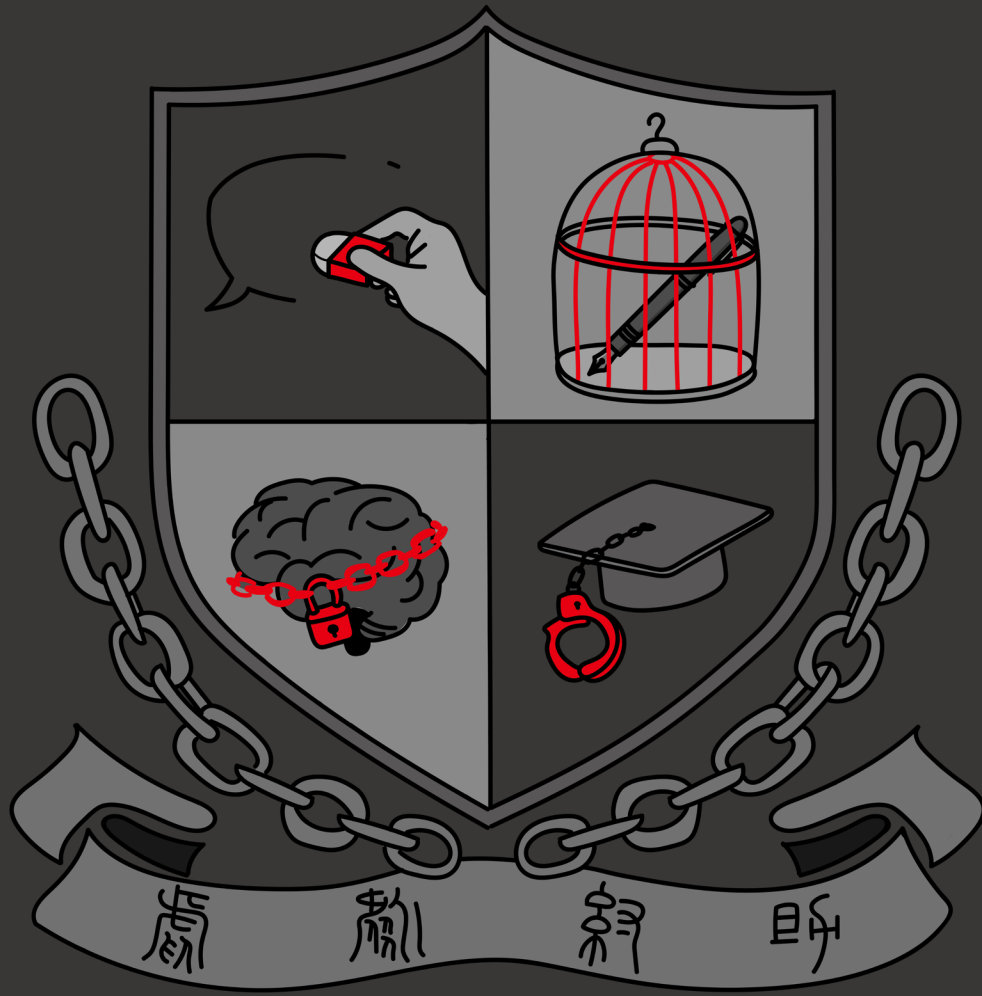




“We Can’t Write the Truth Anymore”

Academic Freedom in Hong Kong under the National Security Law

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH





“We Can’t Write the Truth Anymore”

Academic Freedom in Hong Kong
under the National Security Law

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Glossary

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
GRF	General Research Fund, administered by the Research Grants Council
HKBU	Hong Kong Baptist University
HKUST	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
NSL	National Security Law
RGC	Research Grants Council
UGC	University Grants Committee

Summary

I had a final lunch on campus with my colleagues.... [W]e were talking about what we'd like to do the most next, and everyone had the same answer: We would like to write fiction because we cannot write the truth on paper anymore.

— Rowena He, historian formerly at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, October 2022

Following months of massive pro-democracy protests in 2019, the Chinese government on June 30, 2020, imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong. The draconian law contains overly broad and vague provisions that severely punish peaceful speech and activities, create secret security agencies, give sweeping new powers to the police, impose restraints on civil society and the media, deny fair trial rights, and weaken judicial oversight.

The Chinese and Hong Kong governments moved swiftly to transform Hong Kong from a free society into an authoritarian one. Hong Kong authorities arrested many of the city's pro-democracy leaders, activists, and protesters, and forced independent media, labor unions, and civil society organizations to close. They reshaped multiple sectors and institutions so they become compliant to the Chinese government.

This report details the severe decline in academic freedom and the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly on Hong Kong's eight publicly funded universities since June 2020.

Hong Kong's universities used to be places where free speech and expression were protected as part of liberal education traditions during British colonial rule. Now, students, academics, and administrators, especially those from Hong Kong studying contemporary socio-political issues, feel as if they are living under a microscope. They believe they must tread carefully, as any misstep as to what they say, research, write, teach, or publish, or with whom they partner, can potentially land them or those they associate with in serious trouble, resulting in a ripple of repercussions that could even land them in prison for years.

University officials have harassed the once influential student unions at all eight universities in Hong Kong. They have cut off administrative support to these unions,

refused to collect membership dues for them, denied them gathering spaces and offices, and pushed them off campuses to become entities legally separate from the universities. The result is that none of the student unions can continue to effectively function as elected representatives of the student bodies.

University administrators have scrubbed clean notice boards known as the “Democracy Walls,” removed “Goddess of Democracy” statues and other memorials reminding people of the Tiananmen Massacre of pro-democracy protesters in 1989, and replaced them with large barriers and planters, objects that literally and physically obstruct the free exchange of ideas.

University officials have punished students for holding peaceful protests and gatherings, and have broadly censored student publications, communications, and events. University security guards—some former police officers—have been empowered to tear down student posters, and film and monitor those who hold unsanctioned public events.

While there is widespread agreement among the students and faculty whom Human Rights Watch interviewed that the campus environment has become significantly more repressive, interpretations differ as to the impact of the National Security Law on “the actual act of scholarship,” as one academic put it.

Most students and faculty interviewed said they self-censor regularly on any Hong Kong and Chinese socio-political topics to avoid trouble. They do this, for example, when expressing themselves in the classrooms, when writing and researching academic articles, when applying for grants, and when inviting speakers for academic conferences.

The National Security Law’s impact on students and faculty depends in significant measure on who they are, what subject they study, their career status, and the perceived power dynamics vis-à-vis the Chinese government. One Hong Kong student lamented that in universities, “you feel that you are on the side without power” and that everyone “has more power than you do.” Academics from Hong Kong, especially those who teach or are otherwise involved in current Hong Kong and China affairs, feel especially vulnerable. One Hong Kong academic half-joked that he was “risking his life” by being interviewed for this report, while another withdrew her interview days afterwards. A small number of academics—those who teach physical sciences, those who are well established in their

fields, those who are not ethnically Chinese, and those holding passports from major democracies—told us they felt little or no pressure to self-censor.

A few academics reported direct censorship. One said that their department administrators repeatedly stopped them from offering courses on topics that the Chinese government considers sensitive, including threatening them that they would not get tenure if they continued to do so. Four academics said the university administrators and academic publishers censored their academic articles; one said his university reported him to the police for an article he wrote.

Academics interviewed diverged in their interpretation of the National Security Law's impact on academic freedom. Some said it affected everything they do; others said it has very little impact. One made the distinction between academic work versus the wider environment: "It's not that teaching and research is being impacted, but [faculty and students'] activities in other times are impacted." But other academics contended that academia is not an ivory tower separated from its social environment, and that the Chinese government's tactics in Hong Kong were aimed at changing this environment, including the structure of rewards and punishments, and the social cues.

The Chinese government has already reengineered the governance of universities in Hong Kong. Its handpicked chief executive of Hong Kong is also the chancellor of all eight universities with the power of appointing key members of the universities' governing councils, which can then appoint university leadership and staff. Analysis of changes in university leadership since 2020, when broadly examined, suggests that those who have disagreed with Beijing have lost their positions of authority, while those who support Beijing's line have been rewarded.

University administrations appear to have put up little discernible resistance to government pressure. In some cases, administrators have collaborated with the Chinese and Hong Kong governments to remove academics with pro-democracy sympathies. While it is not always clear whether academics are penalized for political reasons, there is a clear trend towards "harmonization" of opinion in academia so that it is increasingly consistent with those of the Communist Party. The government does that by defaming and intimidating in the state-owned media those academics perceived to hold liberal or pro-democracy views—that is, what the Party considers to be anti-China views—and denying or

not issuing visas to foreign academics expressing such opinions. Universities then fire, let go, or deny tenure to these academics. Professor Carsten Holz, who has taught in Hong Kong for nearly three decades, wrote in a 2022 article that “clearing out any remaining disobedient academics” was taking place “elegantly through discriminatory measures by university administrators who, under an exceedingly executive, managerial system control every aspects of an academic’s career from promotion to annual performance reviews, salary advancement, teaching duties, and sabbatical leave.”

Other academics, feeling unsafe, stop teaching “sensitive” courses; some quietly leave Hong Kong altogether. Those who remain feel further isolated and marginalized. This in turn helps fulfill the government’s manufactured narrative that pro-democracy voices are in the minority, troublemakers, or “people’s enemies” who must be “eradicated.”

The Chinese government’s overall intention, as it has stated in its official statements, has been to “cleanse” the universities. The result is a sanitized version of higher education compliant with the Party’s views, which so far continues to deliver a high caliber education.

Hong Kong universities are microcosms of Hong Kong society: As people who used to live in a free society are suddenly thrust into authoritarianism, they grapple with how to respond, and how to justify their actions.

One academic criticized a colleague for talking to a prominent foreign news outlet, following which the Hong Kong immigration department denied that colleague a visa extension and so they had to leave Hong Kong. The academic implied that the colleague should have kept silent.

Rowena He, a historian, observed how administrators did an about-face as Beijing rapidly transformed Hong Kong:

[During the 2019 protests] even someone in position of power at the time would brag about, “Oh, I [am] participating in protest too, I’m yellow [pro-democracy] too.” It was easy for them, when the whole mainstream was participating in demonstrations, to be perceived as heroic and there were no consequences.... But once ... the National Security Law passed, once ...

the political climate changed, they started to come after you [for] one thing ... after another.

In this “really rapidly evolving discursive space,” as another academic put it, people conform, resist, act to protect others, or facilitate oppression. Some choose to preserve space. One encouraged students to express themselves in written assignments and made clear that they were for his eyes only. Another, in management, encouraged a colleague to take on a student writing critically about a Chinese leader, even as the colleague expressed reservations. As he put it:

I’m in the position to protect academic freedom, then I should do it because ... there’s no big monster up there.... [F]or me, there’s a set of very complex negotiations between so many people, no one is entirely passive, everyone should do what they can in their position to protect academic freedom.

The transformation of Hong Kong’s universities has implications far beyond the city. Hong Kong universities had long played a unique role in the generation of knowledge about China. It has been a place for students and scholars who study China—those from China and those internationally—to exchange views and publish in a Chinese speaking environment that had few barriers to access, and yet was outside of the Chinese government’s control. That space had been important, especially as the world is eager for knowledge about China as it takes on an increasingly global role, and as the Chinese government is increasingly manipulating and controlling such knowledge.

The Hong Kong government should immediately repeal the National Security Law and the second national security law it passed in March 2024, the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance. It should free all those arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their fundamental human rights, including academics and students arrested and imprisoned.

Concerned governments and foreign universities with partnerships with Hong Kong universities should actively track instances of censorship and threats to academic freedom on Hong Kong university campuses, speak up for affiliated academics and students who

suffer intimidation, and regularly review these partnerships to avoid becoming complicit in human rights violations.

This report starts with a discussion of methodology, followed by two background chapters: one on relevant Hong Kong and international laws and the other on the state of academic freedom between 2010 and 2020. It then details the decline in academic freedom since the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020 in chapters III, IV, and V. The report ends with a set of recommendations for Hong Kong and foreign governments and universities.

Methodology

This report is based on interviews with 25 academics and 8 students from all eight publicly funded Hong Kong universities: University of Hong Kong (HKU), Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), Lingnan University, and the Education University of Hong Kong.

The interviews were conducted in Cantonese and English on encrypted messaging platforms between October 2022 and June 2024. Two of the academics interviewed held management positions in their departments.

Since passage of the National Security Law, the risks for those speaking with international human rights organizations have significantly increased. As a result, identifying and accessing students securely for interviews became more difficult.

Names of all interviewees for this research have been withheld to protect their identity, except for two interviewees who gave permission to use their real names for some quotes. No compensation was provided to anyone interviewed.

Some media articles collected for this report from 2020 onwards abruptly disappeared from the public domain as the Hong Kong government forced at least two major independent Hong Kong media outlets, *Apple Daily* and *Stand News*, to close. Other media outlets retroactively censored “sensitive” articles.

Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council wrote to each of the eight universities with a list of questions (see Appendix II). None replied by the deadline provided. City University responded a day before the report’s release, and their reply is attached (see Appendix III).

I. Relevant International and Hong Kong Laws

International law obligates states to respect academic freedom, a principle based on a series of basic and widely accepted human rights.

The right to education is enshrined in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).¹ The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its General Comment No. 13 on the right to education, states that “the right to education can only be enjoyed if accompanied by the academic freedom of staff and students.”² The committee noted that “[m]embers of the academic community, individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation or writing.” At the same time, “[t]he enjoyment of academic freedom carries with it obligations, such as the duty to respect the academic freedom of others, to ensure the fair discussion of contrary views, and to treat all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds.”

Academic freedom also includes formal and informal gatherings of members of the university community. Articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. The ICCPR and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also provide for the right to freedom of opinion and expression.³

Hong Kong is a party to the ICCPR and ICESCR. Article 39 of Hong Kong’s de facto constitution, the Basic Law, expressly states that the provisions of the ICCPR and ICESCR remain in force in Hong Kong.⁴ The ICCPR is incorporated into Hong Kong’s legal framework

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217 (III), U.N. Doc A/RES/217(III), adopted December 10, 1948, art. 26; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), entered into force December 16, 1976, art. 13.

² UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 13, The Right to Education (Art. 13), adopted December 8, 1999, E/C.12/1999/10, para. 38.

³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (No. 49), entered into force March 3, 1976, art. 19.

⁴ Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, *National People’s Congress*, 1990, article 39.

through the Bill of Rights Ordinance, while the ICESCR is built into domestic law through the Basic Law (including articles 27, 36, 37, 137, 144, and 149) and provisions in more than 50 ordinances.⁵

In addition, article 27 of the Basic Law guarantees the rights to freedom of speech, association, and assembly; article 34 protects the right to freely engage in academic research; and article 137 stipulates that “educational institutions of all kinds may retain their autonomy and enjoy academic freedom.”

In June 2020, the Chinese government imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong. It criminalizes four types of broad and vaguely defined activities: secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with “foreign forces,” all carrying a maximum sentence of life in prison.⁶

In March 2024, the Beijing-controlled Hong Kong legislature hastily passed another national security law under article 23 of the Basic Law. The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance punishes peaceful speech and activism with heavy prison sentences, expands police powers, and weakens due process rights.

Both national security laws state that they apply beyond Hong Kong and China.⁷ Anyone who criticizes the Hong Kong or Chinese governments anywhere in the world can potentially be charged with violating the laws’ provisions, putting non-Chinese or Hong Kong citizens at risk if they visit Hong Kong or if their own governments extradite them to Hong Kong.

⁵ “LCQ 2: Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Hong Kong,” Hong Kong Secretary for Home Affairs Dr Patrick Ho in response to a question by the Hon Lee Cheuk-yan in the Legislative Council on April 6, 2005, https://www.cmab.gov.hk/en/upload/20050406humanq02_e.pdf (accessed August 15, 2024).

⁶ “China: New Hong Kong Law a Roadmap for Repression,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 29, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/29/china-new-hong-kong-law-roadmap-repression>.

⁷ Articles 37 and 38 of the National Security Law states that it applies to anyone—both a permanent resident of the city and a non-permanent resident—beyond Hong Kong and China. Article 12 of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance applies the law to Hong Kong residents and Hong Kong incorporated bodies or businesses anywhere in the world.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has repeatedly criticized the Hong Kong government for the adoption and implementation of both security laws.⁸ In recent years, Hong Kong authorities have also charged students with “unlawful assembly,” an offense under the Public Order Ordinance. The law broadly defines unlawful assembly as three or more people assembled and behaving in a “disorderly, intimidating, insulting or provocative manner” that causes a reasonable fear of a breach of the peace. The UN Human Rights Committee, the independent expert body that monitors compliance with the ICCPR, has criticized the law, saying that it “may facilitate excessive restriction” of basic rights.⁹

⁸ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Comment by UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Liz Throssell on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China,” January 7, 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/01/comment-un-human-rights-office-spokesperson-liz-throssell-hong-kong-special> (accessed August 21, 2024); UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Rushed adoption of national security bill a regressive step for human rights in Hong Kong – UN Human Rights Chief,” March 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/rushed-adoption-national-security-bill-regressive-step-human-rights-hong> (accessed August 21, 2024).

⁹ Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Hong Kong, China, adopted by the Committee at its 107th session (11 – 28 March 2013), CCPR/C/CHN-HKG/CO/3, April 29, 2013, para.10.

II. Political Pressure on Hong Kong Higher Education Since 2010

Hong Kong's universities have long played a critical role in the history of Hong Kong, China, and the rest of the world. The city's oldest universities were established as the city became a refuge for those escaping from the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) takeover of China in 1949, including many Chinese scholars. These universities preserved a strand of Chinese intellectual thought that, combined with the British colonial education system, contributed to the rapid modernization and industrialization of Hong Kong and China.¹⁰ These universities had also provided a space for scholars and students to exchange and generate knowledge about China largely outside of the Chinese government's reach.

Hong Kong's universities include institutions that are consistently ranked among the top universities in the world. In the years up until 1997—the year the British government transferred the city's sovereignty to Beijing—they enjoyed a high level of academic freedom. According to a multi-year and multi-country democracy index published by the Germany-based Global Public Policy Institute, academic freedom in Hong Kong peaked around 1997.¹¹ It has since declined, gradually at first and more sharply in recent years, as the Chinese government increasingly repressed Hong Kong generally. A 2008 academic article provided a snapshot: academics interviewed at the time described a “high degree of freedom,” but they were also experiencing growing self-censorship.¹² By 2024, Hong Kong had fallen to the bottom 10 to 20 percent bracket of the Global Public Policy Institute's academic freedom index among 179 countries.

¹⁰ Hong Kong's universities were not merely places “to combine tradition with modernity and to bring together China and the West traditions meet modernity” (結合傳統與現代，融會中國與西方) but they entail a history of contention between the Chinese intellectual-refugees, and the British colonial government at the time. See Wong Ching-Ting (王靖婷) et al., *50 Years of CUHK (中大五十年)* (*Hong Kong: 50 Years of CUHK Editorial Committee*, 2015), <https://ia600809.us.archive.org/10/items/cuhk50/Cuhk50Book1.pdf>.

¹¹ “Academic Freedom Index,” <https://academic-freedom-index.net>.

¹² Carole J. Petersen and Jan Currie, “Higher Education Restructuring and Academic Freedom in Hong Kong,” *Policy Futures in Education* 6(5) (2008), doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2008.6.5.589.

“Anti-Patriotic” Education Protests and the Umbrella Movement

Since the 2010s, the Chinese and Hong Kong governments have sought to “rectify” or change the city’s education system. Hong Kong students strongly pushed back on earlier efforts to introduce “moral and national education” in 2012. Those “anti-patriotic education” protests propelled some student leaders, notably Joshua Wong, to the forefront of the city’s pro-democracy movement. They went on to play a central role in the 2014 Umbrella Movement protests during which Hong Kongers peacefully occupied the city’s major thoroughfares for months to press for democracy. During the Umbrella Movement, student unions, elected student bodies that represent students and organize social events, played key roles. Some student union leaders at the time, such as Nathan Law and Alex Chow, have continued to be key figures in the city’s pro-democracy movement. After the 2014 Umbrella Movement protests—so named because demonstrators used umbrellas to shield themselves from police use of tear gas and pepper spray—Beijing’s pressure on the city and its universities became more evident.¹³

In Hong Kong, all eight publicly funded universities are under the leadership of the city’s chief executive, who is appointed by the Chinese government. The chief executive, in turn, appoints a significant number of individuals to sit on each university’s governing council, which has the power to determine faculty appointments and university policy.¹⁴ Since 2014, the chief executive has increasingly appointed pro-Beijing individuals to key positions in university governing councils, which then block academics perceived to be pro-democracy from taking up university leadership and faculty posts.¹⁵

During this period, the Chinese and Hong Kong governments began to use indirect means of intimidation to “harmonize” Hong Kong academia, sometimes with the cooperation of university leadership. Chinese government-owned and controlled newspapers in Hong

¹³ For changes to the city’s academic freedom prior to the National Security Law, see Hong Kong Watch, “Academic Freedom in Hong Kong since 2015: Between Two Systems,” January 22, 2018, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58ecfa82e3df284d3a13dd41/t/5a65b8ece4966ba24236ddd4/1516615925139/Academic+Freedom+report+%281%29.pdf>.

¹⁴ For more background on changes to Hong Kong university governance after the British transfer of Hong Kong’s sovereignty to Beijing, see Carole J. Petersen and Jan Currie, “Higher Education Restructuring and Academic Freedom in Hong Kong,” p. 589.

