

Cornell Must Cancel Dual Degree Program With Peking University

Kinen Kao – Cornell University

Cornell University recently approved a dual degree program with China's Peking University. As a Hongkonger who has witnessed the downfall of academic freedom in Hong Kong, it is very troubling to find out that the university I'm currently studying at – somewhere I consider a safe place for me to speak my mind – is planning to sacrifice their academic freedom and the safety of their students and faculty for profit.

I still vividly remember when I was 12 years old, when my secondary school took me on a school trip to Xi'an and we visited a local school, during the music class, the teachers there taught us how to sing songs praising the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). "Long live the Chinese Communist Party, there is no new China without Communist Party"... These were the lyrics we were taught to sing. I didn't know much about the CCP was when I was 12 years old, but now I think about it, realizing that Chinese kids were brainwashed this way during their entire childhood, this is a very scary thought to me.

Nine years later, the Chinese Communist Party is now planning to brainwash Hong Kong students the same way they have brainwashed Chinese students. The Hong Kong education system is gradually turning into a brainwashing system, and students are rapidly losing their freedom of speech to express their true selves in school.

In primary schools, children as young as 6 years old are going to be taught about the draconian Hong Kong National Security Law, brainwashing them into the CCP mindset of prioritizing so called "national security" over basic human rights from the very young age¹.

In secondary schools, students and teachers will soon be constantly monitored under CCTV cameras inside classrooms, preventing teachers from "corrupting students" with free thinking, and terrorizing students from developing any ideas of resistance².

And in universities, the purge on free speech is the most blatant. Just last month, Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) forcefully disbanded the newly elected student union by accusing it for "exploiting the campus for political propaganda", betraying its students and removing freedom of speech simply to please the CCP³. Meanwhile, former University of Hong Kong (HKU) law professor Benny Tai is currently imprisoned after being charged for

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55948773>

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<https://hongkongfp.com/2021/01/22/install-cctv-in-hong-kong-classrooms-to-monitor-teachers-urges-pro-beijing-lawmaker/>

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<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/>

“subversion” under Hong Kong National Security Law, simply for organizing an unofficial primary election for the 2020 Hong Kong Legislative Council election⁴.

According to the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI)’s 2020 report, Hong Kong’s academic freedom score has plummeted from 0.442 down to 0.348 this year⁵. Within just 23 years of CCP ruling, Hong Kong’s academic freedom score has dropped from the pre-1997 level of A status down to D status.

With the CCP rapidly purging academic freedom even in Hong Kong, it is very clear that the situation in Mainland China could only be worse. China’s academic freedom score is 0.082 — belonging to E status — almost one of the lowest out of 175 countries.

China has had a long history of arresting and silencing academic scholars based on speech. Some of which include former Tsinghua University law professor Xu Zhangrun, who was arrested for criticizing the CCP’s handling of the coronavirus crisis⁶, and Uyghur professor Ilham Tohti, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for opposing the CCP’s draconian policies against Uyghurs in East Turkestan (Xinjiang)⁷.

The CCP not only purges academic freedom within their country, they are even attempting to silence academic freedom in foreign countries through lawsuits, threats and inexplicable insults. The CCP tried to sue German researcher Adrian Zenz for his work in exposing the CCP’s human rights abuses in the Uyghur genocide⁸. The CCP also insulted French professor Antoine Bondaz as a “petite frappe” — meaning “little thug” in French — while threatening French senators against their plan to visit Taiwan⁹ as part of a France-Taiwan study group.

All these evidences show that if Cornell pursues a dual degree program with China’s Peking University, the Chinese Communist Party will definitely abuse this program to both brainwash Cornell students with CCP propaganda, and silence Cornell professors and students who speak up against the CCP.

As detailed in another article in the College Fix written by Joe Silverstein, since September 2019, my sticky notes on a Cornell bridge railing that form the slogan “STAND WITH HONG KONG, FIGHT FOR FREEDOM” has been torn off or vandalized for more than 85 times, most likely done by Chinese Communist Party loyalists¹⁰. If Cornell allows its students to be brainwashed by universities controlled under the CCP, these attempts of silencing freedom of speech in Cornell will very likely worsen.

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56281684>

⁵ https://www.gppi.net/media/KinzelbachEtAl_2021_Free_Universities_AFI-2020.pdf

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-53306280>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/11/ilham-tohti-uighur-china-wins-nobel-martin-ennals-human-rights-award>

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-sanctions-uighurs-xinjiang/2021/03/10/dd57f8c8-814a-11eb-be22-32d331d87530_story.html

⁹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/china-s-insults-sanctions-unacceptable-france/2184718>

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<https://www.thecollegefix.com/at-cornell-pro-hong-kong-fight-for-freedom-signage-repeatedly-vandalized-destroyed/>

Moreover, the CCP will likely use this deal as a means of threatening Cornell to compromise our academic freedom, forcing Cornell professors and students to stay silent on their human rights abuses against Uyghurs, Tibetans and Hongkongers, in exchange for Cornell's economic profit.

Most importantly, Cornell students and faculty could potentially be at risk of being politically persecuted for dissent against the CCP. As summarized above, the CCP have always been politically persecuting academic scholars, both in Mainland China and now in Hong Kong as well. And in fact, in 2018, Cornell had to suspend an exchange program with Renmin University in Beijing, after reports that it was harassing and detaining students for campaigning for workers' rights¹¹. With so much previous experience that proves the CCP will not hesitate in persecuting anyone who speaks up against them, Cornell must not put our students and faculty at risk of political persecution by the CCP.

Fellow Ivy League universities such as Harvard University and University of Pennsylvania have recognized the threat of the CCP after the promulgation of the Hong Kong National Security Law, letting students use codes instead of names on their work to protect their identities, allowing students to enjoy academic freedom in a safe manner¹². Cornell should do the same in protecting academic freedom in the face of the CCP's threat, rather than going backwards by further sacrificing academic freedom to the CCP for profit.

Cooperating with the devil is never a good idea. Universities that treasure academic freedom within countries that treasure freedom of speech, cannot cooperate with universities that purge academic freedom under tyrannies that purge freedom of speech. Before the day China is freed from the tyrannical clutches of the Chinese Communist Party, academic cooperation between the United States and China simply will not end well. Therefore, I believe that Cornell University should immediately suspend all plans of a dual-degree program with Peking University, until Chinese universities are given genuine academic freedom, and Chinese people are given genuine freedom of speech.

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/29/world/asia/cornell-university-renmin.html>

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-national-security-law-reaches-into-harvard-princeton-classrooms-11597829402>