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Meng Lang, Poet Who Promoted Dissident Writers, Dies at 57

By **Mike Ives**

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Meng Lang, a poet who promoted Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, along with other dissident Chinese writers, died on Dec. 12 in Hong Kong. He was 57.

His death, at Prince of Wales Hospital, was confirmed on Monday by Tammy Ho, the vice president of PEN Hong Kong, and Yibing Huang, an associate professor of Chinese at Connecticut College. Local news media reported that Mr. Meng had been treated for lung cancer.

Mr. Meng, whose own writing has been published and translated into many languages, was a co-founder of the Independent Chinese PEN Center, a nonprofit organization formed in 2011 to promote freedom of expression and publication.

Mr. Liu, a renegade Chinese intellectual who protected students from encroaching soldiers during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and who won the Nobel Peace Prize years later while locked away, died at 61 in 2017 at a hospital in China while under guard.

Among Mr. Meng's last projects was an anthology of poems in Mr. Liu's memory, published this year in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Last year, as the Chinese authorities rebuffed calls by foreign doctors for an ailing Mr. Liu to be allowed to go overseas for medical treatment, Mr. Meng published an untitled poem — later translated into English by Anne Henochowicz for the website China Digital Times — that began with these lines:

Broadcast the death of a nation

Broadcast the death of a country

Hallelujah, only he is coming back to life.

Who stopped his resurrection

This nation has no murderer

This country has no bloodstain.

Soon after, Mr. Liu became the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate to die in state custody since 1938.

Meng Lang was born in Shanghai in 1961 and participated in unofficial poetry movements in China throughout the 1980s, according a biographical sketch published by *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, where Ms. Ho is a founding editor.

He later helped edit the book “A Compendium of Modern Chinese Poetry, 1986-1988,” and was a writer in residence at Brown University from 1995 to 1998. Professor Huang, of Connecticut College, said Mr. Meng moved from the United States to Hong Kong in 2006 and to Taiwan in 2015.

Mr. Meng “played an important, fearless role in championing an unorthodox, experimental and free-spirited poetry in China back in the 1980s,” Professor Huang, who is also a poet, said in an email.

“Although he had been living overseas since 1995, Meng Lang was widely respected and loved by poets, artists and friends in mainland China and overseas,” he added. “He also contributed to the growth of a new diasporic Chinese poetry.”

Mr. Meng was a vocal supporter of Yiu Mantin, a fellow Hong Kong-based publisher who in 2014 was sentenced to 10 years in prison by the mainland Chinese authorities on charges of smuggling industrial chemicals. Mr. Meng was among those who said that the charges were a political vendetta tied to his plans to publish a book critical of President Xi Jinping.

“I’m still convinced that this sentence was so heavy because of political considerations,” Mr. Meng said of Mr. Yiu, who also goes by the Mandarin Chinese rendering of his name, Yao Wentian. “If you took away the politics, then the sentence would have been much lighter, and Yao Wentian might not have ever been targeted to begin with.”

Since Mr. Meng’s death last week, tributes have poured in from an international chorus of writers, translators and free speech advocates.

“The exiled poet Meng Lang has passed away, but he has left behind a lot of poetry, his life’s footsteps,” the dissident Chinese novelist Ma Jian, who lives in exile in London, wrote on Twitter on Sunday. “As we walk along the path of these poems, we will see him again, this ‘child of the sky,’” he added, an apparent reference to a refrain in one of Mr. Meng’s untitled poems.

Patrick Poon, a researcher with Amnesty International in Hong Kong, described Mr. Meng’s death in an email as “a big loss not only to the dissent writers’ community, but to contemporary Chinese literature in China.”

A commemorative reading in Mr. Meng’s honor was scheduled for Tuesday night in Hong Kong. A posting for the event on Facebook pays homage to his poem “Encounter in the Black Night,” in which a “lost” generation is likened to two lovers finding their way out of darkness by touching the poles of extinguished street lamps.

Tiffany May contributed reporting.

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