¹⁵ Yojana Sharma, “‘Localism’ scholar is axed ‘due to political pressure,’” *University World News*, April 19, 2016, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20160419123323266>; and Anthony Kuhn, “In Hong Kong, A Tussle Over Academic Freedom,” *NPR*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/02/10/465702928/in-hong-kong-a-tussle-over-academic-freedom>.

Kong—*Wen Wei Po* and *Ta Kung Pao*—would publish articles targeting academics perceived to be pro-democracy or anti-Beijing, naming and smearing them, and pressing the university leadership to act.¹⁶ For instance, the prominent Hong Kong University law professor Johannes Chan counted 350 attacks on him by the two Beijing papers as the HKU governing council rejected a recommendation by the university’s search committee, and declined to appoint him as the university pro-vice-chancellor.¹⁷ Chan had a close working relationship with Umbrella Movement leader and legal scholar Benny Tai.

There were other notable incidents that indicated greater government interference in Hong Kong’s universities during this period. In 2015, during his policy address, then-Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-Ying criticized an HKU student union publication for promoting the idea of Hong Kong independence, popularizing what was then a minority opinion.¹⁸

In 2016, Baptist University did not renew the contract of Chin Wan, a scholar and writer often considered as the “godfather” of “Hong Kong localism,” a school of thought advocating for a greater Hong Kong identity separate from that of China.¹⁹

In 2017, the Hong Kong Immigration Department denied visas to two Taiwanese academics deemed politically “sensitive.”²⁰

¹⁶ The two papers are owned by the China Liaison Office, the Chinese government’s representative office in Hong Kong. See Blake Schmidt, “The Publishing Empire Helping China Silence Dissent in Hong Kong,” *Bloomberg*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-08-17/the-publishing-empire-helping-china-silence-dissent-in-hong-kong>.

¹⁷ Sik Ying Ho, “Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement One Year On: The University of Hong Kong as the New Battleground,” *Discover Society*, April 5, 2016, <https://archive.discoversociety.org/2016/04/05/hong-kongs-umbrella-movement-one-year-on-the-university-of-hong-kong-as-the-new-battleground>.

¹⁸ Many have since questioned Leung’s motivations in discussing Hong Kong independence at such a high-profile occasion, which widely popularized the concept among the city’s young people, deepening the distrust and conflict between Hong Kong young people and the Chinese government. See Benson Wong Wai-Kwok (黃偉國), “Hong Kong Observer: What’s the mystery behind Leung Chun-ying’s criticism of ‘Hong Kong independence’?” (香港觀察：梁振英批「港獨」有何玄機?), *BBC*, January 20, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/hong_kong_review/2015/01/150120_hkreview_liang_criticism_independence.

¹⁹ Kris Cheng, “‘First academic casualty after Occupy’: Lingnan Uni refuses to renew contract of radical professor,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, April 14, 2016, <https://hongkongfp.com/2016/04/14/first-casualty-after-occupy-lingnan-refuses-contract-extension-of-radical-professor>.

²⁰ Peng Wan-Hsin (彭琬馨), “Scholars from Academia Sinica refused entrance to Hong Kong, ‘We no longer have optimistic fantasies about the situation in Hong Kong’” (中研院學者赴港交流遭拒「對香港局勢已沒有樂觀幻想」), *Liberty Times (自由時報)*, December 16, 2017, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/2284988>.

Around the same time, a project being incubated by a top Hong Kong university left the university and became an independent entity after a member of senior management expressed concerns about the project's foreign funders and described it as “anti-China,” according to two people familiar with the project. The entity left Hong Kong completely after the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020 out of concerns for its staff's safety (see also “Troublesome” Projects Toned Down).

Hong Kong University Governance since 2019

On June 9, 2019, over one million Hong Kong people marched peacefully against proposed amendments to the law that would allow Hong Kong authorities to transfer criminal suspects to China. What started as a specific demand to scrap the amendments escalated into six months of citywide protest, as many Hong Kongers became angry over the Hong Kong police's use of excessive force against protesters and pressed to uphold Hong Kong's democratic freedoms against an increasingly repressive Chinese government. Many protesters were young university students. It was following these protests, and during the Covid-19 pandemic that began in early 2020, that Beijing imposed the draconian National Security Law on Hong Kong.

The Chinese government blamed the education system for the rise of a Hong Kong identity that is pro-democracy (the color “yellow” is often used as a short-hand).²¹ Top Hong Kong leaders, along with the Beijing-controlled media have often used disturbingly violent language in decrying these sentiments—and the people behind them—as “viruses,” “cancer,” and “poison” that must be “cleansed” and “eradicated” from the system.²²

Days after the imposition of the National Security Law in mid-July 2020, then-Chief Executive Carrie Lam claimed that “anti-government forces have used different means to infiltrate campuses.”²³ In late July 2020, the then-security chief, John Lee (who later

²¹ After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over China in 1949, it repeatedly persecuted intellectuals and “rectified” Chinese universities throughout the 1950s as part of its drive to exert ideological control over the population. Those abuses were a lot harsher and violent, than those applied to present day Hong Kong. See Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957* (Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

²² Instead of treating these protests as legitimate concerns over government mismanagement of specific issues, the Chinese government has often assigned blame on the people criticizing it, smearing them as a broad and fundamental threat to the integrity of China—such as being foreign government pawns intent on splitting China. This line of reasoning, also often used in its other border regions—Xinjiang and Tibet—allows the government to justify a harsh crackdown.

²³ 「我們應該清楚看到有反中央、反政府的勢力通過不同途徑滲透校園」 See Chief Executive Carrie Lam, speech at the Hong Kong Education Summit Forum, July 11, 2020, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202007/11/P2020071100348.htm>.

succeeded Lam as the chief executive), more darkly said that his top priority was “to save students from being poisoned” by pro-democracy teachers and scholars who are “the people’s enemies” (人民公敌) and “national security viruses” (危害国安嘅病毒) that must be “eradicated.”²⁴

In September 2020, the China Liaison Office, the Chinese government’s representative office in Hong Kong, held a meeting with pro-Beijing politicians in the city. The meeting, the details of which have not been made public, reportedly urged pro-Beijing groups to “reform” three Hong Kong sectors: the judiciary, education, and social welfare sectors.²⁵ According to a report of the meeting, there were two tasks for education: remove pro-democracy, pro-independence teachers; and remove liberal studies from Hong Kong’s senior secondary school curriculum.²⁶

After 2020, changes to the composition of top management at Hong Kong’s universities accelerated in a direction favorable to the Chinese government: Academics who were perceived to hold pro-democracy views or who came from democratic countries had been replaced by those who share Beijing’s views or are from the mainland (though they may have US graduate degrees and citizenship). Some of them hold Chinese government advisory positions.

In 2017, Hong Kong University—with its history of student activism—appointed mainland-born and educated Zhang Xiang (張翔) as president to replace Peter Mathieson, who left

²⁴ 「李表示对付大奸大恶的人民公敌，会以最严厉手段搜集情报，执法，检控。」 Teachers in the secondary school system have been disqualified from teaching, fired, and disciplined for their pro-democracy views. See Lee Nga-Man (李雅雯), “John Lee: Focus on removing “bad apples” from the education sector to save students from being poisoned” (李家超：着眼教育界 清除 “坏苹果” 拯救学子免受荼毒), Ta Kung Pao (大公报), July 30, 2020, <https://www.takungpao.com/news/232109/2020/0730/481080.html>.

²⁵ Some pro-Beijing politicians chastised Junius Ho for revealing details of that meeting, and said that Ho had inserted his own opinion and misrepresented them as orders from the Chinese Liaison Office; Lee Sin-Chi (李先知), “China Liaison Office called for unity among the establishment, Junius Ho issues “meeting summary” saying that the judiciary should be rectified” (聞風筆動：中聯辦召建制籲團結 何君堯發「會議總結」稱整頓司法 / 文：李先知), *Ming Pao* (明報), September 24, 2020, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210917050559/https://news.mingpao.com/pns/%E8%A7%80%E9%BB%9E/article/20200924/s00012/1600885682430/%E8%81%9E%E9%A2%A8%E7%AD%86%E5%8B%95-%E4%B8%AD%E8%81%AF%E8%BE%A6%E5%8F%AC%E5%BB%BA%E5%88%B6%E7%B1%B2%E5%9C%98%E7%B5%90-%E4%BD%95%E5%90%9B%E5%A0%AF%E7%99%BC%E3%80%8C%E6%9C%83%E8%AD%B0%E7%B8%BD%E7%B5%90%E3%80%8D%E7%A8%B1%E6%95%B4%E9%A0%93%E5%8F%B8%E6%B3%95-%E6%96%87-%E6%9D%8E%E5%85%88%E7%9F%A5>.

²⁶ The Hong Kong government ended liberal studies in 2023.

before his contract finished.²⁷ Prior to his appointment, Zhang had written in his candidate proposal that HKU should seek greater interaction with mainland universities and resources from the Chinese Ministry of Education.²⁸ In 2020, Zhang joined a statement signed by four other university presidents in support of the National Security Law.²⁹ He appointed two new vice-presidents, both scholars born in China and who earned their first degrees there.³⁰ One of them, Shen Zuojun (申作軍), was listed on the website of Tsinghua University as the university's CCP committee member, an affiliation Shen later denied.³¹

In November 2023, the LegCo amended legislation to change the composition of CUHK's governing council, reducing the proportion of members from within the university to those outside and those appointed by the chief executive, because CUHK management had "failed" in its lenient response to the 2019 protests.³² The new board then terminated, with immediate effect, CUHK's vice-president and long-time employee, Eric Ng (吳樹培), who had opposed these amendments.³³ Later, CUHK President Rocky Tuan (段崇智) resigned before the end of his contract. Both Ng and Tuan are from Hong Kong.

²⁷ Zhang got his first university degree in the mainland, following which he went to the US for graduate studies and for his academic career. See Karen Cheung, "HKU announces recommendation of Chinese-American scholar Zhang Xiang as school's next vice-chancellor," *Hong Kong Free Press*, December 13, 2017, <https://hongkongfp.com/2017/12/13/hku-announces-recommendation-chinese-american-scholar-zhang-xiang-schools-next-vice-chancellor>.

²⁸ "Zhang Xiang, an American scholar from Nanjing, recommended to be the president of the University of Hong Kong, advocates contacting Chinese Ministry of Education for national resources, supported by Arthur Li" (美籍南京學者張翔 獲薦任港大校長 倡接觸中國教育部爭國家資源 李國章力挺), *Ming Pao (明報)*, December 1, 2017, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210629045958/https://news.mingpao.com/pns/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/article/20171201/500002/1512065042086/%E7%BE%8E%E7%B1%8D%E5%8D%97%E4%BA%AC%E5%AD%B8%E8%80%85%E5%BC%B5%E7%BF%94-%E7%8D%B2%E8%96%A6%E4%BB%BB%E6%B8%AF%E5%A4%A7%E6%A0%A1%E9%95%B7-%E5%80%A1%E6%8E%A5%E8%A7%B8%E4%B8%AD%E5%9C%8B%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E9%83%A8%E7%88%AD%E5%9C%8B%E5%AE%B6%E8%B3%87%E6%BA%90-%E6%9D%8E%E5%9C%8B%E7%AB%A0%E5%8A%9B%E6%8C%BA>

²⁹ "Statement by University Heads," The Hong Kong Polytechnic University media release, June 1, 2020, https://www.polyu.edu.hk/media/media-releases/2020/0601_statement-by-university-heads.

³⁰ Zhang and Shen are both US citizens.

³¹ Wong Kam-Kei (黃金棋) and Wu Ka-Yan (胡家欣), "HKU Vice-president Max Shen clarifies he was not a CCP member, listed on the Tsinghua University website due to negligence" (港大副校長 | 申作軍親自澄清非中共黨員 被列黨委屬清華網站疏忽), *HK01*, October 27, 2020, <https://www.hk01.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/541170/%E6%B8%AF%E5%A4%A7%E5%89%AF%E6%A0%A1%E9%95%B7-%E7%94%B3%E4%BD%9C%E8%BB%8D%E8%A6%AA%E8%87%AA%E6%BE%84%E6%B8%85%E9%9D%9E%E4%B8%AD%E5%85%B1%E9%BB%A8%E5%93%A1-%E8%A2%AB%E5%88%97%E9%BB%A8%E5%A7%94%E5%B1%AC%E6%B8%85%E8%8F%AF%E7%B6%B2%E7%AB%99%E7%96%8F%E5%BF%BD>.

³² "The draft reform of CUHK's council continues to be controversial, involves university's autonomy and choice of president | Whatsnew" (香港中大校董會改制草案持續爭議, 涉大學自主與校長人選 | Whatsnew), *Initium Media (端傳媒)*, August 7, 2023, <https://theinitium.com/article/20230807-hongkong-cuhk>.

³³ The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Amendment) Bill 2023 (2023 年香港中文大學 (修訂) 條例草案), <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2023/chinese/bills/b202306091.pdf>.

Since 2023, Lingnan University has been led by S. Joe Qin (秦泗釗), a mainlander who replaced a Hong Konger.³⁴ Little is publicly known about Qin’s political views.

At Polytechnic University, mainland scholar Teng Jin-Guang (滕錦光) replaced Hong Konger Timothy Tong Wai-cheung (唐偉章) as president in 2019. Teng, a signatory of the pro-National Security Law statement signed by four university presidents, has been a member of the Chinese government advisory body, the Chinese Political Consultative Conference.³⁵

As to the presidents of three universities that did not sign onto the pro-NSL joint statement—Baptist University, City University, and HKUST—two were both heading towards retirement. City University replaced 73-year-old Way Kuo (郭位) from Taiwan with Singaporean Freddy Chiang (梅彥昌) as president in 2023. At Baptist University, Hong Konger Alex Wai (衛炳江) replaced Roland Chin (錢大康), a Macau-born Hong Konger. Wai is also a member of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference.

The third university president who did not sign the joint statement, Taiwanese Wei Shyy (史維) left his presidency at HKUST a year before the end of his five-year term. He was replaced by Hong Konger Nancy Yip (葉玉如), who is a member of the Chinese government’s rubberstamp legislature, the National People’s Congress, as well as a member of the Beijing-controlled Election Committee in Hong Kong.

Education University—probably the university with the least politically active student body—replaced its president, Stephen Cheung (張仁良) from Hong Kong, with another Hong Konger, John Lee (李子建), who was previously the vice-president of the university.

In Hong Kong, another important institution determining academic freedom is the University Grants Committee (UGC), a non-statutory body that oversees funding allocation to universities and advises the government on their development. The advisory body under the UGC, the Research Grants Council (RGC), is responsible for setting up panels of

³⁴ For Leonard Cheng’s and Associate Vice President Lau Chi-pang’s records complying with the National Security Law, see Peter Baehr, “Hong Kong Universities in the Shadow of the National Security Law,” *Society* 59 (2022): 225–239, doi.org/10.1007/s12115-022-00709-9. Qin also has US citizenship.

³⁵ “Two Sessions | Hong Kong deputies to the National People’s Congress and members of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference went to Beijing to attend the sessions (list attached)” (兩會 | 這些港區全國人大代表和政協委員赴京參會 (附名單)), *Hong Kong Ta Kung Wen Wei Media Group* (香港大公文匯傳媒集團), February 29, 2024, <https://www.tkww.hk/a/202402/29/AP65e07f88e4boeb64daocao5.html>.

academics based in and outside Hong Kong to review and approve funding applications from Hong Kong academics for General Research Fund grants. As such, these bodies effectively determine whether academics in the city can keep their jobs and advance in their careers.

The Chinese and Hong Kong governments have, since 2020, exerted greater pressure and control over both the UGC and RGC. In 2021 and 2022, respectively, the Hong Kong government appointed Wong Yuk-shan as RGC's chairman and Tim Lui as UGC's chairman; both members of the National People's Congress. In April 2021, news emerged that the UGC had issued a letter to the universities "reminding them" to ensure that they teach the National Security Law to ensure "both faculty and students understand its content."³⁶ The two Chinese government-controlled media outlets throughout 2022 attacked the UGC and RGC for funding Hong Kong independence (see When Applying for Funding).

Role of Foreign Universities and Academics in Hong Kong Universities

Hong Kong's universities have numerous partnerships with many of the world's top universities in the form of joint research programs, dual degree programs, visiting scholars programs, student exchanges, and study abroad programs (see Appendix I: Foreign Universities with Dual-Degree or Joint-Degree Programs in Hong Kong). Most of these universities are in democratic countries. Some universities also have campuses in Hong Kong.³⁷ Hong Kong universities are also members in major international university networks.³⁸

Foreign academics not only teach in the city, but also serve as reviewers for the Research Grants Council.

International academic rankings, such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, regularly place Hong Kong's universities near the top of the charts. These

³⁶ "Universities must teach the National Security Law, UGC has a responsibility to remind universities of requirements" (大學須教授國安法 教資會：有責任提醒要求), *Oriental Daily* (東方日報), May 25, 2021, https://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/news/20210525/00176_207.html.

³⁷ They include, for example, the University of Chicago Booth School of Business - Hong Kong Campus; Upper Iowa University Hong Kong; University of Notre Dame Hong Kong Global Center; University of Wollongong College Hong Kong; and The University of Sunderland in Hong Kong.

³⁸ Such as the McDonnell International Scholars Academy, Universitas 21, and the Association of Pacific Universities.

rankings often do not take into account the state of academic freedom when evaluating universities, even though free enquiry and thought are widely seen as the foundation of a good university.³⁹

³⁹ Carsten A. Holz, “Universities without Academic Freedom Have No Place in Rankings,” *International Higher Education* 106 (2021), <https://www.internationalhighereducation.net/api-v1/article/!/action/getPdfOfArticle/articleID/3162/productID/29/filename/article-id-3162.pdf>; Robert Quinn, Janika Spannagel, and Ilyas Saliba, “Why university rankings must include academic freedom,” *University World News*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210311071016522>.

III. Restricting Freedoms of Expression, Association and Assembly on Campus

There were security guards for a long time around the Pillar of Shame. One time I saw an anonymous protester there, and they were followed by security guards.... Also, where there used to be like a Democracy Wall—student art and posters with reference to political issues—they were taken away and removed. Gathering spaces were replaced by plants, to disincentivize students from gathering there and make it impossible for them to put up artwork or posters.... So, there's a lot of changes going on. And you can feel it on campus, and you can also feel it in terms of the approach of staff members towards what they can teach and what they can say.

— Academic “F”, October 28, 2022

Since June 2020, all Hong Kong universities have restricted freedom of expression, association, and assembly on campus. University authorities have harassed student unions, removed messages on notice boards known as “Democracy Walls,” dismantled memorials that commemorated the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre of pro-democracy protesters, punished students for peaceful acts of dissent, used security guards to monitor students on campus, and censored student publications, communications, and events.

Harassment of Student Unions

The University of Hong Kong Student Union has long been notorious for its evil path of anti-China and sowing chaos in Hong Kong. Especially after the introduction of the National Security Law ... the student union’s cunning heart is still determined ... to spread reactionary ideas in an attempt to lure more students to board the pirate ship and tie universities to the chariot of crime.... These people are not students at all, but thugs hiding on campus.

— *People’s Daily* editorial, “Remove the malignant tumor of HKU student union to return peace to campus,” April 19, 2021⁴⁰

⁴⁰ People’s Daily HK Facebook post, “Remove the malignant tumor of HKU student union to return peace to campus” (切除港大學生會「毒瘤」，還校園一片安寧), April 18, 2021,

Since June 2020, all eight Hong Kong universities have taken numerous actions to harass and marginalize student unions, rendering them unable to effectively operate on campus as representatives of the entire student bodies.⁴¹ Some student unions disbanded altogether.

Universities have publicly “severed ties”—denouncing their affiliations—with student unions.⁴² Universities have stopped collecting dues for them, ceased providing them with administrative support, and evicted them from their campus premises. They have told the unions that they are not allowed to use the university’s names, removed union representatives from university bodies, and effectively evicted them from campuses.⁴³ Official justifications for these actions vary. City University, which in August 2020 was the first university to take such actions, stated that the union had “trouble managing

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbido2vkkSRXHYU5jZhEeikMhcbGynmMrQ1qVaTAnujmGom9tv4cwG2hwTreZ6ij5fUVq2l&id=104936044581591.

⁴¹ For a compilation of these actions, see Fung Hiu-Tung (馮曉彤) and Lau Yue-shing (劉裕城), “(The Eight Student Unions) Reorganizing after dissolution, forced off campus, discussions with the universities: What they faced under the crackdown” (【八大學生會】解散後重組、遷出校園、與校方有商有量——他們在狹縫下面對甚麼), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), September 3, 2022,

<https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E7%A4%BE%E9%81%8B/%E3%80%90%E5%85%AB%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E3%80%91%E8%A7%A3%E6%95%A3%E5%BE%8C%E9%87%8D%E7%B5%84%E3%80%81%E9%81%B7%E5%87%BA%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%92%E3%80%81%E8%88%87%E6%A0%A1%E6%96%B9%E6%9C%89%E5%95%86%E6%9C%89%E9%87%8F%E2%80%94%E2%80%94%E4%BB%96%E5%80%91%E5%9C%A8%E7%8B%B9%E7%B8%AB%E4%B8%8B%E9%9D%A2%E5%B0%8D%E7%94%9A%E9%BA%BC>; and Wu Ka-Yan (胡家欣), “Among the 8 major universities, only PolyU as a student union, HKU student union not recognized, the rest has no one willing to run as candidates” (八大院校僅理大有學生會 港大學生會地位不獲承認 其餘「斷莊」), *HK01*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.hko1.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/686030/%E5%85%AB%E5%A4%A7%E9%99%A2%E6%A0%A1%E5%83%85%E7%90%86%E5%A4%A7%E6%9C%89%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E6%B8%AF%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E5%9C%B0%E4%BD%8D%E4%B8%8D%E7%8D%B2%E6%89%BF%E8%AA%8D%E5%85%B6%E9%A4%98%E6%96%B7%E8%8E%8A>. In these eight universities, there are still student activity groups and small student representative bodies on campus. In CUHK, where the university is formed by nine colleges, some of the colleges still have functioning unions, but they are smaller and less powerful without the support of the university-wide union.

