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Pillar of Shame Hong Kong



Pillar of Shame

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Abstract

In the early morning hours of December 23, 2021, the Pillar of Shame (國殤之柱), a sculpture commemorating the Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989, was surreptitiously removed in the middle of the night from the campus of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) where it had prominently resided since 1998. A copper sculpture created by Danish artist Jens Galschiøt in 1997, the monument depicts fifty torn and twisted bodies symbolising those who died in the Chinese government crackdown on student protests on June Fourth. This paper explores how for over two decades, the Pillar served as a prominent site of contestation over the memory of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in one of the few public spaces on the territory of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and reflects on the complex processes surrounding the contestation of Chinese historical memory which ultimately culminated in the Pillar's removal.

Introduction

The eight-metre tall 'Pillar of Shame' was unveiled in Hong Kong at a candlelight vigil attended by 55,000 people on June 4, 1997, which marked the eighth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. The Pillar was crafted by the Danish artist Jens Galschiøt as part of a wider global commemorative art project known as 'Pillar of Shame – A Happening of Remembrance'.¹ As detailed by Galschiøt on his website, the Pillar commemorating the Tiananmen Square Massacre was intended as the first of a global series of Pillars meant to be mounted annually or bi-annually in various locations around the world to 'remind us of a shameful event which must never reoccur'.² Regarding Hong Kong specifically, the Pillar would serve as a 'litmus test' for the authorities' 'guarantees for human rights and freedom of expression in Hong Kong'.³ Between 1997 and 2021, the Pillar served as one of the main centres for commemorating the Tiananmen Square Massacre in Hong Kong, for decades the only space on the Chinese mainland where such contestation could occur. This ended with the arbitrary and sudden removal of the Pillar in December 2021, which marked a significant political shift and symbolised the erosion of freedoms of speech and expression in Hong Kong after the Anti-Extradition Bill protests of 2019-20 and the subsequent imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law in early 2021.

Background

Hong Kong and the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre

The 1989 student protests in China that culminated in the subsequent Tiananmen Square Massacre in Beijing on June 4, 1989, had initially been sparked by the death of the popular reformist leader Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989. The outpouring of grief at Hu's death was fuelled by tensions built up over the past few years under Deng Xiaoping's post-Maoist reform programmes.⁴ In particular, rising inequality and corruption that had become apparent due to economic reforms and privatisation caused significant popular discontent, especially among students and intellectuals. This rising discontent, in turn, sharpened divisions between reformers and conservatives within the ranks of the Chinese leadership, with the former increasingly embracing student and intellectual demands for political liberalisation and reform as an equally necessary counterpart to the ongoing economic reforms.

The death of Hu, seen as a reformist hero by many students and intellectuals, prompted a march to lay wreaths at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, arguably the most symbolic public venue in modern China. Students began chanting slogans calling for democracy, freedom, and the rule of law and subsequently issued a series of demands for political reform and democratisation. Faced with an implacable response by the Chinese government, thousands of students occupied Tiananmen Square. They established protest camps, while mass protests and strikes spread

¹ Jens Galschiøt, "PILLAR OF SHAME - A Happening of Remembrance." AIDOH - Art in defense of Humanism, 2000.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Michael Sheridan, *The Gate to China: A New History of the People's Republic and Hong Kong* (William Collins, 2021), 162-168.

throughout China for weeks in solidarity.⁵ These protests persisted for more than a month, culminating in a protest of more than a million people on May 17, 1989. However, the ongoing struggle within the leadership of the CCP resulted in a conservative triumph, with the reformist General Secretary Zhao Ziyang being stripped of all his posts by Politburo, which then declared Martial Law in Beijing on May 20.⁶ A standoff ensued until May 29, when the Politburo under Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping ordered People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops into Beijing to clear the protestors. Faced with significant civil resistance and barricades by Beijing residents, PLA troops used live ammunition to clear Tiananmen Square during the early morning hours of June 4, 1989.⁷ This crackdown which led to hundreds being killed or imprisoned, came to be known in Chinese as the 'June 4 Incident' (六四事件) and as the Tiananmen Square Massacre in the West.

