One activist lawyer’s ordeal shows up the injustice of human rights ‘with Chinese characteristics’, writes Jerome A. Cohen

Dark days and rights

On Human Rights Day this year, the day on which imprisoned writer Liu Xiaobo died, a courageous lawyer who was imprisoned and tortured for her defense of human rights. Ni Yulan (Ni Yulan), a courageous defender of human rights whose work was systematically suppressed by authorities, had been arrested and held in a small room in a run-down hotel, watched and occasionally harassed by the authorities. It was there that she was deprived of her right to legal representation. Ni was detained for nine months, and was then transferred to a prison. During her time in prison, she was subjected to severe physical and psychological abuse, including beatings, electric shocks, and forced confessions. Despite this, she maintained her composure and continued to fight for justice.

Ni’s own legal problems, meanwhile, grew worse. In 2008, she was convicted of subversion and sentenced to three years in prison. In 2010, she was again convicted of subversion and sentenced to another three years in prison. Despite her legal problems, Ni never lost her determination to fight for justice.

Even now, petitioners come to seek advice from Ni as well as to show solidarity. The day I visited was no different.

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