⁴² “CUHK Statement on the Cabinet of the CUSU Executive Committee,” Chinese University of Hong Kong news release, February 25, 2021, <https://www.cpr.cuhk.edu.hk/en/press/cuhk-statement-on-the-cabinet-of-the-cusu-executive-committee>.

⁴³ “PolyU retaliates against student union for Apple Daily advertisement: halts membership fee collection and bans screenings” (學生會登《蘋果》頭版廣告 遭理大報復：停代收會費 禁辦放映會), *Apple Daily* (蘋果日報), November 12, 2020, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/2020113043507/https://hk.appledaily.com/local/20201112/DMPEOXYGZNAPDKFML6OGLTOHXM/>; “CityU to reorganize school council and eliminate the ex-officio seat of student union president, saying it is ‘in line with the practices of most institutions’” (城大擬改組校董會 取消學生會長當然席位 稱「與大部分院校做法看齊」), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), March 30, 2024, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2/%E5%9F%8E%E5%A4%A7%E6%93%AC%E6%94%B9%E7%B5%84%E6%A0%A1%E8%91%A3%E6%9C%83%E5%8F%96%E6%B6%88%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E9%95%B7%E7%95%B6%E7%84%B6%E5%B8%AD%E4%BD%8D%E7%A8%B1%E3%80%8C%E8%88%87%E5%A4%A7%E9%83%A8%E5%88%86%E9%99%A2%E6%A0%A1%E5%81%9A%E6%B3%95%E7%9C%8B%E9%BD%8A%E3%80%8D>.

finances.”⁴⁴ Education University claimed that the union “did not adequately represent the student body.”⁴⁵ CUHK in February 2021 issued a strongly worded statement criticizing the elected student union for its platform that promoted democracy and opposed university policies, such as the use of facial recognition cameras.⁴⁶ CUHK said it would not “allow anything that endanger[s] national security on campus,” and that any student who “has violated the law” or is responsible for “incitement” would be “given the harshest disciplinary actions.” Yet, CUHK has never explained which remarks of students were problematic.⁴⁷ A CUHK student knowledgeable about the union, which later disbanded under pressure, said:

One day a university staff member called and said, “Some things will happen, would the student running for office consider withdrawing their participation in the [student union] elections?” ... The students didn’t know where the red line was ... when they wrote their election platform, they didn’t think there was anywhere that touched the red line. Even today, nobody has told the students which part of their platform violated the NSL ... they asked the school which part was problematic ... at the time, the school often told the student running for office that the university administration [too] was having a hard time, as “lots of people outside of the university” were pressuring the administration.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Hung Fan-Hui (孔繁翹), “CityU says financial management of student union is poor, to stop collecting membership fees in the new school year” (城大指學生會財務管理持續欠佳 新學年停止代收會費), *HKO1*, August 21, 2020, <https://www.hko1.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/514041/%E5%9F%8E%E5%A4%A7%E6%8C%87%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E8%B2%A1%E5%8B%99%E7%AE%A1%E7%90%86%E6%8C%81%E7%BA%8C%E6%AC%A0%E4%BD%B3-%E6%96%B0%E5%AD%B8%E5%B9%B4%E5%81%9C%E6%AD%A2%E4%BB%A3%E6%94%B6%E6%9C%83%E8%B2%BB>.

⁴⁵ Hung Fan-Hui (孔繁翹), “EdU student union lacks representatives, no longer recognized by the university, HKD\$9m temporarily entrusted to financial office” (教育大學指學生會缺乏代表性 不再承認地位 暫託 900 萬元存備), *HKO1*, January 20, 2022, <https://www.hko1.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/726353/%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E6%8C%87%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E7%BC%BA%E4%B9%8F%E4%BB%A3%E8%A1%A8%E6%80%A7-%E4%B8%8D%E5%86%8D%E6%89%BF%E8%AA%8D%E5%9C%B0%E4%BD%8D-%E6%9A%AB%E8%A8%97900%E8%90%AC%E5%85%83%E5%AD%98%E5%82%99>.

⁴⁶ “CUHK Statement on the Cabinet of the CUSU Executive Committee,” Chinese University of Hong Kong news release.

⁴⁷ Selina Cheng, “Security law: Newly elected student union leaders say Chinese University Hong Kong trampled on popular opinion by cutting ties,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 26, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/02/26/security-law-newly-elected-student-union-leaders-say-chinese-university-hong-kong-trampled-on-popular-opinion-by-cutting-ties>.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Lauren C. (pseudonym), CUHK, October 31, 2022.

The harassment of student unions escalated over time. In 2021, CUHK student union members said they received death threats reportedly by the government or those suspected of being affiliated with the government for their election platform. But university administrations took no discernible actions to protect the students. In fact, university administrations added to the pressure: Officials repeatedly pressed and harassed the student union until it disbanded, just one day after it was elected.⁴⁹

The timeline of how City University officials harassed its student union elucidates the interplay between university and government-affiliated harassment. City University stopped collecting dues for the student union in August 2020, claiming that the union had “trouble managing finances.”⁵⁰ Weeks later, even though protests had effectively been banned since the imposition of the National Security Law (and especially during the Covid-19 pandemic), several pro-Beijing individuals were able to protest unmolested in front of a government office, pressing for official investigations into the union’s alleged “financial impropriety.”⁵¹

Months later, an article appeared in the pro-Beijing newspaper *Oriental Daily* claiming that City University management was “seriously following up on such matters [of alleged financial impropriety].”⁵² This appeared to kick the City University administration into high gear: Five days after the article, a university official accused the union of having “a rat infestation” in their meeting room due to “improper hygiene,” and said they would take

⁴⁹ “CUHK Student Union ‘Syzygia’ resigns over death threats, worries of implicating family members, apologizes for letting down voters” (中大學生會「朔夜」總辭 收死亡恐嚇憂牽連家人 為辜負選民致歉), *Stand News* (立場新聞), March 1, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20211207084112/https://www.thestandnews.com/politics/%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83-%E6%9C%94%E5%A4%9C-%E7%B8%BD%E8%BE%AD-%E6%94%B6%E6%AD%BB%E4%BA%A1%E6%81%90%E5%9A%87%E6%86%82%E7%89%BD%E9%80%A3%E5%AE%B6%E4%BA%BA-%E7%82%BA%E8%BE%9C%E8%B2%A0%E9%81%B8%E6%B0%91%E8%87%B4%E6%AD%89/>; “‘Syzygia’ Timeline of Events” (「朔夜」事件時間線), *CUHK Student Press* (中大學生報), May 2021, <https://cusp.hk/?p=9441>.

⁵⁰ 城市廣播 City Broadcasting Channel (CBC) Instagram post, August 22, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CEKK8htBzB5/>

⁵¹ “CityU, PolyU student unions accused of unclear accounts, reported to ICAC” (城大、理工大學生會被指帳目不清 團體到廉署稅局舉報), *Oriental Daily* (東方日報), September 17, 2020, https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20200917/bkn-20200917122030735-0917_00822_001.html.

⁵² “Will Seriously Follow up on Student Union’s Chaotic Financials: CityU” (城大：嚴正跟進學生會混帳), *Oriental Daily* (東方日報), January 16, 2022, https://orientaldaily.on.cc/content/%E8%A6%81%E8%81%9E%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/odn-20220116-0116_00176_203/%E5%9F%8E%E5%A4%A7%EF%BC%9A%E5%9A%B4%E6%AD%A3%E8%B7%9F%E9%80%B2%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E6%B7%B7%E5%B8%B3.

away the union's access to the room.⁵³ Two days after this, another university official informed the union that they could not use the word "City University" in the union's name, and that they must provide their financial records of the past 16 years within two weeks or else they would be evicted from their union premises.⁵⁴ The union denied any impropriety, and said they were already complying with the university's requests for these records.⁵⁵ Referring to the *Oriental Daily* article, they also revealed that university administrators had told them that the university had to take these actions against them because of "external pressure."⁵⁶

City University evicted the student union from campus in February 2022. The union held a "parting ceremony," during which some students pushed away barriers in front of the "Democracy Wall" and put up messages in support for democracy using Post-it notes.⁵⁷ The university administration warned 35 of the participating students about disciplinary actions for "violating Covid-19 restrictions," "incitement," and "criminal damage to the Democracy Wall." Hong Kong's national security police also threatened the students, saying that they were being investigated for messages that "incited Hong Kong

⁵³ 香港城市大學學生會 City University of Hong Kong Students Union Instagram post, January 23, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZE8nvQhclK/>.

⁵⁴ "CityU concerned about student union finances, requires union to submit financial reports for the past 16 years within 2 weeks, otherwise will be evicted from premises" (城大稱擔心學生會財務 要求兩週內交 16 年賬目報告 否則割席及收回會址), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), January 25, 2022, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2/%E5%9F%8E%E5%A4%A7%E7%A8%B1%E6%93%94%E5%BF%83%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E8%B2%A1%E5%8B%99-%E8%A6%81%E6%B1%82%E5%85%A9%E9%80%B1%E5%85%A7%E4%BA%A4%16%E5%B9%B4%E8%B3%AC%E7%9B%AE%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A-%E5%90%A6%E5%89%87%E5%89%B2%E5%B8%AD%E5%8F%8A%E6%94%B6%E5%9B%9E%E6%9C%83%E5%9D%80>

⁵⁵ "CityU concerned about student union finances, requires union to submit financial reports for the past 16 years within 2 weeks, otherwise will be evicted from premises" (城大稱擔心學生會財務 要求兩週內交 16 年賬目報告 否則割席及收回會址), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體).

⁵⁶ Peter Lee, "Hong Kong CityU students' union told to hand over 16 years of audit reports within 2 weeks, or face action," *Hong Kong Free Press*, January 26, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2022/01/26/hong-kong-cityu-students-union-told-to-hand-over-16-years-of-audit-reports-within-2-weeks-or-face-action>.

⁵⁷ "CityU student union withdraws from campus, student union president says 'the times no longer allow student unions to exist'" (城大學生會撤出校園 會長：時代不再容許學生會存在), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), February 15, 2022, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E7%A4%BE%E9%81%8B/%E5%9F%8E%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E6%92%A4%E5%87%BA%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%92-%E6%9C%83%E9%95%B7%EF%BC%9A%E6%99%82%E4%BB%A3%E4%B8%8D%E5%86%8D%E5%AE%B9%E8%A8%B1%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E5%AD%98%E5%9C%A8>.

independence.”⁵⁸ And finally, the Food and Environmental Hygiene department fined 14 of the students 7,000 HKD (US\$900) each for violating Covid-19 restrictions.⁵⁹



Above and below: City University students pushed away physical barriers to leave Post-it notes on the “Democracy Wall,” February 2022. © 2022 Inmedia

⁵⁸ “CityU Students Union farewell ceremony involves inciting independence; National security police investigate the phrases ‘Free Hong Kong, Revolution Now’ and ‘Independent Nation’ suspected to have appeared on the Democracy Wall, school denies calling the police” (城大學生會臨別禮涉煽獨 國安警查 民主牆疑現「光時」「獨立民族」字眼 校方否認報警), February 21, 2022, <https://news.mingpao.com/pns/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/article/20220221/s00002/1645380788987>.

⁵⁹ “CityU takes back student union premises; 14 students fined for “farewell ceremony,” pleaded guilty to violating the ban on multi-household gatherings, fined 7,000 HKD each” (城大收回學生會會址 14 學生「臨別禮」被票控 認違多戶聚集禁令 每人罰款 7,000 元), September 23, 2022, <https://thewitnesshk.com/%E5%9F%8E%E5%A7%E6%94%B6%E5%9B%9E%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E6%9C%83%E5%9D%80-14%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E8%87%A8%E5%88%A5%E7%A6%AE%E8%A2%AB%E7%A5%A8%E6%8E%A7-%E8%AA%8D%E9%81%95%E5%A4%9A%E6%88%B6/>.



City University students pushed away physical barriers to leave Post-it notes on the “Democracy Wall,” February 2022. © 2022 Inmedia



City University student union members bowing and thanking fellow students in front of the university’s Democracy Wall before the union was evicted from campus by university administrators, February 2022. © 2022 City Broadcasting Channel (CBC)

Only one university appears to have a university-wide student union currently operating on campus—the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). But HKUST has also stopped collecting dues for the union, which led to a one-third plunge in membership, putting the union into financial deficit.⁶⁰

Two student unions have continued to operate outside of campus as independently registered entities, and they have run into difficulties.⁶¹ City University’s student union has been harassed by government departments. One government department told the union that they needed an “entertainment license” for organizing singing and *mahjong* competitions for students; another revoked a bid the union had won to sell their merchandise at a government-run market to raise funds.⁶²

These threats and harassment have largely deterred students from trying to run for student unions, even in universities where it may be possible to revive them. One student said, “Student unions have become taboo.... In the past two years things have changed.... Right now, I don’t really want to participate [in the student union.] But if it was in the past, I’d have thought of running for student elections.”⁶³

The harassment of student unions and activism on campus has fostered a sense of helplessness among many students. Said one HKU student interviewed:

I think our feeling is that whatever we do, the university would not allow it, so there is nothing we can do through the university. If anything, you’d be left with a big mess if you try to do something. So now who would want to run to be a student representative?⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “HKUST student union records deficit of over 78,000HKD” (科大學生會錄逾 78 萬赤字), *Sing Tao Daily* (星島日報), April 29, 2024, <https://std.stheadline.com/daily/article/2590207/%E6%97%A5%E5%A0%B1-%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2-%E7%A7%91%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E9%8C%84%E9%80%BE78%E8%90%AC%E8%B5%A4%E5%AD%97>.

⁶¹ 紅磚編委 Redbrick PressCom Instagram post, April 1, 2023, https://www.instagram.com/redbrick_presscom/p/CqemXd8hNbr.

⁶² “News Year’s Eve [event] was ‘attended to’; the hard road of CityU student union’s transformation.” (年宵被 DQ 活動被「關心」城大學生會轉型波折重重), *The Epoch Times* (大紀元時報), February 5, 2024, <https://hk.epochtimes.com/news/2024-02-05/86728283>.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Sam C. (pseudonym), HKU, November 4, 2022.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with student Sam C. (pseudonym), HKU, November 4, 2022.

Another student, from CUHK, said:

[B]ecause there is no longer a student union, and there are more and more regulations—whether it’s about Covid-19 or the removal of the Goddess of Democracy—we all know that there’s nothing we can do about anything. So the university does whatever it decides to do, even though we all think there’s a problem; nobody’s going to take action to change anything anymore.⁶⁵

Demise of Democracy Walls

The demise of student unions in these universities went hand in hand with greater restrictions on the ability of students to express themselves on campus, as the student unions managed some of these avenues for expression.

Since 2020, universities have also censored or deterred students from expressing themselves on “Democracy Walls”—notice boards for students that, especially during the protests, were popular places for students to express their feelings about Hong Kong’s future. Universities put up barriers around these boards, covered them up, tore down students’ posters, took over management of the boards from student unions, or removed them completely.⁶⁶ At CUHK, after the student union disbanded in 2021, university administrators put up barriers around the Democracy Wall, citing the need for “renovations.”

While some boards still exist, students said anything they put up on the board would get promptly torn down, often by security guards. A student at CUHK said:

As I understand it, the Democracy Wall has been cordoned off with barriers, nobody would post anything. Any posts would be torn down by security guards. The whole campus has no political posters.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with student Gregory C. (pseudonym), CUHK, October 25, 2022.

⁶⁶ “With leaflets torn, barricaded by boards, abandoned—how university democracy walls have changed under the National Security Law?” (撕標語、圍板、荒廢——國安法下，大學民主牆變成怎樣？), *Stand News* (立場新聞), September 28, 2021, <https://collection.news/thestandnews/articles/152574>.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with student Danny L. (pseudonym), CUHK, November 10, 2022.



CUHK put up barriers around the “Democracy Wall” as of September 2021. © 2021 Inmedia



In 2021, Polytechnic University covered up messages such as “Hong Kong Add Oil” and other comments on the police crackdown on campus protests in 2019. © 2021 Inmedia

Universities have added various measures to deter posting, from adding surveillance cameras to requiring that students post with their full names. Another student at CUHK said:

The university said there are legal risks involved [in the Democracy Wall] ... they sought legal advice which said that they could be prosecuted for [these messages] so ... the college said they need to implement a “real name registration” system to protect the college, and to manage those student postings on the wall.⁶⁸

Many students feel they are strongly discouraged from expressing themselves and they no longer post anything on these walls. A student at HKU said:

In 2018, and in 2019, the Democracy Wall was incredible. Whenever you walked past the library, you’d want to take a look at what others have posted. But now nobody would post anything anymore.... [I]n 2019, not only was there a Democracy Wall, people could post anywhere as long as there was space on campus. They are all gone now.... There were also places where people could sit down ... after the protests and the NSL, the school tore down all the messages and removed the graffiti, and turned the seats into planters where you cannot sit down or put anything on top of them.⁶⁹

As an academic put it, these walls are “kind of just sad,” reminders of how the state has crushed free speech in Hong Kong. “No one was posting anything on it anymore.”⁷⁰

Another academic explained that the lack of free expression on campus cannot be separated from the lack of free expression in the classrooms:

That's what stands out in my mind: the Democracy Wall that nobody dared to post anything on. It is pretty chilling if you think about academic life. For people trained in the West, so much of what we do in the humanities, it's

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with student Ken N. (pseudonym), CUHK, October 26, 2022.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with student Kathy W. (pseudonym), HKU, November 3, 2022.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “F”, October 28, 2022.

very difficult to separate from the political realm. And so for me, it's just very bizarre to be here. Everything about educational theory and the way in which we guide people's inquiry in the classrooms and so forth, they all presume a certain set of freedoms.⁷¹



HKU's "Democracy Wall" in August 2021. HKU administration added the surveillance cameras visible on the ceiling after the 2019 protests. © HOWOHGMHA TOAH / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-4.0

Erasing Memories of 1989 Tiananmen Massacre

In the middle of the night on December 22, 2021, the University of Hong Kong boarded up and removed from campus the "Pillar of Shame"—a large statue that had stood at HKU for over two decades, commemorating the Chinese government's massacre of pro-democracy

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "M", November 17, 2022.

demonstrators in 1989 in China.⁷² Two days later, on December 24, CUHK and Lingnan University also removed statues, a replica of the Tiananmen “Goddess of Democracy” and a stone relief that commemorated the massacre. A month later, HKU removed a commemorative slogan painted on a bridge, a slogan that HKU students had repainted every year since 1989 as an act of remembrance.⁷³ These actions took place around the holidays and after the student unions had been neutralized. The removal of these memorials was part of a transformation of the campus environment to erase memories of a period of thriving free thought during the 2019 protest movement. One academic said:

[In 2019] the campus was completely plastered over with posters, slogans, graffiti, and not just spray-painted stuff. There was quite a lot of artwork, a lot of care and thought went into this work and all of that has just been totally stripped away. There has also been the gradual disappearance of any symbols that could be evocative of protest movements. The Goddess of Democracy statue was sort of quietly disappeared during renovations to the campus. It didn't get the attention that the statues at other universities received.... It was just sort of put away somewhere during renovations to that area and then never returned.⁷⁴

Removing statues and commemorative plaques further chilled free expression on campus. Another academic said:

When I saw [that] that happened, when the sculpture or relief was removed, that worried me about the future of academic freedom. Why did they have to remove that sculpture? How come last week it was okay but this week it is not okay? Does it mean we can't talk about the massacre? Is that the

⁷² “CUHK’s Goddess of Democracy and Lingnan University’s Tiananmen Massacre relief have been removed, Taiwan groups raise funds to rebuild the ‘June 4 Pillar of Shame’ in Taiwan” (中大民主女神像、嶺大六四浮雕今被移走，台灣團體集資在台重建「六四恥辱柱」), *Initium Media* (端傳媒), December 24, 2021, <https://theinitium.com/zh-Hans/article/20211224-whatsnew-hongkong-univeristies-sculpture-removal>.

