

## Report on HxA East Asia discussion about the National Security Law

(Frances An)

Frances An reports back from HxEastAsia's discussion on National Security Law (NSL)'s stifling of academic freedom in Hong Kong universities. Under the instruction of HxA, all speakers will be kept anonymous due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

The East Asia committee of Heterodox Academy (HxEastAsia) held a Zoom-based discussion with Heterodox Academy members based out of Asia, United States and Australia. In 2020, the Chinese government imposed the NSL on Hong Kong with no oversight from the Hong Kong people's and under a Chinese (not Hong Kong) legal model. From then on, institutions were under explicit and implicit pressure to prove their 'patriotism' (i.e., loyalty to the Chinese government) through rigid enactments of the NSL. In universities, senior management have abandoned their defence of academic freedom and become NSL police: they closely monitor teachers' content and require all students pass courses on NSL to graduate.

The sense of unavoidable surveillance has created an atmosphere of paranoia among students and staff. Lecturers are wary that they may be recorded, reported for anti-state activity, and demanded to avoid teaching or publishing about controversial topics (e.g., Tiananmen Square massacre), especially in Chinese. Students have dissolved unions, are wary of stating their true opinions in assignments which pass through electronic software and avoid enrolling in courses like *Politics & Public Administration* that could mention sensitive issues. Universities can then conveniently dissolve those courses for 'economic reasons.'

Hope remains with the trust that students and teachers build with one another, meeting informally to discuss ways of overcoming the speech restrictions attached to NSL. Young Hong Kongers' refusal to flee and surrender their homeland to the Chinese government inspires the older generation. However, Hong Kongers do not want to alienate their mainland Chinese peers: instead, they are keen to cooperate in a freedom fight not only for Hong Kong but also China's people.