These events had an immense resonance for the inhabitants of Hong Kong, most of whom were ethnically Chinese and had (or were descended from those who had) fled to Hong Kong from Mainland China only decades prior. In particular, the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 stipulated the return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997, and Hong Kong closely followed political developments in China during the student protests of 1989, given their likely immense bearing on Hong Kong's post-1997 future.⁸ Many Hong Kongers closely identified the cause of democracy in China with that of democracy in Hong Kong. Many Hong Kongers rallied in solidarity with the ongoing protests in Beijing and throughout China during the first half of 1989.⁹ In solidarity with protesting students in China, over 600,000 people out of a population of around 6 million marched on May 21, 1989, the largest protest Hong Kong had seen in decades.¹⁰ A similar number marched again on June 4 itself after Tiananmen Square had been cleared by the Chinese military using live ammunition. Even more significantly, Hong Kong subsequently became the centre of efforts to rescue protest leaders and activists out of China. Under the aegis of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China (香港市民支援愛國民主運動聯合會; Henceforth referred to as the "Alliance") and with the tacit cooperation of British colonial authorities, "Operation Yellowbird" (黃雀行動) successfully smuggled over four hundred dissidents out of China through Hong Kong and to the West.¹¹

The Tiananmen Square Massacre had an indelible impact on the psyche of Hong Kong and its population. As argued by scholars such as Steve Tsang, political developments in the 1980s, such as the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 and simultaneous moves towards democratisation by British authorities in the last decade of a colonial rule meant that in 1989, most Hong Kong people identified themselves strongly with the democracy movement in China, to the extent that when protestors in Beijing were massacred, many in Hong Kong 'saw *their* comrades fall.'¹² After 1989, the events in Tiananmen Square on June 4 were taboo within public discourse in China, and all attempts at commemoration or memorialisation were banned. Hong

⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁶ Ibid., 168.

⁷ Ibid., 170-171.

⁸ Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (IB Tauris, 2003), 246.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Michael Sheridan, *The Gate to China: A New History of the People's Republic and Hong Kong* (William Collins, 2021), 168.

¹¹ Ibid., 175.

¹² Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (IB Tauris, 2003), 248.

Kong became the centre of the June Fourth commemoration in the Chinese-speaking world and, indeed, the only part of the geographical Chinese mainland where the June Fourth commemoration could happen openly and legally.¹³ The Alliance was prominent in organising commemorative and educational events over the Tiananmen Square Massacre, mainly by holding an annual candlelight vigil in Victoria Park on June 4.¹⁴ It is ultimately important to understand that this was the context in which the Pillar of Shame was constructed in 1997 and placed on permanent exhibition at HKU between 1998 and 2021.

The Alliance's candlelight vigil was held without interruption between 1990 and 2020 despite fears that the vigil and the Alliance itself would be banned after the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997. However, this eventually came to pass in the aftermath of the 2019-20 anti-extradition bill protests and the imposition of the National Security Law (NSL), with the government imposing a ban on the vigil in June 2021. The Alliance dissolved itself in September 2021 after having its funds frozen and leaders jailed on charges of acting as an 'agent of foreign forces'.¹⁵ More broadly, the passage of the NSL marked a watershed for almost all aspects of civil society in Hong Kong. Hundreds of high-profile pro-Democracy activists, ranging from student leader Joshua Wong to the 83-year-old barrister Martin Lee was arrested and detained on NSL charges carrying life imprisonment as the maximum penalty,¹⁶ while longstanding pro-Democracy organisations such as the Civil Human Rights Front¹⁷ and the Professional Teachers' Union¹⁸ similarly dissolved themselves under threat of NSL prosecution. Pro-Democracy media outlets such as *Apple Daily*¹⁹ and *Stand News*²⁰ also wound up after their funds were frozen by the police under NSL provisions.

Notably, these crucial developments were preceded only by months of the removal of the Pillar of Shame from HKU in the early morning hours of December 23, 2021.

The 'Pillar of Shame – A Happening of Remembrance' Project

The Pillar of Shame that came to be located on the campus of HKU for over two decades was initially crafted by Jens Galschiøt as the first monument to be erected as part of a larger global

¹³ Judith Pernin & Eric Florence, "1989-2019: Perspectives on June 4th from Hong Kong." *French Centre for Research on Contemporary China*, May 20, 2019.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kelly Ho, "Hong Kong Tiananmen vigil organiser acted as agent for foreigners, national security police claim." *Hong Kong Free Press*, August 26, 2021.

¹⁶ Rachel Wong, "15 Hong Kong pro-democracy figures arrested in latest police round up." *Hong Kong Free Press*, April 19, 2020.

¹⁷ Jeffie Lam, "Hong Kong protests: as Civil Human Rights Front folds, police and Beijing warn legal troubles far from over." *South China Morning Post*, August 15, 2021

¹⁸ Candice Chau, "Hong Kong's largest teachers' union to disband following pressure from gov't and Chinese state media." *Hong Kong Free Press*, August 10, 2021.