⁷³ Law Kwok-fai (羅國輝), “(Images) June 4th slogan at HKU’s Swire Bridge blocked, another June 4th totem disappears before the new year” (【圖話】香港大學太古橋六四標語被封 新年前一六四圖騰恐消失), *HK01*, January 29, 2022, <https://www.hk01.com/%E7%B4%80%E5%AF%A6/730316/%E5%9C%96%E8%A9%B1-%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E5%A4%AA%E5%8F%A4%E6%A9%8B%E5%85%AD%E5%9B%9B%E6%A8%99%E8%AA%9E%E8%A2%AB%E5%B0%81-%E6%96%B0%E5%B9%B4%E5%89%8D%E5%8F%88%E4%B8%80%E5%85%AD%E5%9B%9B%E5%9C%96%E9%A8%B0%E6%81%90%E6%B6%88%E5%A4%B1>.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “K”, November 2, 2022.

message? ... It's not like with a memo from senior management saying from now on there's no more courses on Tiananmen Square, that has not happened ... but something symbolic like that is concerning.⁷⁵

Punishing Students for Peaceful Protests

University administrations have also punished students for staging peaceful protests and other gatherings. In January 2021, HKUST suspended two student union leaders for a semester and subjected others to disciplinary measures for holding a peaceful memorial for a HKUST student who died during the 2019 protests. The students were also sanctioned for other peaceful activities, such as for repainting a 2014 Umbrella Movement protest slogan on a pavement which the school claimed had been done “without permission” and “in violation of pandemic gathering restrictions,” actions that the university claimed had “damaged the school’s reputation.”⁷⁶

During an online graduation ceremony at CUHK in 2020, about 100 students and people from outside CUHK protested on campus, carrying banners with the 2019 protest slogan, “Liberate Hong Kong, the Revolution of Our Times,” and calling on others to remember their fellow pro-democracy protesters in jail. The university administration called the police and “strongly condemned” the protesters for “violating national security.”⁷⁷ The national security police later arrested two people, ages 16 and 18. They were later charged and convicted of “unlawful assembly” and sentenced to, respectively, between 6 and 36 months in a “training center” and between 3 to 9 months in a “rehabilitation center.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “Q”, January 8, 2023.

⁷⁶ “HKUST student union president ordered to suspend school for one semester for holding memorial service for Chow Tsz-lok and painting campus slogans last year” (去年辦周梓樂追悼會、補校園標語油漆 科大學生會會長被勒令休學一學期), *Ming Pao* (明報), January 24, 2021, <https://news.mingpao.com/ins/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/article/20210124/500001/1611490768000/%E5%8E%BB%E5%B9%B4%E8%BE%A6%E5%91%A8%E6%A2%93%E6%A8%82%E8%BF%BD%E6%82%BC%E6%9C%83-%E8%A3%9C%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%92%E6%A8%99%E8%AA%9E%E6%B2%B9%E6%BC%86-%E7%A7%91%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E6%9C%83%E9%95%B7%E8%A2%AB%E5%8B%92%E4%BB%A4%E4%BC%91%E5%AD%B8%E4%B8%80%E5%AD%B8%E6%9C%9F> archived at <https://archive.ph/bubuO>.

⁷⁷ “CUHK Statement,” Chinese University of Hong Kong news release, November 19, 2020, <https://www.cpr.cuhk.edu.hk/en/press/cuhk-statement-2>.

⁷⁸ “18-year-old sentenced to rehabilitation center for unlawful assembly at CUHK protest” (18 歲青年認中大遊行非法集結 判入更生中心), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), April 20, 2023, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E7%A4%BE%E9%81%8B/18%E6%AD%B2%E9%9D%92%E5%B9%B4%E8%AA%8D%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%A7%E9%81%8A%E8%A1%8C%E9%9D%9E%E6%B3%95%E9%9B%86%E7%B5%90-%E5%88%A4%E5%85%A5%E6%9B%B4%E7%94%9F%E4%B8%AD%E5%BF%83>.

Every year since, in 2021, 2022, and 2023, students have protested during CUHK's graduation ceremonies. In 2021, several groups of students hung up banners and messages protesting against the university's suppression of the student union. CUHK university authorities promptly took down these banners, while security guards surrounded another group.⁷⁹

In 2022, a few students staged a small protest carrying non-political slogans, but they were nonetheless stopped by security guards as the protest “had no prior permission.” The security guards filmed the students and called the police, saying that they were “threatened by the students.” Police came but did not make arrests.⁸⁰

In 2023, two CUHK students held up boards in black asking graduating students for their views about the university. Security guards filmed them and took them away while the university administration persuaded other protesting graduates to stop and leave the area, citing “disturbance” to others and a “violation to graduation management rules.”⁸¹

Security Guards Restricting Free Expression on Campus

After the imposition of the National Security Law, campus security guards have been empowered to tear down student messages and posters, and to film and follow anyone who seems politically troublesome. They guard university entrances, some of which have

⁷⁹ “Protests reappear at CUHK graduation ceremony, supporting peers sentenced for protesting the extradition law” (香港中大畢業典禮再現抗議 聲援反送中被判刑同儕, Central News Agency, November 4, 2021, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/firstnews/202111040383.aspx>).

⁸⁰ ReNews Facebook post, “Students demonstrate, CUHK calls the police” (學生示威 中大報警), November 24, 2022, [https://www.hko1.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/840053/%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%A7%E7%95%A2%E6%A5%AD%E7%A6%AE-%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E8%87%AA%E8%A3%BD%E6%A0%A1%E8%A2%8D%E6%8A%97%E8%AD%B0-%E8%88%87%E4%BF%9D%E5%AE%89%E5%93%A1%E5%8F%A3%E8%A7%92%E5%A0%B1%E8%AD%A6-%E8%AD%A6%E5%93%A1%E5%85%A5%E6%A0%A1%E8%AA%BF%E6%9F%A5](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=151846410933991&id=100083258981625&set=a.128212953297337&locale=hi_IN&paipv=o&eav=AfaKdAd-W8F6o1is-uPojTSpuA5T4KTVIZ6pMh-Vvl5FK2wtEXgGkpNDqoOfmW-E9ZM&_rdr; Hung Fan-Hui (孔繁楦) and Lau Mung-ting (劉夢婷), “CUHK graduation ceremony | Students make their own robes in protest, police are called after altercation with security guard, enter the school to investigate” (中大畢業禮 | 學生自製校袍抗議 與保安員口角報警 警員入校調查), HKO1, November 24, 2022, <a href=).

⁸¹ Cheung Shi-Yan (張仕仁), “CUHK students who ‘lied down’ and ‘raised placards’ after the graduation ceremony accused of disrupting order, alumni criticized suppression of speech and warned of braindrain” (中大生畢業禮後「躺平」及「舉牌」被指干擾秩序 舊生批打壓言論趕走學術精英), Radio Free Asia, November 10, 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/htm/hk-cuhk-11102023031444.html>.

installed gates and access control systems since the protests ended.⁸² A student at CUHK said:

Everything we distribute and post, the school would record it, or make a copy, especially on campus, the security guards would watch us, and they'd take down information—like our leaflets—it's obvious that they're surveilling us.... In the past, there were lots of people running booths on campus, but in the last couple of years, whatever booths you run—political or not—the security guards would come if you didn't register with the school.⁸³

An academic described the behavior of campus security guards since the imposition of the National Security Law: “The security guards on campus have become this sort of weird political force where they'll go and take down anything that is remotely controversial and they're completely unaccountable.”⁸⁴

A student said the National Security Law and the enhanced role of security guards had altered the power dynamics on campus:

If you're holding a loudspeaker to promote things on campus, the security guards will move quickly to follow you.... [T]he security guards think they have the power to do anything. Some guards have a police background, and during 2019 they ... harassed the students ... so [now] students are wary about the security guards.... In the past we had a lot of freedom to discuss things, now we'd be cautious.... On campus you feel that you are on the side without power. Even security guards have more power than you do, you feel this change, and you feel helpless about it.⁸⁵

⁸² “(University turned tourist attraction) HKU ‘attracts too many tourists,’ 6 tips to solve the overcrowding problem, joint platform advocates installation of gates for official tour groups” 【大學變景點】港大「太吸客」6 招解人滿之患 平台倡辦官方遊覽團加裝閘機, *Hong Kong Economic Times* (香港經濟日報), February 27, 2024, <https://topick.hket.com/article/3712916/%E3%80%90%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E8%AE%8A%E6%99%AF%E9%BB%9E%E3%80%91%E6%B8%AF%E5%A4%A7%E3%80%8C%E5%A4%AA%E5%90%B8%E5%AE%A2%E3%80%8D%E6%8B%9B%E8%A7%A3%E4%BA%BA%E6%BB%BF%E4%B9%8B%E6%82%A3%E3%80%80%E5%B9%B3%E5%8F%B0%E5%80%A1%E8%BE%A6%E5%AE%98%E6%96%B9%E9%81%8A%E8%A6%BD%E5%9C%98%E5%8A%A0%E8%A3%9D%E9%96%98%E6%A9%9F>.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with student Gregory C. (pseudonym), CUHK, October 25, 2022.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “E”, October 26, 2022.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with student Kathy W. (pseudonym), HKU, November 3, 2022.

IV. Censorship and Self-Censorship

The university and the dean ... defined academic freedom very narrowly and I was told that basically I could teach anything I wanted as long as it wouldn't encourage students to act upon it.... [W]ell, if I'm teaching, say, something having to do with democracy in the classroom, how am I to know if they're going to go out into the public sphere and post artwork or try to assemble?... Basically, as soon as a student acts upon what they've learned in the classroom, that's when we potentially become endangered because we are potentially inciting them to break the law.

—Academic “F”, October 28, 2022

Both faculty members and students said that since the National Security Law came into effect in 2020, they widely self-censor to avoid getting into trouble with the authorities. They told Human Rights Watch that this was due to a combination of uncertainty, fear, and a lack of support or outright complicity of university authorities. They said self-censorship takes place in the classrooms, when academics and students write and publish academic articles, when academics apply for funding, and when they deliberate over which speakers to invite to conferences and events. While self-censorship is prevalent, direct censorship is rarer, impacting mostly those whose work focuses on modern Chinese and Hong Kong politics. Universities also censor student publications, communications, and events.

In-class Discussions

One academic reported that administrators had repeatedly told them to stop offering a course on a topic the Chinese government considers sensitive.⁸⁶ But other than this example of direct censorship, interviewees reported self-censorship as prevalent in university classrooms. Most students and academics interviewed acknowledged some form of self-censorship, especially when discussing political topics, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and Hong Kong independence. One scholar who studies China feels that the National Security Law was a “powerful game changer” for her work:

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “D,” October 26, 2022.

In the classroom, some things ... I used to teach every year in the past, I would not talk about it ... even if I still teach the topics, I would not teach it exactly the same way as I did in terms of content. I believe that everyone who teaches the humanities have made these adjustments.⁸⁷

Another academic said he is being careful, but he nonetheless feels like he is “walking on a minefield”:

You are extra careful because it's just walking on a minefield basically. You don't know at what point you'll hit something that might spiral out of hand ... [T]he short version is, I didn't feel like I could speak fairly.⁸⁸

Students also report self-censorship in the classrooms. One student said:

I feel obviously that professors are very careful in what they say. They don't say they're censoring but for example they would say things in a joking manner, “If you say these things, be careful of being arrested.” They don't avoid these things, but they wouldn't say things so directly.... [Now] anything about politics, they'd tread lightly without elaborations or details.⁸⁹

As noted earlier, self-censorship varies depending on the person's perceived power dynamics vis-à-vis the Chinese government. Two academics from the Global North noted that they were less susceptible to government pressure compared to other university staff. One said:

I'm a foreign faculty member, so obviously I have a different position in terms of government.... The repercussions aren't the same for me as they would be for local colleagues for talking about political issues. So at least among a lot of the faculty, we still talk about some of these topics in

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “R”, June 8, 2023.

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “J”, November 2, 2022.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with student Danny L. (pseudonym), November 10, 2022.

conversations with each other, but I think that it has disappeared from the classroom.⁹⁰

Much of the self-censorship is anticipatory, as Hong Kong's political situation quickly deteriorated. Interviewees mentioned watching the developing environment to try to gauge the red lines. One academic said:

We have to err on the safe side of things. It wasn't clear, for example, whether you could teach about Tiananmen. And at this point, with the developments going on, I think the lines become even blurrier and so informally, a lot of self-censorship, a lot of guessing going in, a lot of looking at the environment and trying to figure out what is okay, what not.⁹¹

A few academics interviewed expressed exasperation at others' self-censorship. One said:

One of my colleagues ... scrubbed their syllabus of anything they thought was remotely critical or controversial. And that would include really sort of dry academic commentary ... really kind of mainstream conventional ... material.... Someone who taught jurisprudence legal philosophy told me they had removed any mention of Rawls, they had removed Locke.... So basically this legal philosophy syllabus now seems to consist of one jurisprudential thinker who's sort of small C conservative.... [And] this syllabus [is] on a subject that you'd think would not really be under scrutiny at all.⁹²

However, other academics said they need to protect themselves—and their students—from future repercussions. As one put it:

There is this looming fear that teaching some of these topics could have repercussions further down the line. And I think that's one of the main points or functions of the NSL is that it makes us fear something that we

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “K”, November 2, 2022.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “J”, November 2, 2022.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with academic “X”, June 5, 2024.

don't know if it's even really there, this idea that maybe in the future this could be used against us.... So I think that the point is really to ... instill this kind of fear or concern or worry that this will have repercussions down the line even though it's not explicitly spelled out in that way.⁹³

Another academic said that she had to be vigilant all the time since the National Security Law passed to make sure that she and others do not say anything in the classroom that puts the students in danger, including later on:

Firstly, you don't know who's sitting there. Secondly, you'd be worried about the students' reactions, because they are also under threat from the NSL. So they feel, "oh my god, can I still talk about this?" [What you say] can make the students panic. Also, if the students make a presentation, say certain things, then I must think, "How should I protect them?" ... I'd have to consider whether there is anyone recording. Let's take another example: PowerPoint presentations. These days students love to take pictures, so when students show PowerPoint presentations, I have to handle that too.... Each class has a dozen, fifty or several hundred students ... it all depends on how each of them views the issue and how they view each other, you have to take care of these dynamics ... it's not about me, it's about my students.... If one of them gets into trouble in the future, and [the authorities] say they're your students, you give them this kind of education... what I say [in class] would get this student in trouble.... So ... I have no right to say anything that might be out of line.⁹⁴

Since the imposition of the National Security Law, the Hong Kong government has encouraged people to report anonymously to the authorities those who violate "national security," including by setting up a hotline for the purpose, resulting in what one academic described as a "culture of snitching."⁹⁵ Academics and students alike said they feared being reported by students who hold pro-Chinese government views. One student said:

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "K", November 2, 2022.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "R", June 8, 2023.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "H". An HKU student reportedly reported two academics at the university to the hotline for an unspecified violation. Timothy McLaughlin, "How Academic Freedom Ends," *The Atlantic*, June 6, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/06/china-hong-kong-freedom/619088>.

Everyone has more concerns because there are mainland students here. Would they report us?... [T]hese kinds of concerns make us don't dare to say so-called political topics during interactive tutorials ... when you don't know their backgrounds or political stance, you are more afraid to talk about these things.⁹⁶

An academic at CUHK said:

After the NSL hotline [was set up], everyone worries: If I fail a student or give them bad grades because their assignments are not up to standard, will there be any consequences [for me]? In the past, students can use normal procedures, like appealing their grades or leave us bad teaching evaluations, but after the hotline everyone thinks: If I fail a student, would they report us to the hotline?⁹⁷

Academics said they worried after receiving these complaints, including whether the government may be behind it. One said:

It made me feel very uncomfortable teaching that class because at that point you're just wondering who is the student that was writing you this? And so you feel like you're being noticed, basically. You feel like you're being watched and you don't know what you can say that will be reported again.⁹⁸

The academic Rowena He said she tried to seek help from relevant offices because she was receiving harassing emails from a pro-Beijing mainland student. The student humiliated her by writing, “Even at a third-rate American university you’re just a lecturer,” and used a derogatory and discriminatory term, “northern chick (北姑),” to refer to her, saying she was unqualified to teach. The academic said that she was told nothing could be done to stop such emails. She said:

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with student Ken N. (pseudonym), CUHK, October 26, 2022.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “T”, May 17, 2024.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “J”, November 2, 2022.

I tried hard to seek help.... I wrote to different offices. And I was being told that there was nothing they could do, even given these harassing emails.... They said, you can report them to the police. I felt very disappointed.⁹⁹

As a result of this atmosphere, students and faculty calibrate what they say depending on who is in the room, and how big the class is. One HKU student said:

In class, to be honest, everyone is cautious around mainland students, though I know in [one class] mainland students would support [human] rights ... so that's a relatively safe space.¹⁰⁰ But if it's a bigger class, like a hundred or two hundred students, then I wouldn't discuss these things.... I feel it depends on class size ... if there are mainlanders and you don't know who they are, then we ... worry about being reported ... plus it depends on the teacher ... you need to know where they stand and so you can feel more relaxed in writing.¹⁰¹

Students and academics were particularly cautious when, during the pandemic and even afterwards, some universities told faculty to record their classes on Zoom. An academic said:

At the time ... some colleagues were [already] worried about students complaining about them, complaining that they talk about the protests during class. But there was nothing we could do, because it was a policy from above you've got to do it, though I also know that some colleagues don't actually record the classes, but even then, there was a sense of white terror, and you know you had to be a lot more cautious when speaking.¹⁰²

Some report that they have sought to manage the situation by not recording or by turning off the recording during sensitive conversations. But even these efforts have not been entirely successful. Another academic said:

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rowena He, October 26, 2022.

¹⁰⁰ This line has been further edited to remove identifying details.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with student Kathy W., HKU, November 3, 2022.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with academic "P", January 8, 2023.

I would kind of encourage students to talk openly and tell them, “Oh, don't worry, this won't be recorded.” Or in some of their writing assignments, I said, “Feel free to write about any topic you like and remember, it will just be me reading it.” And I noticed in 2020, a lot of students were writing about and reflecting on the experience of the previous year and in relation to some of the topics we were looking at. And then that kind of stopped, or they would refer to it in sort of veiled terms of saying like, oh, the issues last year and things like that.... And then there was also a retreat in terms of the students even feeling like I really didn't know what they were thinking or feeling a lot of the time. I just know that there was a lot of fear and apprehension and ... that I think they were treading very carefully.¹⁰³

When Publishing Academic Articles

Academics have faced pressure from universities and academic publishers to withdraw articles on topics deemed “sensitive” in Hong Kong, such as writing about the protests. Reports of self-censorship are even more prevalent. Four academics, all of whom focus on China and Hong Kong issues, said they were not able to publish certain pieces of their work due to censorship.

In one case, visual artist and academic Justin Wong said Baptist University administrators reported him to the police in November 2021 for his academic writing—which discussed the activist art of the 2019 protests—a claim that the university has denied.¹⁰⁴ Wong told Human Rights Watch:

My boss told me, “Your essay has problems,” because of what I wrote about the protests and some of the cartoons in it. He said it would be a bit sensitive ... so I said ... “If that’s the case then don’t distribute it.” After several days, suddenly, my boss said the university has called the police. I was totally shocked ... the essay ... was purely a discussion.... I didn’t think they would go and report [me] to the police ... the university management

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “O”, November 18, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ “Justin Wong says his anti-[extradition bill] research was reported to police, HKBU denies. Wong: resigns professorship and moves to UK, School: will always protect academic freedom” (黃照達稱反修例研究遭報警 浸大否認 黃：觸發辭教席移英 校方：一直護學術自由), *Ming Pao* (明報), January 3, 2023, archived at <https://archive.ph/n1b0a>.

didn't talk to me, and my boss told me directly that the police had been contacted ... my boss ... and those responsible for the project, they were very scared.... As soon as they found out that the police has been contacted, the [publisher] withdrew the magazines and pretended nothing had happened.¹⁰⁵

Another academic said that they were unable to publish an article in an academic journal edited by a school at a Hong Kong university:

At the 11th hour, the editor told me she can't publish it because the head of the school told her it's too dangerous now. She didn't want to put the editorial team at risk. And later [the head of the school] told me that every day ... he received emails and messages from the Liaison Office ... apparently [they] dropped my article because of pressure from the central government's liaison office in Hong Kong.¹⁰⁶

The academic eventually published this article in a foreign language. Another academic reported a similar incident with another academic publisher who decided not to print her article—which she described as on a “mild” topic—just before it went to print, though she did not know the reasons for the decision:

That [academic] publisher put a stop to it after I've already read the third galley [proof] ... I had to agree ... if they wouldn't take it to be printed what can I do? I didn't contest the decision or kick up a big fuss because ... the publication involves lots of people, so I felt like it was a wise choice ... I don't know if any [official] had contacted them about it, the publisher didn't tell me, but we all know that at this point, if you keep going there would be trouble.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, academic “N” said he withdrew publication of a book in Chinese because the publisher was worried about finding a printer and the consequences:

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Justin Wong on January 8, 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “A”, October 23, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “R”, June 8, 2023.

A publisher friend was very willing to publish it for me but he ... said after publication there may be problems. Actually, there are problems even before publication. He said now it is not easy to get printing companies to print things. He said my book discusses Hong Kong activists who promote Hong Kong independence ... he said the book may have to be edited before bringing it to the printer. So, along the way, I fear harming this friend, because this friend is also in academia, so I said let's not print it ... if I had taken it outside Hong Kong, let's say to Taiwan, then would it bring more problems to me?¹⁰⁸

In some of these cases, the censorship in Hong Kong and pressure to withdraw articles has reached beyond borders. Some of these publications are published by foreign universities and distributed globally. One academic said:

The sad thing about the journal is the fact that it is published in [a western country], but since the editorial team is here, they are very cautious and they censored me is what happened, to be very frank. So I was very upset at the moment, but what can we do? I had to find another journal to publish it.¹⁰⁹

Some academics who write on contemporary Hong Kong and Chinese politics feel the pressure to self-censor “at the moment of writing.” One said:

[I]t is hard to articulate voices critical of the government. It's not that you can't criticize the government or the politicians ... but likely that moment when you write, you have more worries ... [I have to be] more careful in framing things to the best of my abilities, and not trying to infringe on whatever national security concerns that might be there. This is new, and these concerns are invisible, and not very clear. It's not like I go to 7-Eleven to steal a pack of gum, that is clearly wrong. But [the National Security Law] has no clarity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “N”, November 17, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “A”, October 23, 2022.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “Q”, January 8, 2023.

