two years Liu went back to Changchun, and, when entrance exams were re-established, he was admitted to Jilin Normal University in the literature department. His thirst for knowledge led him to attend not only literature classes but also those of the philosophy department. He didn’t shy away from fighting with his Master’s thesis supervisor, and he also supported the student-run literary magazine *Pure Hearts* where he published poems, including a reply to Bei Dao’s poem *The Answer* – then the manifesto of a generation – which reveals Liu’s then Nietzschean personality (p. 80). These chapters about Liu’s early life give a fascinating and well documented account of the cultural and social atmosphere of the period.

It is impossible to convey the richness of the book in this short review, but through the life and intellectual evolution of Liu Xiaobo, Link and Wu provide an exhaustive description of an intellectually stimulating period. Drawing on Liu’s dissertation and on the numerous articles he wrote on aesthetics, the authors present all the facets of this fascinating personality. Attracted by classical poetry as much as by Western philosophy, Liu Xiaobo is an excellent representative of 1980s intellectuals’ eclecticism.

In the mid-1980s, his iconoclastic criticism of the scars literature that was immensely popular at the time made him the “black horse” of the literary scene. His controversy with philosopher Li Zehou, then one of the most admired liberal thinkers, made him famous: positioning himself in the tradition of Lu Xun, Liu denounced Li as a conservative and traditionalist, and he praised the spirit of rebellion (p. 118). “For two years following his appearance as ‘dark horse’ he had developed some intellectual themes: instinct vs civilization, repression and release, division and tragedy, modernity and tradition” (p. 146). His daring appealed to the young generation, and the conferences he gave all around the country drew in huge crowds. He behaved like a rock star, and his success with women put increasing strains on his marriage (p. 149). However, despite his immense popularity, he remained unsatisfied, and “fear[ed] the loss of a clear head” (p. 147). After his transformation triggered by the 1989 June Fourth massacre, he regretted his behaviour (p. 150) and changed his attitude. But it was too late for Tao Li, who filed for divorce while he was serving time in jail for his participation in the pro-democracy movement.

The book details Liu’s intellectual evolution, providing a wealth of new information on the post-1989 Liu, a period when his life and actions are better known to the public. It especially shows the complexity of his personality. During the 1989 pro-democracy movement, he was the only famous intellectual who stayed on the square day and night. However, he did not hesitate to criticize the students’ undemocratic behaviour. After the massacre, he was denounced as a “black hand” and jailed in Qincheng. There, he wrote “Repentance,” a self-criticism that denounced his thought and behaviour. The court declared his crimes would be “exempt of criminal punishment” (p. 226). Very sensibly, the authors provide us with a deep analysis of how “his repentance for having written ‘Repentance’, together with his acts of self-preservation immediately following

the June Fourth massacre, are key to understanding the second half of his adult life” (p. 239). Besides blaming himself for having produced a self-criticism which was subsequently used by the government, he also felt he had been a bad husband and a bad father. He decided to atone for these “sins.” For the rest of his life, he would experience a sense of guilt that made him feel duty-bound to speak for the lost souls of June Fourth.

Having lost his job and not being allowed to publish in China after his release, Liu faced serious material difficulties. Luckily, he was able to write articles for Hong Kong and overseas magazines to earn money. Link and Wu also highlight the role that his second wife, Liu Xia, played in his new life and how she shaped him.

The book always links Liu’s political and psychological personae. As both a great biography and a penetrating history of the reform period, it recreates the atmosphere of the times. For example, it is filled with fascinating details on the PRC security system. The account of his arrest and interrogation in 1996 vividly analyses the way surveillance was enforced: Liu had a cordial relationship with the cop responsible for watching him; he knew his name, Ju Xiaofei. But the day Ju came in uniform to search his home, things changed: Liu was taken to the police station and interrogated about an open letter that had yet to be made public, which shows that the cops knew all about his activities. The meticulous description of the arrest, interrogation and attitude of the members of the Security apparatus is a fascinating immersion in the repressive machine.

The book also describes the numerous petitions and initiatives Liu led in the field of human rights. But it clearly shows that he was innocent of one of the main “crimes” he was accused of – the drafting of Charter 08. Link and Wu’s thorough analysis of the writing process of this document shows that he was far from enthusiastic, took no part in its drafting, and only intervened after Ding Zilin – the founder of the Tiananmen Mothers movement whom he admired greatly – asked him to edit it and gather signatures (chapter 19).

In conclusion, this incredibly detailed study of the life and times of Liu Xiaobo is an absolute must-read for anyone who wants to understand the reform period in China.

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## Assignment China: An Oral History of American Journalists in the People’s Republic

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Jonathan Fenby

SOAS University of London, London, UK

Email: [jtfenby@hotmail.com](mailto:jtfenby@hotmail.com)

If journalism is the first rough draft of history, this book provides a notable contribution to contemporary historiography as a collective self-portrait of several generations of American correspondents in China from 1945 to the present day. Their reporting, analysis and commentary did much to shape views in the existing global superpower – and beyond – of the rise of the rival across the Pacific. Now, Mike Chinoy, who was the first Beijing bureau chief for CNN from 1987 to 1995 during 24 years as a foreign correspondent for the network, sets out to present them through more than 100 interviews that also formed the basis for a 12-part television documentary. As he writes,