Academics evaluate risks not only in terms of what they write, but also other aspects of the research process, including with whom they are writing. One said:

I have a paper coming out.... But I know that two of the other authors of that paper are still working in Hong Kong. And we had a discussion about whether this would affect us. I think as an expat, I have an extra layer of safety, and one of the other authors is an expat as well, but we were worried more about the PhD student.... So we did have those kinds of conversations ... about “Is this safe? Are we going to get reported for this?” ... [T]here's just this sense of fear.¹¹¹

Students similarly reported that they self-censor, or their professors effectively censored what they could write, when choosing topics for their writing. But often the limits of what could be safely written about were not all that apparent, as both academics and students—and their supervisors and editors—weigh up the ramifications of publishing material that could bring them trouble. An HKU student said:

When I brainstormed with my advisor on my thesis, we have discussed ... [a topic related to] the 2019 protests, but my advisor said, “This is too dangerous, let’s not write it.” So I didn’t write it, to be honest ... I didn’t want to cross the line.¹¹²

One department administrator reported having a conversation with a colleague who, despite his reassurances, seemed reluctant to let a student write about a former Chinese government leader. He said:

A colleague asked me about a student who wanted to write about [the late Chinese leader] Deng Xiaoping ... it wasn’t very sensitive like the Tiananmen Massacre ... my first answer was “don’t be nervous, I don’t think this is a sensitive topic.” Secondly this is self-censorship. If you feel this topic has sufficient academic merit, just go for it, because that’s what we do here, scholarship, not because it might offend someone or implicate national

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “O”, November 18, 2022.

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview with student Kathy W., HKU, November 3, 2022.

security concerns, that should not be our concerns. But in the end, she decided she was not comfortable.¹¹³

Self-censorship has impacts outside academia, as many academics also write to participate in public discussions of issues. One academic said a colleague deleted all his own media articles after the National Security Law was enacted:

After the NSL passed, one of my colleagues ... deleted all his articles on [a Hong Kong media outlet] ... he was very nervous, very fearful, like an impending disaster was about to happen ... the fear was extreme before and after the imposition of the NSL because you did not know how it was going to be used.¹¹⁴

Another academic said he took some of his research out of the public domain:

As a scholar, there is yet another dimension, we call it “knowledge exchange”—publishing publicly, not necessarily just academic publishing ... actually we had some data that we made public ... but after the NSL, all the previously public information concerning China and Hong Kong, I have changed it to private mode.¹¹⁵

Funding Applications

The University Grants Committee ... [is] becoming a “cash machine” for anti-China and anti-Hong Kong scholars. Those so-called studies provided pseudo-academic theories and brainwashing mobilization for the subsequent social unrest.

— Chinese state-owned newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*, February 8, 2022¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “Q”, January 8, 2023.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “N”, November 17, 2022.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “L”, November 3, 2022.

¹¹⁶ “UGC Inside Story 2/Investigative Report/ UGC becomes a “cash machine” for Hong Kong scholars” (教資會黑幕 2/調查報道/離晒譜 教資會淪亂港學棍「提款機」), *Ta Kung Pao* (大公报), February 8, 2022, <http://www.takungpao.com.hk/news/232109/2022/0208/684110.html>.

The fact that your academic survival, your professional future is tied to a grant funded by a government, that itself is very problematic.

— Rowena He, CUHK, October 26, 2022

There are growing concerns over the continued independence of the government institutions, the University Grants Committee (UGC) and the Research Grants Council (RGC), which sets up panels of academics to review and approve applications for General Research Fund grants.

In 2022, Chinese government-owned newspapers *Wen Wei Po* and *Ta Kung Pao* began to attack the UGC, accusing it of “using public money to subsidize Hong Kong independence,”¹¹⁷ and alleged that the RGC is “dominated by so-called scholars who are involved in political resistance” and served as “the ATM machine for pro-independence and anti-China scholars.”¹¹⁸

Some academics interviewed expressed concern that Chinese Communist Party mouthpieces were “attacking the independence of how research funds are being allocated.”¹¹⁹ They described this as a “bad omen,” signaling greater political control over the allocation process.¹²⁰ But others said they have had no problem accessing funding. Academics have pointed out that as the process is opaque (“pretty random” said one¹²¹), it is difficult to determine whether political pressure was at work behind the scenes. One academic said:

About 40 percent of research grants get funded and, you know, why you don't get funded is never very clear. I did know somebody who was

¹¹⁷ “Ta Kung Pao exposes shady story behind inciting violence, UGC public funds support ‘Hong Kong independence’” (大公報揭煽暴黑幕 教資會公帑資助「港獨」), *Wen Wei Po* (文匯報), February 7, 2022, <https://www.wenweipo.com/a/202202/07/AP62006a40e4b03103e0c89060.html>.

¹¹⁸ “Benefitting her own friends, Hong Kong scholar responsible for causing chaos in Hong Kong appointed as RGC reviewer” (益自己友 亂港學棍任研資局評審), *Wen Wei Po* (文匯報), February 9, 2022, <https://www.wenweipo.com/a/202202/09/AP620307a3e4b03103e0c90740.html> and archived at: <https://archive.ph/h7bYx>.

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “J”, November 2, 2022.

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “A”, October 23, 2022.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “E,” October 26, 2022.

planning on doing research into Hong Kongers who had gone to the UK and didn't get funding and who knows what's political and what's not.¹²²

Another academic said:

There can be a hundred reasons why they don't give you the grant, or they say they've found some experts, but if the experts are very "red"—pro-Beijing—then they won't tell you why they aren't giving the grant to you ... you will never know.¹²³

Some academics believe there is pressure to self-censor while applying for the General Research Fund. As one from Baptist University said:

There is a sense of concern that if you have a more politically sensitive topic that it won't be funded or if it's something that could be considered to be somewhat politically sensitive, then it won't be funded. So I think [there is] a bit of an inclination to avoid some of those topics when applying for funding in large part because securing these grants is one of the main contributing factors to contract renewal and tenure and promotion. It is absolutely fundamental that we receive these grants.¹²⁴

Another academic said:

At this point, especially with what's going on about the Tiananmen Massacre ... all the campuses removed any sort of mention and statue and commemoration, and they basically outlawed the vigil, at this point, I don't think anyone would submit a research proposal in Hong Kong to study [the Tiananmen Massacre]. So then it never gets into a position where you can say, well, this got rejected because [of politics].¹²⁵

¹²² Human Rights Watch interview with academic "B", October 25, 2022.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "R", June 8, 2023.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "K", November 2, 2022.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "J", November 2, 2022.

One academic said that they applied for funding to research a political topic about China and were rejected several years in a row, even though their work is internationally recognized.¹²⁶

Speakers Invited to Campus

In November 2023, Hong Kong University cancelled without explanation an upcoming lecture by Tim Owens, a British lawyer defending the detained pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai. The lecture was to discuss “the growing threats to judicial independence and the rule of law with particular focus on the administration of criminal justice.”¹²⁷ Several academics interviewed said they now worry about who they can invite to speak at events and conferences. One said:

[We] organized quite a number of conferences, including on Taiwan and cross-strait relations with people from both sides.... Now, there's an issue because you can't invite people from the DPP (Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party) or academics who are “green” (affiliated with the DPP) because the government won't get them visas to come here anyway.¹²⁸

The same academic said for an upcoming academic roundtable, they had invited a speaker from the consulate of a Western government. The academic then received a call from one of the two Beijing-owned newspapers inquiring about the event. The academic told Human Rights Watch: “Maybe because the speaker is from the [Western] consulate, they don't like it. But they just try to know more about the event, and I don't think they're in the position to stop it. But that creates another kind of environment, of course.”

That “kind of environment” refers to regular intimidation academics face from Beijing-controlled papers (see Harassment of Academics). Another academic said:

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “D,” October 26, 2022.

¹²⁷ Amy Hawkins, “Hong Kong lecture by British barrister linked to Jimmy Lai trial cancelled,” *The Guardian*, November 14, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/14/hong-kong-lecture-by-british-barrister-linked-to-jimmy-lai-trial-cancelled>.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “A,” October 23, 2022. The Democratic Progressive Party is one of two major political parties in Taiwan, which is often accused by the Chinese government as advocating for Taiwan independence.

Can we still invite some foreign experts? Let's say I have a conference on [a sensitive topic in China] ... you know they would not be able to enter Hong Kong, you would not invite them. On Zoom, where you invite scholars to present their papers, would they affect your conference? Or, say, you research Hong Kong ... do you talk about the occupation of the Legislative Council [during the 2019 protests]?... Let's say you organize an event. There is this very important work, maybe you think it has violated the NSL, but it is an important phenomenon. Do you organize discussions about it? Do you invite the person behind this work? You organize it and it'd be risky. Everything you do you subject it to risk [assessment].¹²⁹

Censorship of Student Publications, Communications, and Events

Universities have also censored publications, especially those affiliated with the student unions while they were still functional. Polytechnic University ordered the student union to take down one of its periodical magazines in August 2021 due to “inappropriate content.” But it never told the students what it was referring to. The union suspected that it was an interview with a group that provides support to pro-democracy protesters in prison.¹³⁰ CUHK evicted the student union publisher and the student radio station from their offices citing “inspection and maintenance” issues. The student radio shuttered in April 2022 after 23 years in operation.¹³¹ The student publication, after losing access to their on-campus office and their funding, changed their name from *Chinese University Student Press* to *University Community Press* as CUHK would not let them continue using the university's name in their publication. In March 2024, CUHK Office of Student Affairs took away copies of the publications, along with the racks that were previously available to hold the student publications, claiming that “the content is not comprehensive nor

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “R”, June 8, 2023.

¹³⁰ “PolyU orders removal of student newspaper, saying the content is inappropriate and untrue. Student union Editor-in-chief: school did not mention specific content, materials related to WALL-FARE” (理大指令學生報下架 指內容不當不實 學生會總編：校方未提具體內容 料關石牆花訪問), *Ming Pao* (明報), August 25, 2021, <https://news.mingpao.com/pns/%e6%b8%af%e8%81%9e/article/20210825/s00002/1629830658987/%e7%90%86%e5%a4%a7%e6%8c%87%e4%bb%a4%e5%ad%b8%e7%94%9f%e5%a0%b1%e4%b8%8b%e6%9e%b6-%e6%8c%87%e5%85%a7%e5%ae%b9%e4%b8%8d%e7%95%b6%e4%b8%8d%e5%af%a6-%e5%ad%b8%e7%94%9f%e6%9c%83%e7%b8%bd%e7%b7%a8-%e6%a0%a1%e6%96%b9%e6%9c%aa%e6%8f%90%e5%85%b7%e9%ab%94%e5%85%a7%e5%ae%b9-%e6%96%99%e9%97%9c%e7%9f%b3%e7%89%86%e8%8a%b1%e8%a8%aa%e5%95%8f>.

¹³¹ 中大校園電台 CUHK Campus Radio's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/cuhkcampusradio>.

truthful” and that the university had received “a lot of complaints” about the publication.¹³²

Since the National Security Law was enacted, universities have stopped providing spaces for events on anything deemed politically sensitive. In February 2021, HKBU cancelled the World Press Photo exhibition, which showed photos of the 2019 protests.¹³³ HKU in February 2021 warned its student union against showing a documentary about Hong Kong independence advocate and alumnus Edward Leung. The school administration provided a nine-page document to the student union, complete with precise screenshots of the film in which Leung spoke in support of independence, and warned that the film showing would bring the organizers “extremely high risks” under the National Security Law¹³⁴



A photo showing the magazine rack and the magazines that the university took away, March 2024. © Private

Student groups now have to conform to greater restrictions and censorship by university administrators when organizing activities

¹³² “Take away the University Community Press, CUHK: The publication is not recognized by the university, which is responsible for maintaining a safe campus” (收走《大學社區報》中大：刊物未得大學認可、有責任維護安全校園), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), March 26, 2024, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E7%A4%BE%E9%81%8B/%E6%94%B6%E8%B5%B0%E3%80%8A%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%A4%BE%E5%8D%80%E5%A0%B1%E3%80%8B-%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%A7%EF%BC%9A%E5%88%8A%E7%89%A9%E6%9C%AA%E5%BE%97%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E8%AA%8D%E5%8F%AF%E3%80%81%E6%9C%89%E8%B2%AC%E4%BB%BB%E7%B6%AD%E8%AD%B7%E5%AE%89%E5%85%A8%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%92>.

¹³³ “Hong Kong Baptist University cancels World Press Photo exhibition citing ‘safety and security’ concerns,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 26, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/02/26/breaking-hong-kong-baptist-university-cancels-world-press-photo-exhibition-citing-safety-and-security-concerns>.

¹³⁴ Selina Cheng, “Security law: University of Hong Kong warns students to axe film screening about jailed activist Edward Leung, union vows to proceed,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 3, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/02/03/security-law-university-of-hong-kong-warns-students-to-axe-film-screening-about-jailed-activist-edward-leung-union-vows-to-proceed>.

or advertising for events.¹³⁵ They tend to stick to non-political topics, such as student welfare or activities.¹³⁶ A student leader at Lingnan University said the administration has banned student groups from sending mass emails unless they have been vetted and approved.¹³⁷ Another student at CUHK told Human Rights Watch that it is now very difficult to organize events:

It's hard even just organizing events—like holding a booth or booking a venue. I feel that the school has more and more restrictions over student activities, even when our activities have nothing political. I feel that as long as we do anything that is not what the school wants us to do, there is little support for doing them. Like a film showing, especially if they are politically sensitive, I feel it's impossible. The security guards, the gated entrance, the absence of a Democracy Wall, I feel it's impossible to organize any exhibitions.¹³⁸

In 2022, at a CUHK arts fair, the university administration insisted on covering up an image of the Goddess of Democracy, which the students had printed on the stage backdrop. The university reportedly told students that the image would “bring unspecified speculation

¹³⁵ “PolyU terminates recognition of student union, which must remove the university's name and move off campus; more than 80 organizations may be affected” (理大終止承認學生會 需停用校名、遷離校園 逾 80 個組織或受影響), *HKO1*, March 26, 2024, <https://www.hko1.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/759581/%E7%90%86%E5%A4%A7%E7%B5%82%E6%AD%A2%E6%89%BF%E8%AA%8D%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83-%E9%9C%80%E5%81%9C%E7%94%A8%E6%A0%A1%E5%90%8D-%E9%81%B7%E9%9B%A2%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%92-%E9%80%BE80%E5%80%8B%E7%B5%84%E7%B9%94%E6%88%96%E5%8F%97%E5%BD%B1%E9%9F%BF>; “CUHK requests student newspaper and radio station to vacate premises, citing end of term and maintenance” (校方以莊期完結及維修為由 要求中大學生報及電台遷出會室), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), April 21, 2022, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E7%A4%BE%E9%81%8B/%E6%A0%A1%E6%96%B9%E4%BB%A5%E8%8E%8A%E6%9C%9F%E5%AE%8C%E7%B5%90%E5%8F%8A%E7%B6%AD%E4%BF%AE%E7%82%BA%E7%94%B1-%E8%A6%81%E6%B1%82%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E5%A0%B1%E5%8F%8A%E9%9B%BB%E5%8F%B0%E9%81%B7%E5%87%BA%E6%9C%83%E5%AE%A4>.

¹³⁶ For some of these restrictions, see: Fung Hiu Tung (馮曉彤) and Lau Yue-shing (劉裕城), “(The Eight Student Unions) Reorganizing after dissolution, forced off campus, discussions with the universities: What they faced under the crackdown” (【八大學生會】解散後重組、遷出校園、與校方有商有量——他們在狹縫下面對甚麼), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), September 3, 2022, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E7%A4%BE%E9%81%8B/%E3%80%90%E5%85%AB%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9C%83%E3%80%91%E8%A7%A3%E6%95%A3%E5%BE%8C%E9%87%8D%E7%B5%84%E3%80%81%E9%81%B7%E5%87%BA%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%92%E3%80%81%E8%88%87%E6%A0%A1%E6%96%B9%E6%9C%89%E5%95%86%E6%9C%89%E9%87%8F%E2%80%94%E2%80%94%E4%BB%96%E5%80%91%E5%9C%A8%E7%8B%B9%E7%B8%AB%E4%B8%8B%E9%9D%A2%E5%B0%8D%E7%94%9A%E9%BA%BC>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with student Danny Lau, CUHK, November 10, 2022.

from the outside,” and “brought unhappy memories from the past” at an entertainment event.¹³⁹

At Baptist University, in February 2024, the administration wrote to students whom they suspected of having established an Instagram account that had expressed concerns over the merger of two university departments, saying that “it has received complaints” about the account.¹⁴⁰ The university accused the students of “propagating information that affects the university’s reputation” and “inciting an atmosphere of confrontation among the University’s community,” and demanded that the students provide information on the group, and threatened them with disciplinary hearings.¹⁴¹ The university, when contacted by the press, said “students must abide by the law.” The students said they had no idea which post or what content was problematic.

¹³⁹ “CUHK Art Market Backdrop featuring image of the Goddess of Democracy is covered up, students quote school officials: worries of attracting outside speculation” (中大藝墟舞台背景板印民女像遭遮蓋 學生引述校方：憂引來外界揣測), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), September 3, 2022, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E6%94%BF%E7%B6%93/%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%A7%E8%97%9D%E5%A2%9F%E8%88%9E%E5%8F%B0%E8%83%8C%E6%99%AF%E6%9D%BF%E5%8D%B0%E6%B0%91%E5%A5%B3%E5%83%8F%E9%81%AD%E9%81%AE%E8%93%8B-%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E5%BC%95%E8%BF%B0%E6%A0%A1%E6%96%B9%EF%BC%9A%E6%86%82%E5%BC%95%E4%BE%86%E5%A4%96%E7%95%8C%E6%8F%A3%E6%B8%AC>.

¹⁴⁰ “HKBU requires students to submit IG information to the ‘Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences MergerConcern Group,’ saying it affects the university’s reputation” (浸大要求學生交「文社科院合併關注組」IG 資料 指影響大學聲譽), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), February 26, 2024, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E6%94%BF%E7%B6%93/%E6%B5%B8%E5%A4%A7%E8%A6%81%E6%B1%82%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E4%BA%A4%E3%80%8C%E6%96%87%E7%A4%BE%E7%A7%91%E9%99%A2%E5%90%88%E4%BD%B5%E9%97%9C%E6%B3%A8%E7%B5%84%E3%80%8D%E8%B3%87%E6%96%99-%E6%8C%87%E5%BD%B1%E9%9F%BF%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%E8%81%B2%E8%AD%BD>. Some students and faculty opposed the merger, complaining about inadequate consultation by the university administration and concerns over how the merger may impact funding for these programs and on their academic careers.

¹⁴¹ “HKBU requires students to submit IG information to the ‘Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences MergerConcern Group,’ saying it affects the university’s reputation” (浸大要求學生交「文社科院合併關注組」IG 資料 指影響大學聲譽), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), February 26, 2024.

V. Harassment of Academics

Hong Kong University governing council's decision to fire professor Benny Tai ... [is] a good start in cutting off the black hands behind university politics.... Now that the cancer of Benny Tai has been removed, the reputation of the century-old University of Hong Kong will shine brightly again!

— *China Daily* editorial, July 30, 2020¹⁴²

For us, the NSL's threats ... more importantly is about changing the mechanisms regarding how colleagues are assessed: What kind of experts do they get for these important assessments and where did they come from? It is about [changing] how the game is played, and ... making those who are usually outspoken to [know] that they are not welcomed here.

— Academic "R", June 8, 2023

Several academics perceived to be pro-democracy have been targeted by Beijing-controlled newspapers and are subject to virulent campaigns that intrude into their personal life, destroy their reputation, and insinuate that they may get arrested for violating the National Security Law. Hong Kong authorities have denied visas to foreign academics or refused to extend or renew them. Universities have also fired academics perceived to be pro-democracy, did not renew their contracts, or denied their tenure in opaque circumstances. Some academics have also quietly left their jobs and the city, with some citing concerns about security and the city's deteriorating political environment.

Defamation and Intimidation by the Chinese Government-Controlled Press

The smearing and harassment of academics and pro-democracy individuals by *Wen Wei Po* and *Tai Kung Pao* often happens in concert with other pro-Beijing press, such as *Oriental Daily*, and well-known Beijing loyalists, notably the former Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-Ying. These attacks appear aimed at creating an atmosphere of fear among

¹⁴² "Hong Kong people's public opinion: Benny Tai's dismissal is a good start to cut off the black hand of campus politics" (香港各界及舆论: 戴耀廷被革职是斩断校园政治黑手的好开端), *Xinhua*, July 30, 2020, <http://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202007/30/WS5f227300a310a859d09db15e.html>.

academics: that someone is always watching them, what they research, say publicly, and where they get their funding.

Ching-Kwan Lee, a prominent sociology professor then working at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), was one of the most high-profile academics attacked by the Beijing press. Beginning November 16, 2020, the two newspapers took aim at Lee.¹⁴³ They first accused her of “spreading independence” (in Cantonese, independence [獨] is a homonym of poison [毒]) in a May 2020 speech she gave during an online panel.¹⁴⁴ Lee had said that as an international city, “Hong Kong does not belong to China, it belongs to the world.” Several months later, in March 2021, the two papers ran other articles “exposing” Lee, this time about a presentation she gave about the 2019 Hong Kong protests at a sociology conference. They said she had “used the cloak of academic freedom to support an agenda of Hong Kong independence.” The two newspapers, along with Leung Chun-Ying, repeatedly characterized her academic work as violating the National Security Law—even though Lee had made these statements months before the law came into effect. They also called her “the female version of Benny Tai”—a prominent Hong Kong academic whose ideas to peacefully occupy city streets led to the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and who has since been imprisoned. They urged the university to “stop sheltering” her, “to strictly handle the case as soon as possible,” and for Lee to turn herself in to the police.¹⁴⁵ In response to a media request, HKUST stated that, while stating that they respected “the freedom of speech that everyone enjoys and is entitled to under the Basic Law,” it also reminded “members of HKUST” to “abide by law.”¹⁴⁶ At the end of that school year in 2021, Lee quit HKUST at the end of her contract, and left Hong Kong.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ “HKUST scholar Ching-Kwan Lee falsely claims that Hong Kong does not belong to China” (科大学者李靜君妄言香港不屬於中國), *Ta Kung Pao* (大公報), November 16, 2020, <https://www.takungpao.com/news/232109/2020/1116/520886.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Lee was one of the speakers together with former legislator and activist Nathan Law, activist Joshua Wong and legal scholar Benny Tai organized by the Hong Kong Democracy Council on May 26, 2020, four days before the National Security Law came into effect.

¹⁴⁵ “Revealing the secrets of HKUST Professor Ching-Kwan Lee’s ‘declaration of independence’ under the guise of academic freedom” (揭秘科大教授李靜君 披學術自由外衣行「宣獨」之實), *Wen Wei Po* (文匯報), March 18, 2021, <https://www.wenweipo.com/a/202103/18/AP60533b42e4b04e1918cc09d9.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Rachel Wong, “Scholar who said ‘Hong Kong belongs to the world’ refutes pro-Beijing press claim she may have violated security law,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, November 19, 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/11/19/scholar-who-said-hong-kong-belongs-to-the-world-refutes-pro-beijing-press-claim-she-may-have-violated-security-law/>.

¹⁴⁷ Shui-Yin Sharon Yam and Ching-Kwan Lee, “Ideas Are Bullet-Proof: A Conversation with Ching Kwan Lee,” *Being Water* 6(3), September-December 2021, <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2022/03/08/ideas-are-bullet-proof>.

科大女教授宣獨涉違國安法

教界憂課堂播「獨」貽害學生 校方避答會否跟進



本港學界發生「黃師」事件，中小學系列尚有教育局把關跟進，至於大專院校的「獨師」問題，只能靠大學主動處理。

香港科技大學一名女教授被揭發今年5月出席所謂「美國香港民主委員會」網上論壇，竟然公然宣稱「香港不屬於中國」。有教育界及社會人士一致認為其言論涉嫌違背「港獨」訊息，擔心她會將激進立場帶入課堂，影響學生，促請科大嚴正處理，包括考慮對方是否適合擔任教務，以免下一代遭受貽害。有網民更質疑對方涉嫌違反國安法。科大昨日回覆香港文匯報查詢時強調科大成員須遵守法律，但未有提及會否跟進問題教師。

香港文匯報記者 姬文風

日前，網上廣傳一段攝於今年5月的網上論壇片段，科大社會科學部講座教授李靜君於發言時，竟公然稱「（香港）是全球化都市，所以我認為否認香港是一個中國城市是有利的」、「我認為我們不屬於中國」等違法訊息。

根據資料顯示，該論壇由所謂「美國香港民主委員會」（HKDC）主辦，此組織由「佔中三壯」之一的朱耀明之子朱敬民成立，成員包括前「香港單志」創黨主席鄭耀聰等。該會亦為美國所謂「香港人自由和選擇法案」的幕後推手，「宗旨」是勾結美國勢力以支持「香港自治」，李靜君本身亦是該會成員之一。



網上公然稱「香港非中國」

當日論壇可謂「群魔聚集」，主持人正是朱敬民，同場嘉賓包括「佔中三壯」之一的戴耀廷、前「香港單志」秘書長黃之鋒，均是著名的亂港分子。這份名單也充分顯示當日的論壇目的，正是宣揚違法「港獨」訊息。

雖然有關片段昨日已被HKDC轉為「私人」狀態，即拒絕公眾查閱，欲「毀屍滅跡」，以淡化事件，但消息已瞬間廣傳網絡，引起社會譁然，各界紛紛批評李靜君公然鼓吹「港獨」。由於她本身為科大學者，有人更將其稱為「科大亂港派」，促大學從速跟進，以免學生遭受荼毒。

黃錦良質疑是否適合任教

教聯會主席黃錦良接受傳媒訪問時指，李靜君於片段中提到「由於香港是國際都會……因此這城市不屬於中國會更有利」的說法是非常荒謬。他質問：「按這『說法』，那麼紐約是否不屬於美國，倫敦不屬於英國，巴黎不屬於法國？」他直斥有關說法無知，是最基本的理解都未能達到。尤其有關言論涉及鼓吹「港獨」，黃錦良質疑對方是否適合

於大學任教，促科大管理層好好了解事件，嚴肅處理。

馮煒光：不能小覷應辭退

前新聞統籌專員馮煒光昨日亦撰文指，李靜君的言論令人判定「她是想把香港從我國分裂出去」，等同「港獨」言論，各界不應小覷老師對學生的影響，促科大把她辭退，不要讓她貽害下一代，以免學生論為被外國或境外勢力利用的棋子。

網民倡警方國安處徹查

不少網民均認同大學應作出跟進，有人更建議警方國安處予以徹查。其中「Alan Chan」便質疑：「其實佢咁高姿態表態，是否已觸犯香港國安法呢？」「何佑仁」則批評：「作為一個教授，如果講乜都只係『佢認為』，唔需要邏輯及理據、現實、法理等等，唔講乜都係廢話！」「Simon Yung」更建議國安處，「一定唔可以放過破壞社會秩序安寧嘅亂港分子」。香港文匯報昨日就事件向科大查詢，科大發言人回覆指，科大尊重各人所享有、基本法賦予的言論自由，但強調科大成員須遵守法律。

A screenshot showing a Wen Wei Po article accusing Ching-Kwan Lee of having “harmed students” by spreading pro-independence ideas on November 17, 2020.

Wen Wei Po and *Tai Kung Pao* used a similar playbook in February 2022 against another academic, the Hong Kong Studies scholar Brian Fong.¹⁴⁸ Their allegations drew on Fong’s speeches and writing, such as a joint statement he signed in 2016, which advocated Hong Kong autonomy through peaceful resistance.¹⁴⁹ They said Fong had “colluded with foreign forces,” had a “subversive intention,” and had “incited” students and “spread pro-independence ideas on campus”—all vague allegations that could, if Fong were charged under the National Security Law, lead to penalties of up to life in prison. The newspapers said he “used academia to package anti-China [ideas],” to provide “spiritual nutrition for Hong Kong independence.”¹⁵⁰ They also accused the UGC of providing funding to him to build a database of autonomous political entities around the world, calling that platform

¹⁴⁸ Fong was then the associate director of the Academy of Hong Kong Studies in the Department of Asian and Policy Studies at the Education University of Hong Kong.

¹⁴⁹ Brian Fong and Max Wong (方志恒 and 王慧麟), Resolution for Hong Kong’s Future (香港前途決議文), April 21, 2016, <https://www.symedialab.com/talk/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%89%8D%E9%80%94%E6%B1%BA%E8%AD%B0%E6%96%87/>.

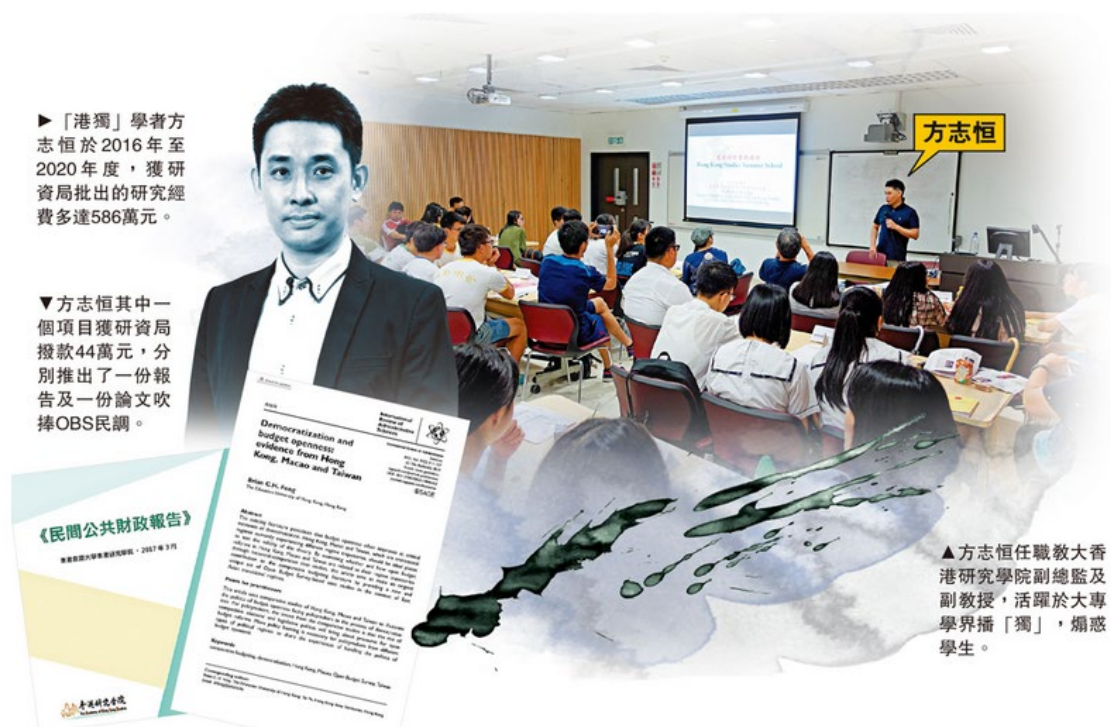
¹⁵⁰ “Collaborating with external forces/Brian Fong is active in colleges and universities and broadcasts ‘independence’” (勾連外力/方志恒活躍大專學界播「獨」), *Tai Kung Pao* (大公報), February 7, 2022, <http://www.takungpao.com.hk/news/232109/2022/0207/683715.html>.

“a fake academic platform.”¹⁵¹ Just four days after these accusations, the Education University took the platform offline, and said Fong “no longer works at the university.”¹⁵² Fong left Hong Kong in 2022.

大公報揭煽暴黑幕 教資會公帑資助「港獨」

🕒 2022-02-07 08:39:28 香港

(大公報記者 施文達 / 文 李斯達 / 資料) 立法會教育委員會明天將討論教育資助委員會 (UGC) 未來三年的撥款申請。這個掌握大學財權的教資會，是1965年設立的非法定諮詢組織，該會在香港回歸後權力與日俱增，今年支配約1000億元八大資助大學的營運經費及研究基金。教資會及其轄下負責審批研究經費的研究資助局，曾在2016年被審計署狠批賬目混亂，研究成果「離地」，沒有效益。



A screenshot showing a Tai Kung Pao article about Brian Fong on February 7, 2022.

¹⁵¹ “Blatantly set up an ‘autonomous government’ database to connect ‘independent’ people around the world” (明目張膽/設「自治政體」數據庫 勾連全球「獨」人), *Ta Kung Pao (大公報)*, February 7, 2022, <https://www.tkww.hk/epaper/view/newsDetail/1490386839180283904.html>.

¹⁵² “‘Hong Kong independence’ scholar Brian Fong resigns from EdU” (「港獨」學者方志恒離任教大), *Ta Kung Pao (大公報)*, February 11, 2022, <http://www.takungpao.com.hk/news/232109/2022/0211/685235.html>.

While the harassment of academics by Beijing-controlled newspapers is not new, the National Security Law has substantially changed the environment in which these articles are being construed. Critical media articles citing academics are now warning shots to the named academics, and those featured fear being prosecuted and imprisoned for their views. One academic described their nervous feelings to Human Rights Watch:

Well, generally it means that you're being painted a target and then it's the state media saying it's open season on you. That's what it means once you're being mentioned in *Tai Kung Pao* or *Wen Wei Po*: “feel free to attack this person however you see fit, and feel free to dig up dirt. Feel free to look up their history and feel free to dox the person.” ... And to the person it's saying, “You’d better sit still, be quiet, don't do anything sensitive, at least for the foreseeable future.” ... The state media plays that role of informal extralegal attack dog.¹⁵³

The “dirt” and doxing this academic refers to is the kind of tactic the two newspapers often employ against their targets—including writing “exposés” on the academics’ private life, alleging serious sexual, financial, and professional misconduct, stringing together insinuations, and knowing that there is no recourse for those smeared with false allegations.

Shiu Ka-Chun, a former lecturer and associate director of Baptist University’s Centre for Youth Research and Practice, and a former legislator jailed for months for his role in the Umbrella Movement protests, has been featured in dozens of *Ta Kung Pao* articles since 2016. In this article pictured above, typical of its kind, the newspaper, purportedly based on an anonymous email, wrote that Shiu “had multiple relationships,” that while he was dating someone “who is already married, he was also ... secretly having sex with his student[s].”¹⁵⁴ The same article also alleged that Shiu had sought employment outside of his academic job in violation of university rules and used money to manipulate his multiple partners.

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “J”, November 2, 2022.

¹⁵⁴ “Multiple Romantic Relationships, Shiu Ka-chun’s Private Life is a Mess” (始亂終棄/一腳踏多船 邵家臻私生活一塌糊塗), *Ta Kung Pao* (大公报), September 15, 2021, <http://www.takungpao.com.hk/231106/2021/0915/632136.html>.

始亂終棄/一腳踏多船 邵家臻私生活一塌糊塗

時間: 2021-09-15 04:28:21 來源: 大公报



下一篇: 別有用心/濫用公務探監 向囚犯「播獨」



圖: 邵家臻昨晚獨自離開辦公室, 行蹤鬼祟。

A screenshot showing a *Ta Kung Pao* article on academic Shiu Ka-Chun, on September 15, 2021, entitled “Multiple Romantic Relationships, Shiu Ka-chun’s Private Life is a Mess,” with a telephoto picture of him taken at night, with the caption that says, “He is acting suspiciously sneaky.”

Academics understand these smearing attacks are a warning to everyone else. One academic said:

[The authorities] don’t have to go through the national security bureau to harass you. They don’t need to use the law, but they will use the Party media to name people.... [T]here was a number of editorials that directly criticized several academics by name ... involving several universities ... and they all left their jobs after a very short time. I knew some of them: They left because it was a very big blow. Because you don’t know whether they will

follow it up and act against you.... [This] has created an atmosphere.... If you stay, would you be in trouble? Or this time it was not about me, but would I be next?... If you're afraid you'd have left, and if you haven't left then they have erected a barrier in your head [to self-censor] because you don't want to be next.¹⁵⁵

In these cases, university administrators made few public efforts to speak up against such intimidation, or even try to correct the record. Another academic said:

I left Hong Kong pretty disappointed that there wasn't more administrative support, like from our deans or from the president for people like Ching-Kwan Lee and her entitlement to academic freedom ... I guess I'm understanding why it wasn't there, but I was disappointed. I thought that was kind of cowardly. My dean was completely unwilling to sign off on something that just said that students had the right to freely ask questions in classes without fear of retribution and that teachers had the right to teach whatever material they chose without fear of retribution.... I think our dean preferred to not put anything in writing so they wouldn't have to be quoted on it later. [It] was my feeling [that] they were very sympathetic. They said that they would privately support academic freedom, but they didn't necessarily want to put their name on a document that pledged that in any way.¹⁵⁶

Universities' overall message to faculty, as one academic put it, is that "you are completely on your own in navigating this new landscape."¹⁵⁷

Universities Terminating Staff, Not Renewing Contracts, or Denying Tenure

Within HKUST, the new reality is not openly acknowledged. To the contrary, HKUST's president wrote in his September 2020 welcome email to staff and students, "We remain steadfast in our support for academic freedom." ... But behind the scenes, one project approval was discreetly withdrawn and

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "L", November 3, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "H", November 1, 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "X", June 5, 2024.

the departing colleague's remaining links to the university were abruptly severed, while other faculty members in the social sciences quietly disappeared and were replaced by new PhDs with Mandarin names.

—Carsten Holz, a Hong Kong academic, wrote in *The Diplomat*, January 27, 2022¹⁵⁸

In addition to the cases mentioned above, universities have also fired, let go, and denied tenure to the following academics perceived to be pro-democracy:

- After years of harassment by the two Beijing-controlled papers, Baptist University informed academic Shiu Ka-Chun that they would not renew his contract on July 27, 2020, shortly after Beijing imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong. Shiu had been a lecturer at Baptist since 2007.¹⁵⁹
- The day after, on July 28, 2020, the University of Hong Kong governing council fired tenured Professor Benny Tai who had taught there for nearly three decades. The governing council overturned an earlier decision by the university's senate, which is made up of HKU academics.
- In July 2021, HKU did not renew the contract of Johannes Chan, a prominent law professor previously prevented from taking a top job at HKU following the 2014 Umbrella Movement.¹⁶⁰ Around the time of HKU's decision, Hong Kong's top officials had criticized Chan for making a media comment. After a man stabbed a police officer and committed suicide, some Hong Kongers laid flowers in memory of the assailant; the Hong Kong government said doing so was akin to "supporting terrorism."¹⁶¹ Chan, when reached by the press, said he did not think expressing

¹⁵⁸ Carsten A. Holz, "Hong Kong's Contested Academic Freedom," *The Diplomat*, January 27, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/hong-kongs-contested-academic-freedom>.

¹⁵⁹ "Baptist University refuses to renew Shiu Ka-Chun's contract, Shiu cites political suppression and plans to appeal" 邵家臻不獲浸大續約 斥政治打壓 將提出上訴, *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), July 27, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220406102729/https://www.inmediahk.net/node/1075890?fbclid=IwARoTAmeXd6x3H5agPWZBTLNZqlDyvKq1RyOgtPGRAPhKe5tCpaQKsURRLqc>.

¹⁶⁰ Lilian Cheng, "Outspoken Hong Kong law professor Johannes Chan 'has left post at end of HKU contract,'" *South China Morning Post*, July 8, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3140496/outspoken-hong-kong-law-professor-johannes-chan-leaves-post>.

¹⁶¹ "Police warn Hongkongers not to mourn for or support man who stabbed officer, says 'no different from supporting terrorism,'" *Hong Kong Free Press*, July 4, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/07/04/police-warn-hongkongers-not-to-mourn-for-or-support-man-who-stabbed-officer-says-no-different-from-supporting-terrorism>.

sympathy was illegal. Hong Kong's top officials called Chan a "sinner of a 1,000 years"¹⁶² and said his comment could lead to "bloodshed" on the city's streets.¹⁶³

- Also in July 2021, Lingnan University did not renew the contract of Ip lam-chong, assistant professor at the Department of Cultural Studies who taught there for 18 years. He was earlier denied tenure after being on tenure-track for six years. Ip, a founder of the independent online media, InMedia, and a prolific writer on Hong Kong politics, said his department had agreed to renew his contract, but the university management overrode this decision. Lingnan declined to respond when reached by the press (see "Troublesome" Projects Are Toned Down).¹⁶⁴
- Two months later, in September 2021, Lingnan University fired two adjunct professors from the same Department of Cultural Studies, Hui Po-keung and Law Wing-sang, both prominent activist-scholars in Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement and who had taught over two decades at Lingnan.¹⁶⁵ Law was terminated despite having one more year left on his contract.¹⁶⁶ The university declined to

¹⁶² "Hong Kong's No 2 official: apologists for terrorism are 'sinners for 1,000 years,'" *South China Morning Post*, July 7, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/yp/discover/news/hong-kong/article/3140198/hong-kongs-no-2-official-apologists-terrorism-are>.

¹⁶³ Candice Chau, "Hong Kong security chief condemns 'pariahs' mourning man who stabbed police officer," *Hong Kong Free Press*, July 7, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/07/07/hong-kong-security-chief-condemns-pariahs-mourning-man-who-stabbed-police-officer>.

¹⁶⁴ "After teaching at Hong Kong's Lingnan University for 18 years, an outspoken scholar was dismissed for political dissent" (香港嶺南大學任教十八載 敢言學者疑因不同政見被變相辭退), *VOA Cantonese*, July 6, 2021, <https://www.voacantonese.com/a/hong-kong-outspoken-veteran-scholar-sacked-despite-support-from-faculty-20210706/5954921.html>; "Assistant Professor Ip lam-chong of the Department of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University was denied tenure: Ip said the school had political considerations" (嶺大文研系助理教授葉蔭聰 遭否決任兼職 葉：校方有政治考慮), *HK01*, June 26, 2021, <https://www.hko1.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/643070/%E5%B6%BA%E5%A4%A7%E6%96%87%E7%A0%94%E7%B3%BB%E5%8A%A9%E7%90%86%E6%95%99%E6%8E%88%E8%91%89%E8%94%AD%E8%81%B0-%E9%81%AD%E5%90%A6%E6%B1%BA%E4%BB%BB%E5%85%BC%E8%81%B7-%E8%91%89-%E6%A0%A1%E6%96%B9%E6%9C%89%E6%94%BF%E6%B2%BB%E8%80%83%E6%85%AE>.

¹⁶⁵ "Lingnan University: contracts of adjunct professors Law Wing-sang and Hui Po-keung have ended, school refuses to disclose details due to privacy reasons" (嶺大：客席副教授羅永生、許寶強合約已終結 私隱為由拒披露詳情), *HK01*, October 1, 2021, <https://www.hko1.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/683537/%E5%B6%BA%E5%A4%A7-%E5%A%E2%E5%B8%AD%E5%89%AF%E6%95%99%E6%8E%88%E7%BE%85%E6%B0%B8%E7%94%9F-%E8%A8%B1%E5%AF%B6%E5%BC%B7%E5%90%88%E7%B4%84%E5%B7%B2%E7%B5%82%E7%B5%90-%E7%A7%81%E9%9A%B1%E7%82%BA%E7%94%B1%E6%8B%92%E6%8A%AB%E9%9C%B2%E8%A9%B3%E6%83%85>.

¹⁶⁶ Lingnan University: contracts of adjunct professors Law Wing-sang and Hui Po-keung will end in September; Law says school unilaterally terminated contract" (嶺大：客席副教授羅永生、許寶強合約 9 月終結 羅永生：校方單方面終止合約 (18:58)), *Ming Pao* (明報), September 30, 2021, <https://news.mingpao.com/ins/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/article/20210930/s00001/1632998832457/%E5%B6%BA%E5%A4%A7-%E5%AE%A2%E5%B8%AD%E5%89%AF%E6%95%99%E6%8E%88%E7%BE%85%E6%B0%B8%E7%94%9F-%E8%A8%B1%E5%AF%B6%E5%BC%B7%E5%90%88%E7%B4%84%9E%E6%9C%88%E7%B5%82%E7%B5%90-%E7%BE%85%E6%B0%B8%E7%94%9F-%E6%A0%A1%E6%96%B9%E5%96%AE%E6%96%B9%E9%9D%A2%E7%B5%82%E6%AD%A2%E5%90%88%E7%B4%84>.

comment on their cases “out of respect for their privacy.”¹⁶⁷ Hui was later arrested for “colluding with foreign forces” under the National Security Law for serving as a trustee to the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, a group that provided medical, legal, and psychological aid for those arrested during the 2019 protests.¹⁶⁸

Several academics interviewed pointed out that in some cases of terminations, alternative explanations may exist, given how opaque these processes can be. One said:

[In the case] of Law Wing-sang ... he was retired and was teaching one class. If that was done for political reasons, it is a bad thing. I have been department chair and have had to stop classes when we didn't have enough students in the class, or when course evaluations were low. There are a lot of reasons why things happen.¹⁶⁹

Another academic pointed out that the lack of transparency is precisely the problem:

The concern would be that when it comes time for tenure or promotion—processes which are not very transparent—someone could say, this person has been too political and therefore we should not promote them. And that can all be done very secretly and behind closed doors and the candidate wouldn't necessarily know that that's exactly what it was and that the university would never have to admit to that sort of thing.¹⁷⁰

One academic, who was denied tenure, pointed out that while “it's hard to prove these things,” the bigger picture is clear:

The problem is that in a bureaucracy, there are a million other reasons you can point to, to not give someone tenure or not renew their contracts. For

¹⁶⁷ Nadia Lam and Victor Ting, “Hong Kong’s Lingnan University terminates 2 professors who previously criticised government,” *South China Morning Post*, October 2, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3150955/hong-kongs-lingnan-university-terminates-2-professors-who>.

¹⁶⁸ “Hong Kong: Prominent Democracy Advocates Arrested,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 13, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/13/hong-kong-prominent-democracy-advocates-arrested>.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “B”, October 25, 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with academic “K”, November 2, 2022.

example, I didn't get tenure, and I cannot say that it was because of political reasons, but I also cannot not say it was because of political reasons. But if you look at what happened after the National Security Law got introduced, what you do see in an individual case ... it's hard to prove anything. But if you look at the bigger picture as a whole, there's a clear pattern going on ... And there's a whole list of them.

In the case of this academic, and those of two other academics interviewed—all known as pro-democracy and who have been publicly criticized by Beijing-owned newspapers or influential pro-Beijing individuals—there was no clear proof that their treatment by the university was politically motivated. Two of the three academics said they had solid if not excellent academic and teaching records comparable to others who have been given tenure. The heads of the schools of two of these academics both supported their tenure applications, but they were overruled by others in the university. Another academic, who specializes in a sensitive topic, was not given an opportunity to go through an external review process before being denied tenure. While one of the three went through the process, with all external reviewers supporting his tenure application, the university's faculty academic panel decided against giving him tenure. It was “a very strange decision-making process,” one of the three academics observed.

A few academics interviewed felt that, increasingly, anyone outspoken has little chance of getting ahead in academia in Hong Kong. One felt that the National Security Law impacts on “every aspect of [her] work] from getting promoted, tenured, and contracts renewed”:

I have stopped applying for grants because for my kind of topic, I wouldn't want to work on anything that is not critical ... by critical I mean not just criticism, but critical in critical thinking.... I [already] have tenure. I stay silent and I lay low, I do my own stuff. But if I go and apply for grants, I'd expose myself, because they would check my CV.... But if I don't apply then I don't make myself visible. I'm decades old, the university is just waiting for me to retire. As someone outspoken and working on [a sensitive topic] ... [when] I'll retire, the university has one fewer problem ... since 2019 I have decided that I would not get promoted, I would not apply for anything, I

would ask for nothing from the university. However long I've got to teach I'll teach, that's it. This is the attitude of many of my colleagues.

Another academic, who has taught for nearly two decades at a Hong Kong university, concluded: "Anyone who is too politically 'yellow' [pro-democracy] wouldn't get any senior position in the administration at the university. That's something which appears very clearly now."

Denial of Visas

The Hong Kong Immigration Department has increasingly denied visas to journalists, staff of nongovernmental organizations, and other foreign passport holders perceived to be unfriendly to the Chinese government.¹⁷¹ Since the imposition of the National Security Law, the department has directly interfered with academic freedom by making it difficult or impossible for at least four academics to obtain work visas to teach in Hong Kong, according to publicly available reports:

- In September 2020, HKU revealed that the Hong Kong Immigration Department asked a foreign award-winning journalist seeking to teach a course as a visiting scholar a list of 40 detailed questions, including their future plans after teaching in Hong Kong, and demanded that they supply original copies of their university transcript. Given the lengthy process, and the start of Covid-19, the unnamed journalist withdrew their application.¹⁷²
- In February 2022, the Hong Kong Immigration Department denied without reasons a work visa to Ryan Thoreson, a legal scholar with a focus on LGBTQ rights, who

¹⁷¹ See, for example, "US photography professor who covered 2019 protests says Hong Kong denied him entry, suspects he is 'on a list,'" *Hong Kong Free Press*, August 29, 2023, <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/08/29/us-photography-professor-who-covered-2019-protests-says-hong-kong-denied-him-entry-suspects-he-is-on-a-list>; Committee to Protect Journalists, "Hong Kong denies entry to Japanese journalist Yoshiaki Ogawa," June 30, 2023, <https://cpj.org/2023/06/hong-kong-denies-entry-to-japanese-journalist-yoshiaki-ogawa>; Committee to Protect Journalists, "Hong Kong denies entry to Japanese photographer who covered 2019 pro-democracy protests," <https://cpj.org/2023/01/hong-kong-denies-entry-to-japanese-photographer-who-covered-2019-pro-democracy-protests>; Tom Grundy, "Reporters Without Borders rep. denied entry to Hong Kong, NGO says, after 6-hour detention, searches at airport," *Hong Kong Free Press*, April 10, 2024, <https://hongkongfp.com/2024/04/10/breaking-reporters-without-borders-rep-denied-entry-to-hong-kong-ngo-says-after-6-hour-detention-searches-at-airport>.

¹⁷² Kelly Ho, "University of Hong Kong visa application for Pulitzer-winning journalist prompts long list of 'unusual' questions from gov't," *Hong Kong Free Press*, September 2, 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/09/02/university-of-hong-kong-visa-application-for-pulitzer-winning-journalist-prompts-long-list-of-unusual-questions-from-govt>.

- was hired as a tenure track assistant professor to teach human rights law at HKU.¹⁷³ Thoreson, who was working as a researcher at Human Rights Watch at the time, was asked to respond to a list of over 30 detailed questions concerning nearly every item on his curriculum vitae. In one question, he was asked to provide all “activities, assignments, researches and works ever engaged with Human Rights Watch”; in others, he was asked to detail “the duties and responsibilities” of his various engagements with nongovernmental organizations and bar associations.
- In June 2023, a Taiwanese scholar was denied entry to Hong Kong after flying to the city and being held for six hours “in a dark room” by the Hong Kong Immigration Department. The scholar, who used to work at a Hong Kong university but “does not deal with current affairs,” said they were interrogated over who they knew and worked with for while in Hong Kong before being put on a plane back to Taiwan.¹⁷⁴ Several other Taiwanese academics have had similar experience since 2020, though their cases have not been publicized, according to a Taiwanese media outlet.¹⁷⁵
 - In October 2023, the Hong Kong Immigration Department did not renew the visa of Tiananmen Massacre historian Rowena He. Her employer, Chinese University of Hong Kong, immediately terminated her, citing the Immigration Department’s decision. In February that year, *Wen Wei Po* ran an article calling on CUHK “to get rid of her.”¹⁷⁶

Resignations and Exodus

Several academics interviewed who had left Hong Kong said the “suffocating” environment was one of the top reasons why they left, though many others had chosen to stay because there are few well-paid jobs for academics:

¹⁷³ “US human rights law scholar says Hong Kong gov’t denied him visa to teach at HKU,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 2, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2022/02/02/us-human-rights-law-scholar-says-hong-kong-govt-denied-him-visa-to-teach-at-hku%ef%bf%bc>.

¹⁷⁴ Chen-Hun Chang, Sherry Li, Yian Lee (張鎮宏, 李雪莉, and 李易安), “Can I enter Hong Kong safely? 3 years after Hong Kong’s National Security Law, the “Taiwanese blacklist” silently expands” (我能安全入港嗎? 香港國安法 3 年後, 無聲擴張的「台灣人黑名單」), *The Reporter* (報導者), June 28, 2023, <https://www.twreporter.org/a/hong-kong-national-security-law-blacklisting-taiwanese>.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ “CUHK Must Remove Anti-China ‘Scholar’ Who Destabilize Hong Kong” (中大須清除反中亂港「學棍」), *Wen Wei Po* (文匯報), February 28, 2023, <https://www.wenweipo.com/a/202302/28/AP63fd1530e4b03b588d8fa175.html>.

I don't have much self-restraint, but I was being more careful after the NSL ... I made sure every word, every sentence was fact-based ... but I couldn't ensure that if I continued to stay in Hong Kong nothing will happen to me, so I left. I did not want to live like that, to be an academic like that, it would be very suffocating.... A lot of my colleagues who stayed have struggled. Their struggle is that they know they're going to leave—the question is when. Because they have kids, they have to calculate when they have enough money because they may not be able to find a job abroad.¹⁷⁷

Another academic said:

I would say that ... the main reason I left Hong Kong was because of the National Security Law, because of what's happened in Hong Kong. I had wanted to stay long term. I planned to make it my home. I just received tenure like a year or two before. I just couldn't stay somewhere where I felt that I had to control what I said in the classroom and also might feel forced to actually censor my students. Not because I want to enforce the law but because of a fear of their own safety ... a lot of my colleagues have been leaving Hong Kong ... there's been a lot of turnover. And they aren't always motivated by political reasons, but that's often part of their decision to leave. And these are often tenured staff.¹⁷⁸

Hong Kong's universities have experienced a higher than usual turnover rate since the NSL. In the last academic year, between 2022 and 2023, 380 out of a total of 5,000 academics left their jobs, at a record 7.6 percent turnover rate.¹⁷⁹ This is in turn higher than the 7.4 percent the previous year of 2021 and 2022. Prior to 2021, the turnover rate was less than 6 percent. While universities try to rehire for these positions, one interviewee—who is in management—said they had to deal with a sizeable shortfall in staffing.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "G", October 28, 2022.

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "F", October 28, 2022.

¹⁷⁹ William Yiu, "Academic staff departures at Hong Kong public universities hit highest since 1997 handover, with 380 leaving jobs," *South China Morning Post*, February 5, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/3251032/hong-kong-public-universities-record-new-high-academic-staff-departures-380-leaving-jobs>.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with academic "C", October 25, 2022.

“Troublesome” Institutions Abandoned or Toned Down

Hong Kong’s universities appear to have toned down or “restructured” a number of institutions considered “problematic” by the Chinese government since 2020.

At CUHK, university administration has “reorganized” the Universities Service Center for China Studies, often described by those studying modern Chinese history as “a mecca.” The Universities Service Center is no longer a research center or a meeting place for scholars where forums and conferences are held, but a library collection housed in CUHK Library, making the center less publicly visible.¹⁸¹ The university said the reorganization was to make it easier for scholars worldwide to access it online.¹⁸²

At Lingnan University, a year after the Department of Cultural Studies—considered as an incubator for Hong Kong activists, including Nathan Law—did not renew the contracts of three faculty members and declined to provide an explanation, the Associate Vice President Lau Chi-pang (劉智鵬) revealed that, as suspected, those decisions were political.¹⁸³ The department had “restructured” to remove these scholar-activists to ensure that students now “only purely discuss culture.”

Since 2020, three universities have also merged their political science departments with other departments or renamed them by removing the word “political” or “politics” from the names of their departments.

- In 2022, City University combined its Department of Public Policy and the Department of Asian and International Studies into a Department of Public and

¹⁸¹ See concerns by China Studies scholars globally: Letter from the Association for Asian Studies Board of Directors to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, “AAS Letter to the Chinese University of Hong Kong Regarding Reorganization of the Universities Service Centre,” February 9, 2021, <https://www.asianstudies.org/aas-letter-to-the-chinese-university-of-hong-kong-regarding-reorganization-of-the-universities-service-centre>.

¹⁸² Phila Siu, “Leading Hong Kong university denies gutting China studies centre long favoured by overseas scholars,” *South China Morning Post*, December 29, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/3115748/leading-hong-kong-university-denies-gutting-china-studies>.

¹⁸³ “Lau Chi-pang: Lingnan University Cultural Studies had a tendency towards dissent in the past, but now it ‘purely discusses culture’ after reorganizing its faculty” (劉智鵬：嶺大文研過去有逆向發展傾向 重整教員後現純粹討論文化), *Hong Kong Inmedia* (獨立媒體), December 14, 2022, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/%E6%94%BF%E7%B6%93/%E5%8A%89%E6%99%BA%E9%B5%AC%E5%BC%9A%E5%B6%BA%E5%A4%A7%E6%96%87%E7%A0%94%E9%81%8E%E5%8E%BB%E6%9C%89%E9%80%86%E5%90%91%E7%99%BC%E5%B1%95%E5%82%BE%E5%90%91%E9%87%8D%E6%95%B4%E6%95%99%E5%93%A1%E5%BE%8C%E7%8F%BE%E7%B4%94%E7%B2%B9%E8%A8%E8%AB%96%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96>.

International Affairs. The university said the move fosters “interdisciplinary development.”¹⁸⁴

- In 2024, City University further renamed one of its three degree programs offered by the combined department, from “Bachelor of Social Sciences in Public Policy and Politics” to “Bachelor of Social Sciences in Public Affairs and Management.” It also renamed one of the three streams of study under that bachelor program, from “Political Science and Governance” to “Public Affairs and Governance.” The word “politics” disappeared in the renaming process. The university, when contacted by the media, said that many universities around the world use the term “public affairs” in similar degrees.¹⁸⁵
- Also in 2022, Lingnan University’s Department of Political Science changed its name to Department of Government and International Affairs.

In 2024, CUHK subsumed its prestigious Department of Government and Public Administration (政治與行政學系)—which in Chinese has the word “politics” in its name—into part of a new department: School of Governance and Policy Science (政務與政策科學學院).¹⁸⁶ The GPA department, as it was known previously, had many well-known graduates that went on to be key pro-democracy figures. CUHK said that the “restructuring” was due to a decline in the number of students applicants to the program—a claim that is supported by university admission records, as students avoid studying “politically sensitive” topics after the National Security Law. The university said the new department’s name, which does not have the word “politics” in it, is merely a translation issue.

Six years prior to the city’s handover to Chinese rule in 1997, HKU social scientist Robert Chung established the Public Opinion Programme at HKU (HKUPOP) in 1991. Its surveys, which took the pulse of the city from people’s political opinions to their views on recycling, were widely respected.

¹⁸⁴ Lea Mok, “Two universities in Hong Kong plan to restructure politics departments amid security law chill,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, May 30, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2022/05/30/two-universities-in-hong-kong-to-restructure-politics-departments-amid-security-law-chill>.

¹⁸⁵ “Politics seems to have become taboo, CityU’s ‘Public Policy and Politics’ course renamed” (政治似成禁忌 香港城大「公共政策與政治」課程易名), *World Journal* (世界新聞網), March 4, 2024, <https://www.worldjournal.com/wj/story/121474/7808856>

¹⁸⁶ Mok, “Two universities in Hong Kong plan to restructure politics departments amid security law chill,” *Hong Kong Free Press*.

In 2000, Chung alleged that the then-Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa had pressured him—via the university’s president and vice-president—to stop polling the public about his government’s performance. The allegation, explosive at the time as such direct interference of academic freedom was unheard of, led HKU to commission an independent investigation, which confirmed Chung’s allegations, and the resignation of HKU’s two top managers.

In 2011, a top official of the Central Liaison Office criticized Chung and HKUPOP for a public opinion survey that showed that Hong Kong people were increasingly self-identifying themselves as “Hong Kongers” rather than “Chinese.”¹⁸⁷ The official criticized the survey as “illogical” and “unscientific,” and that Chung was “not doing academic work but politics.” Chung and HKUPOP would be increasingly vilified by *Wen Wei Po* and *Ta Kung Pao* as “lackeys” of the US and UK governments to “fabricate fake public opinion.”¹⁸⁸ The two papers also called on HKU to fire Chung.

At age 62, Chung announced his retirement from HKU in July 2019, and that HKUPOP would leave the university to become an independent entity, called the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (PORI), and that PORI would raise money through public donations.

PORI would face growing threats and difficulties. In January 2021, Hong Kong police raided it for conducting an informal public opinion poll for leaders of the pro-democracy movement hoping to coordinate candidates for an upcoming legislative election. Police accused the institute staff of “dishonest use of a computer.”¹⁸⁹ Those pro-democracy candidates would be put on trial for “conspiracy to commit subversion.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ “Pro-China media spins conspiracy theories, Liaison Office official criticizes HKU survey” (親中媒體祭出陰謀論 中聯辦官員批港大調查), *VOA Cantonese*, December 30, 2011, <https://www.voacantonese.com/a/article-20111230h-k-based-beijing-envoy-criticizes-university-of-h-k-poll-136423953/936635.html>.

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, “Suspected of receiving American money to fake polls, ‘Protect Hong Kong’ group urges HKU to fire Chung” (涉收「美水」偽造民調「保港」促港大「炒鍾」), *Wen Wei Po* (文匯報), August 30, 2018, <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2018/08/30/WA18083000005.htm>.

¹⁸⁹ Tom Grundy, “Hong Kong police raid office of pro-democracy camp primary election co-organisers PORI,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, July 10, 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/07/10/breaking-hong-kong-police-raid-office-of-pro-democracy-camp-primary-election-co-organisers-pori-seize-pcs>.

¹⁹⁰ “Hong Kong: 47 Lawmakers, Activists Face Unfair Trial,” Human Rights Watch news release, August 22, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/22/hong-kong-47-lawmakers-activists-face-unfair-trial>.

In April 2022, PORI's deputy executive director, social scientist Chung Kim-wah, fled Hong Kong citing "threats from powerful bodies."¹⁹¹ While Robert Chung continued to run PORI, he announced in June 2023 that he would remove a quarter of his usual survey questions and make the results of some others private due to "suggestions" by "relevant government department(s)."¹⁹² Those censored included questions about the Tiananmen Massacre, ethnic identity, and ratings of officials.

¹⁹¹ Hillary Leung, "Senior member of Hong Kong pollster leaves city for the UK, citing 'red lines,'" *Hong Kong Free Press*, April 25, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2022/04/25/senior-member-of-hong-kong-pollster-leaves-city-for-the-uk-citing-red-lines>.

¹⁹² Kelly Ho, "Hong Kong pollster to curb questions on sensitive topics, incl. Tiananmen crackdown, Taiwan," *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 21, 2023, <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/06/21/hong-kong-pollster-to-curb-questions-on-sensitive-topics-incl-tiananmen-crackdown-taiwan>.

Recommendations

To the Hong Kong Government

- Immediately end the broad assault on basic human rights, in particular by repealing the National Security Law and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance or bringing them into conformity with international human rights standards.
- Revise the Public Order Ordinance to bring it into conformity with international human rights standards.
- Free from custody and drop charges against all those arbitrarily detained for the peaceful exercise of their fundamental human rights, including academics and students arrested and prosecuted under the national security laws and the Public Order Ordinance.
- Review and reform university governance and funding policies to ensure they are free from political interference and control.
- Respect academic freedom and commit to allowing university staff and students the space for different viewpoints, including those that do not align with the views of the Chinese and Hong Kong governments.

To Publicly Funded Universities in Hong Kong

- Cease harassment of student unions, reinstate their university affiliations and provide them with administrative support.
- Provide students and faculty with confidential legal assistance and counsel in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws.
- Cease censorship of student publications, communications, and events, unless as justified according to international human rights standards.
- Instruct staff to limit the recording of classes to those instances where recording is absolutely necessary for educational purposes. In such cases, inform students in advance and provide them with the choice to opt out, delete the recording as soon as possible, and inform those being recorded when those recordings are removed.
- Provide clear and transparent criteria for staff in hiring, promotion, and tenure processes.

- Ensure security guards exercise their duties without infringing upon students' basic freedoms on campus.
- Monitor and report publicly on any incidents of censorship, harassment, and intimidation of students and staff and measures taken by the university to address such abuses.

To Foreign Universities with Partnerships with Hong Kong Universities

- Jointly or individually, actively track reported instances of direct or indirect Chinese and Hong Kong government harassment, surveillance, censorship, or threats on Hong Kong university campuses. Report annually and make public the number and nature of these kinds of incidents.
- Regularly evaluate the best way to support and protect students and faculty in Hong Kong from repression, including by:
 - Providing a confidential reporting or complaints mechanism;
 - Organizing access to confidential and free legal assistance and counsel to foreign students and faculty;
 - Ensuring that partnerships do not give legitimacy to government harassment, surveillance, or threats by vetting potential partners, collaborators, and key speakers at events to exclude state authorities implicated in repression; and
 - Publishing a clear policy on academic freedom for students and faculty studying or conducting research in Hong Kong universities.
- Speak up for affiliated academics and students who suffer harassment and intimidation while in Hong Kong.
- Require partner universities in Hong Kong to undertake adequate measures to protect the academic freedom of students and staff.
- Provide fellowship and scholarship opportunities to scholars and students from Hong Kong who are at risk, or are persecuted by, the Hong Kong and Chinese governments.
- Support Hong Kong students who face harassment or threats because of their involvement in student activism, or because of their course of study or research, to study abroad.

- Regularly review these partnerships and take appropriate actions, including suspending or ceasing certain partnerships or activities as appropriate, to avoid being complicit in human rights violations.
- Universities with significant Hong Kong and Chinese students studying abroad on their campuses should review their partnerships with Hong Kong universities together with their policies protecting Hong Kong and Chinese students and scholars from Chinese government transnational harassment.¹⁹³

To Foreign Scholars who Act as Reviewers for the Research Grants Council

- Together with other reviewers, discuss ways to protect the process from censorship and self-censorship, including by setting up a monitoring and reporting mechanism.
- Press for clear and transparent criteria for approving and rejecting grants.

To Academic Ranking Agencies

- Include academic freedom in university rankings.

To Universities and Academic Publishers

- Monitor censorship and self-censorship in China and Hong Kong Studies publications and, without providing details, disclose these incidents in annual reports.

To Governments Concerned About Human Rights in Hong Kong

- Press the Hong Kong government to take the above actions to protect academic freedom.
- Sanction Chinese and Hong Kong officials responsible for the crackdown on human rights in Hong Kong.
- Provide humanitarian pathways, including fellowship and student visas, for Hong Kong students and scholars facing persecution and other serious harms.

¹⁹³ For those recommendations, see Human Rights Watch, *“They Don’t Understand the Fear We Have”: How China’s Long Reach of Repression Undermines Academic Freedom at Australia’s Universities*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/06/30/they-dont-understand-fear-we-have/how-chinas-long-reach-repression-undermines>.

- In the UK, where such a pathway exists via the British National Overseas (BNO) scheme, consider expanding the scheme to include all Hong Kongers born during British rule. Currently, for example, some Hong Kongers born during this period are ineligible to protection under this scheme if their parents did not apply for BNO passports at the time.
- Follow up on a 2020 call made by over 50 UN experts to hold the Chinese government accountable for its abuses, including convening a dedicated discussion at the UN Human Rights Council and launching an inquiry to further investigate and report on serious abuses.

Acknowledgments

This report was written and researched by Maya Wang, associate China director at Human Rights Watch, with research assistance from Ellie Ng, senior Asia officer, and Jody Chen, senior associate in the Asia division. Members of the Hong Kong Democracy Council also provided research support and reviewed the report.

The report was edited by Elaine Pearson, Asia director. James Ross, legal and policy director, and Tom Porteous, deputy program director, provided legal and programmatic review respectively. Emilie McDonnell, UK advocacy and communications officer, also provided additional feedback to the report. Jody Chen provided editorial and production assistance. The report was prepared for publication by Travis Carr, publications officer, and Fitzroy Hepkins, senior administrative manager.

Human Rights Watch is grateful to Professor Carsten Holz for reviewing an earlier version of this report.

Human Rights Watch is especially grateful to all the academics, administrators, and students who spoke to us despite growing risks for speaking critically about the government in Hong Kong.

Appendix I: Foreign Universities with Dual-Degree or Joint-Degree Programs in Hong Kong

	HKU	CUHK	HKUST	CityU	PolyU	HKBU	Lingnan	EdU
Australia					Queensland University of Technology University of Technology Sydney	University of Queensland University of Technology Sydney		
Brazil			FGV Sao Paulo					
Canada	University of British Columbia University of Toronto McMaster University				University of Calgary	Simon Fraser University		
France	Sciences Po	HEC Paris	HEC Paris	ESSEC Business School		Sciences Po Bordeaux Sciences Po Lyon	École Supérieure des Sciences Commerciales d'Angers	
Germany				Leuphana University				
Italy	Sapienza Università di Roma							
Japan		Waseda University	Waseda University					
Netherlands		Erasmus University Rotterdam						
Poland					University of Warsaw	Kozminski University		

South Korea								Jeonbuk National University
Spain		IE University					Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	
Switzerland							Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts	
Taiwan				National Taiwan University			National Chengchi University	
United Arab Emirates								United Arab Emirates University
United Kingdom	Cambridge University University College London King's College London	University of Edinburgh University of Manchester King's College London	University of Exeter		University of Surrey	University of Lincoln	University of Lincoln University of Leicester	
United States	University of California, Berkeley University of Pennsylvania Northeastern University	Northwestern University University of Texas at Austin	Washington University in St. Louis Yale University Northwestern University	Columbia University Georgetown University	Washington University in St. Louis	University of Missouri Ohio State University Georgia State University		

Appendix II: Letters to Universities in Hong Kong



July 12, 2024

Ms. Shirley Chong, Director of the Communications and Institutional Research Office
City University of Hong Kong
Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Via email: sslchong@cityu.edu.hk; ciro@cityu.edu.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at City University of Hong Kong

Dear Ms. Shirley Chong,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting City University of Hong Kong's role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor Freddy Boey
President
City University of Hong Kong
Via email: office.president@cityu.edu.hk

Mr. Lester Garson Huang
Chairman
The Council of City University of Hong Kong
Via Professor Kevin Downing, Secretary to
Council: sckevin@cityu.edu.hk

**Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to City University of Hong Kong:**

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019?
3. What are the university rules and guidelines on the powers and responsibilities of security guards? Under what circumstances are security guards allowed to take down student messages and posters? Under what circumstances can security guards film and follow students on campus?
4. What support services does the university provide students and faculty, including confidential legal assistance and counsel, in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws?
5. What discussions has the university had with faculty and students about pressure to self-censor and steps taken to minimize such pressure?
6. What is the university policy about when students are able to file complaints about lecturers in class? On what grounds? When can student complaints be the basis for disciplinary action against them?
7. What is the university policy regarding the recording of classes so that students and faculty can freely express themselves?
8. Does the university actively track:
 - a. Government censorship, harassment, surveillance, and intimidation of students, staff, and faculty?
 - b. Harassment by government-controlled or -run newspapers?
 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.
9. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?
10. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.



July 12, 2024

Ms. Lavender Cheung, Director of Communications and Public Relations
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories, Hong Kong
Via email: cpr@cuhk.edu.hk; media@cuhk.edu.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Dear Ms. Lavender Cheung,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting the Chinese University of Hong Kong's role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor Rocky S. Tuan
President and Vice-Chancellor
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Via email: rt_vcoffice@cuhk.edu.hk

Professor John Y. Chai
Chairman
The Council of The Chinese University of
Hong Kong

**Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to the Chinese University of Hong Kong:**

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. In 2021, CUHK's student union representatives reported that they received death threats for their election platform. What kind of support did CUHK offer to these representatives?
3. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019?
4. What are the university rules and guidelines on the powers and responsibilities of security guards? Under what circumstances are security guards allowed to take down student messages and posters? Under what circumstances can security guards film and follow students on campus?
5. What support services does the university provide students and faculty, including confidential legal assistance and counsel, in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws?
6. What discussions has the university had with faculty and students about pressure to self-censor and steps taken to minimize such pressure?
7. What is the university policy about when students are able to file complaints about lecturers in class? On what grounds? When can student complaints be the basis for disciplinary action against them?
8. What is the university policy regarding the recording of classes so that students and faculty can freely express themselves?
9. Does the university actively track:
 - a. Government censorship, harassment, surveillance, and intimidation of students, staff, and faculty?
 - b. Harassment by government-controlled or -run newspapers?
 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.
10. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?
11. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.



July 12, 2024

Ms. Helen Gai Hui Xia, Director of Communications and Engagement
The Education University of Hong Kong
10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories
Hong Kong

Via email: hxgai@eduhk.hk; co@eduhk.hk; media@eduhk.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at The Education University of Hong Kong

Dear Ms. Helen Gai Hui Xia,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting the Education University of Hong Kong's role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor John Lee Chi-Kin
President
The Education University of Hong Kong
Via email: poffice@eduhk.hk

Dr. David Wong Yau-kar
Chairman
The Council of The Education University of
Hong Kong
Via Secretary to Council, Ms. Sarah Wong:
vpadm@eduhk.hk

**Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to the Education University of Hong Kong:**

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019?
3. What are the university rules and guidelines on the powers and responsibilities of security guards? Under what circumstances are security guards allowed to take down student messages and posters? Under what circumstances can security guards film and follow students on campus?
4. What support services does the university provide students and faculty, including confidential legal assistance and counsel, in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws?
5. What discussions has the university had with faculty and students about pressure to self-censor and steps taken to minimize such pressure?
6. What is the university policy about when students are able to file complaints about lecturers in class? On what grounds? When can student complaints be the basis for disciplinary action against them?
7. What is the university policy regarding the recording of classes so that students and faculty can freely express themselves?
8. Does the university actively track:
 - a. Government censorship, harassment, surveillance, and intimidation of students, staff, and faculty?
 - b. Harassment by government-controlled or run newspapers?
 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.
9. Kindly provide us your perspective regarding the departure of Professor Brian Fong, the associate director of the Academy of Hong Kong Studies in the Department of Asian and Policy Studies, who left the university days after he was targeted by two Beijing-owned newspapers, *Wen Wei Po* and *Tai Kung Pao*.
10. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?

11. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.



July 12, 2024

Mr. Terence Poon, Assistant Director of Communication and Public Relations
Hong Kong Baptist University
Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

Via email: terencepoon@hkbu.edu.hk; cpro@hkbu.edu.hk; hkbunews@hkbu.edu.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at Hong Kong Baptist University

Dear Mr. Terence Poon,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting Hong Kong Baptist University's role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we would kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor Alexander Ping-kong Wai
President and Vice-Chancellor
Hong Kong Baptist University
Via email: pdo@hkbu.edu.hk

Dr. Clement C.J. Chen
Chairman
The Council of Hong Kong Baptist
University
Via Council and Court Secretariat, Ms.
Ranie Lo: ranielo_wy@hkbu.edu.hk

Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to Hong Kong Baptist University:

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019?
3. What are the university rules and guidelines on the powers and responsibilities of security guards? Under what circumstances are security guards allowed to take down student messages and posters? Under what circumstances can security guards film and follow students on campus?
4. What support services does the university provide students and faculty, including confidential legal assistance and counsel, in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws?
5. Please provide us your perspective regarding allegations by visual artist and academic Justin Wong, who said that HKBU reported him to the police in November 2021 for his academic writing – which discussed the activist art of the 2019 protests.
6. What discussions has the university had with faculty and students about pressure to self-censor and steps taken to minimize such pressure?
7. What is the university policy about when students are able to file complaints about lecturers in class? On what grounds? When can student complaints be the basis for disciplinary action against them?
8. What is the university policy regarding the recording of classes so that students and faculty can freely express themselves?
9. Does the university actively track:
 - a. Government censorship, harassment, surveillance, and intimidation of students, staff, and faculty?
 - b. Harassment by government-controlled or run newspapers?
 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.
10. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?
11. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.



July 15, 2024

Ms. Melanie Wan, Senior Manager (Media Relations)
The University of Hong Kong
Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong
Via email: melwkwon@hku.hk; cpao@hku.hk; hkumedia@hku.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at the University of Hong Kong

Dear Ms. Melanie Wan,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting the University of Hong Kong's (HKU) role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor Xiang Zhang
President and Vice-Chancellor
The University of Hong Kong
Via email: vcoffice@hku.hk

Ms. Priscilla Wong Pui-sze
Chairman
The Council of The University of Hong Kong
Via email: priscilla.wong@hku.hk

Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to the University of Hong Kong:

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019? When did HKU install surveillance cameras monitoring the wall, and why did it do so?
3. What are the university rules and guidelines on the powers and responsibilities of security guards? Under what circumstances are security guards allowed to take down student messages and posters? Under what circumstances can security guards film and follow students on campus?
4. What support services does the university provide students and faculty, including confidential legal assistance and counsel, in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws?
5. What discussions has the university had with faculty and students about pressure to self-censor and steps taken to minimize such pressure?
6. What is the university policy about when students are able to file complaints about lecturers in class? On what grounds? When can student complaints be the basis for disciplinary action against them?
7. What is the university policy regarding the recording of classes so that students and faculty can freely express themselves?
8. Does the university actively track:
 - a. Government censorship, harassment, surveillance, and intimidation of students and staff, of faculty and students?
 - b. Harassment by government-controlled or -run newspapers?
 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.
9. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?
10. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.



July 12, 2024

Ms. Daisy Chan, Associate Vice-President (Global Engagement & Communications)
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Via email: padaisy@ust.hk; info@ust.hk; media@ust.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Dear Ms. Daisy Chan,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology's role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we would kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor Nancy Y. Ip
President and Vice-Chancellor
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Via email: ophkust@ust.hk

Professor Harry Shum Heung-Yeung
Chairman
The Council of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Via email: ccss@ust.hk

Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology:

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019?
3. What are the university rules and guidelines on the powers and responsibilities of security guards? Under what circumstances are security guards allowed to take down student messages and posters? Under what circumstances can security guards film and follow students on campus?
4. What support services does the university provide students and faculty, including confidential legal assistance and counsel, in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws?
5. What discussions has the university had with faculty and students about pressure to self-censor and steps taken to minimize such pressure?
6. What is the university policy about when students are able to file complaints about lecturers in class? On what grounds? When can student complaints be the basis for disciplinary action against them?
7. What is the university policy regarding the recording of classes so that students and faculty can freely express themselves?
8. Does the university actively track:
 - a. Government censorship, harassment, surveillance, and intimidation of students, staff, and faculty?
 - b. Harassment by government-controlled or -run newspapers?
 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.
9. Please provide us with your perspective regarding the departure of sociology professor Ching-Kwan Lee, who left the university after she was targeted by two Beijing-owned newspapers, *Wen Wei Po* and *Tai Kung Pao*.
10. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?
11. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.



July 12, 2024

Professor Lau Chi-pang
Associate Vice-President (Institutional Advancement and External Affairs)
Lingnan University
8 Castle Peak Road, Tuen Mun
Hong Kong
Via email: laucp@ln.edu.hk; oiapa@LN.edu.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at Lingnan University

Dear Professor Lau Chi-pang,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting Lingnan University's role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor S. Joe Qin
President
Lingnan University
Via email: joeqin@ln.edu.hk

Mr. Yao Cho Fai Andrew
Chairman
The Council of Lingnan University
Via email: occbga@ln.edu.hk

Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to Lingnan University:

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019?
3. A [2022 InMedia report](#) quoted a Lingnan University student union leader as saying that student groups now need to have their email vetted by university officials before being able to send mass emails to the student body (當它們想在大學電郵系統群發放資訊時，只能轉投學生事務處。溫朗晴觀察到，校方在內容上把關較嚴，有時甚至「刪刪減減先出到一啲內容」、「標題都唔肯定 100%係原本嗰個」)。). Kindly provide us with information on this issue.
4. What are the university rules and guidelines on the powers and responsibilities of security guards? Under what circumstances are security guards allowed to take down student messages and posters? Under what circumstances can security guards film and follow students on campus?
5. What support services does the university provide students and faculty, including confidential legal assistance and counsel, in handling concerns, risks, and arrests related to the national security laws?
6. What discussions has the university had with faculty and students about pressure to self-censor and steps taken to minimize such pressure?
7. What is the university policy about when students are able to file complaints about lecturers in class? On what grounds? When can student complaints be the basis for disciplinary action against them?
8. What is the university policy regarding the recording of classes so that students and faculty can freely express themselves?
9. Does the university actively track:
 - a. Government censorship, harassment, surveillance, and intimidation of students, staff, and faculty?
 - b. Harassment by government-controlled or -run newspapers?
 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.

10. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?
11. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.



July 12, 2024

Ms. Priscilla Hung, Director of Communications and Public Affairs
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Via email: priscilla.hung@polyu.edu.hk; web.master@polyu.edu.hk

Re: Academic Freedom at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Dear Ms. Priscilla Hung,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries around the world.

We are planning to publish a report in collaboration with Hong Kong Democracy Council on academic freedom in Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law on the city on June 30, 2020.

We are committed to accurately and fairly reflecting the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's role in the protection of academic freedom in Hong Kong. To do so, we kindly ask you to send us a written response to our questions, below, and any other material you believe would be helpful. Please send your response by August 6 to my colleague Jody Chen at [REDACTED] so that your views can be included in our reporting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Wang
Interim China Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Professor Jin-Guang Teng
President
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Via email: president.office@polyu.edu.hk;
jg.teng@polyu.edu.hk

Dr. Lam Tai-fai
Chairman
The Council of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Via email: ppccs@polyu.edu.hk

**Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council
Questions to the Hong Kong Polytechnic University:**

1. Does the university have a university-wide student union? If so, does the university provide it with administrative support, such as collecting dues for the student union, and allowing the union to have access to rooms and facilities on campus?
2. What requirements exist for university students to post on the university's "Democracy Wall"? Are there any physical barriers that prevent access? Do students need to provide their names and any other information to make a post? Have policies for posting on the Democracy Wall changed since 2019?
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 - c. Please provide figures on the number of different types of incidents reported in each calendar year for the past four years.
9. How many foreign academics have faced difficulties in applying for visas to teach at the university, or to have their visas extended by the Hong Kong government in the past three years?
10. What is the university regulation or policy on criteria for staff hiring, promotion, and tenure processes? Please provide us with a copy of the policy.

Appendix III: Email Response from City University of Hong Kong

From: Communications and Institutional Research Office <ciro@cityu.edu.hk>
Sent: Tuesday, September 24, 2024 10:37 AM
To: hrwasia <[REDACTED]>; Jody Chen <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Human Rights Watch letter Re: Academic Freedom at City University of Hong Kong

Dear Ms Maya Wang,

Thank you for your email. Below please find the reply of City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK) for your information:

City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK) has consistently been at the forefront of ensuring academic freedom and autonomy in Hong Kong and beyond. Our commitment to academic excellence and societal contribution is unwavering, as evidenced by our world-class teaching and research teams.

CityUHK collaborates with prestigious institutions globally, including the University of Cambridge, the University of Exeter, Cornell University, Peking University, and the National University of Singapore, among others. Our faculty, staff, and students engage with leading scholars through international conferences, exchange programmes, and research collaborations across the globe. Notably, our Distinguished Visiting Professors Scheme, launched last year, has brought over 30 eminent scholars from top institutions such as ETH Zürich, Harvard Medical School, MIT, the University of Chicago, National University of Singapore, University College London, University of Cambridge, and the University of Oxford. These distinguished professors co-supervise our PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers, enhancing our academic environment.

CityUHK is dedicated to positioning Hong Kong as an international hub for higher education.

We will continue to attract global talent and foster an environment conducive to academic freedom and innovation.

Finally, we adhere strictly to the law and have well-established guidelines and mechanisms to address any issues faced by our university community. Whether it is illness, financial difficulties, or academic concerns, CityUHK is committed to providing appropriate support to our staff, faculty, and students. This commitment underscores our dedication to the well-being of every member of our community.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues. We remain steadfast in our mission to uphold academic freedom and support our university community.

Communications and Institutional Research Office
City University of Hong Kong



“We Can’t Write the Truth Anymore”

Academic Freedom in Hong Kong under the National Security Law

Following months of massive pro-democracy protests in 2019, the Chinese government on June 30, 2020, imposed the draconian National Security Law on Hong Kong.

“*We Can’t Write the Truth Anymore*,” based on interviews with 25 academics and 8 students, describes how Hong Kong universities have restricted freedom of expression, association, and assembly on campus since June 2020.

University authorities have harassed student unions, removed messages on notice boards known as “Democracy Walls,” dismantled memorials that commemorated the Chinese government’s 1989 Tiananmen Massacre of pro-democracy protesters, punished students for peaceful acts of dissent, used security guards to monitor students on campus, and censored student publications, communications, and events. Both faculty members and students said they widely self-censor, while a handful said they experienced direct censorship.

Beijing-controlled newspapers have subjected several academics perceived to be pro-democracy to virulent campaigns, while Hong Kong authorities have denied visas to foreign academics or refused to extend or renew them. Universities have also fired academics perceived to be pro-democracy, did not renew their contracts, or denied their tenure in opaque circumstances. Some academics have quietly left their jobs and the city.

Human Rights Watch calls on the Hong Kong government to immediately repeal the National Security Law and a second national security law it passed in March 2024, free all academics and students wrongfully detained and imprisoned, and restore academic freedom.

(Above) Masked pro-democracy protesters during a graduation ceremony at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, November 19, 2020.
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vawongsir for Human Rights
Watch