¹⁹ Helen Davidson, "Hong Kong's Apple Daily, symbol of pro-democracy movement, to close." *The Guardian*, June 23, 2021.

²⁰ Hong Kong Free Press, "Hong Kong's Stand News deletes website and wipes social media; ex-staff to appear in court as watchdogs decry raid." *Hong Kong Free Press*, December 30, 2021.

'happening.'²¹ All of these Pillars would follow the same artistic model – 'A dark obelisk-like sculpture, eight metres tall, consisting of people twisted in surreal grotesque positions' (as seen above in Figures 1 & 2).²² The sculpture was originally dark brown (See Figure 1), its present colour (see Figure 2) a result of the 2008 Colour Orange campaign, which is further detailed below.



Figure 1: 'Photo of Pillar of Shame' Image by Minghong via Wikimedia CC BY-SA 4.0



Figure 2: 'Close-up view of the Pillar' Image by Dorange35 via Wikimedia CC BY-SA 3.0

Each Pillar, however, would have different inscriptions on its base to highlight the appropriate local context (see below in Figure 3 and Figure 4). In clear red ink, the English inscriptions state 'THE TIANANMEN MASSACRE June 4, 1989,' and to its left, 'The old cannot kill the young

²¹ Jens Galschiøt, "PILLAR OF SHAME - A Happening of Remembrance." AIDOH - Arts in defense of Humanism, 2000.

Note: Galschiøt completed two other Pillars: One in Acteal, Mexico (1999) to commemorate the December 1997 massacre of forty-five members of the civil society group Las Abejas by right-wing paramilitaries, and the other in Belém, Brazil (2000) to memorialise the victims of the 1996 Eldorado dos Carajás massacre in Brazil. A fifth Pillar was planned for Berlin to commemorate the victims of Nazism, and Galschiøt suggested further possible locations for pillars such as Grozny, Auschwitz, Rwanda, and Srebrenica. However, none of these further Pillars were sculpted due to funding issues, and the "Pillar of Shame – A Happening of Remembrance" project seems to have concluded by the early 2000s.

Of the four Pillars that were sculpted, the Hong Kong Pillar commemorating the Tiananmen Square Massacre attracted the most international attention. It is the only one of the four Pillars that has been forcibly removed since installation, in this case as the clear and direct result of top-down government-led action.

²² Ibid.

forever.' Similarly, the Chinese inscriptions state '六四屠殺' ['June Fourth Massacre'], and to its left in cursive script, '老人豈能夠殺光年輕人' ['How can old people kill all young people'].



Figure 3 & Figure 4: 'Inscriptions on the base of the Pillar' Images by Duanhua via Wikimedia CC BY-SA 3.0

Jens Galschiøt originally conceptualised the Pillar as a 'political happening' meant to be placed around Europe during the 1990s as a reminder that 'horrible things' could still happen after the euphoria that accompanied the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent end of the Cold War.²³ Galschiøt described the project as being 'a crime's Nobel Prize, made not to remember a hero or an achievement, but for a crime that people are trying to forget/erase.'²⁴ Intended to be 'simultaneously beautiful and frightening,' the first Pillar of Shame was displayed publicly in November 1996 at the NGO Forum of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) summit in Rome. During this conference, Galschiøt met Chinese dissidents who had fled due to June 4 and were thus inspired to create a Pillar that would serve as an 'icon' for the Alliance in Hong Kong because of the approaching handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997.²⁵ The second Pillar of Shame was crafted and shipped to Hong Kong in April 1997. It was unveiled in Hong Kong at the Alliance's annual candlelight vigil at Victoria Park on June 4, 1997, the eighth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.²⁶ From September 1997 to April 1998, the Pillar was transported on a roving exhibition around the campuses of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Lingnan University, the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the City University of Hong Kong, before eventually being exhibited in the podium of the Haking Wong Building at the University of

²³ Jens Galschiøt, interview by IHRJ Research Team, April 1, 2022.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jens Galschiøt, "PILLAR OF SHAME - A Happening of Remembrance." AIDOH - Arts in Defense of Humanism 2000.

Hong Kong.²⁷ The Pillar was permanently erected there for over two decades until its removal in late December 2021.

History of the Contestation

The contestation over the Pillar of Shame in Hong Kong can be broken down into three main periods: first, the contestation during its tour around seven Hong Kong universities in 1997 and its initial installation at HKU in 1998; second, the contestation over the commemorative activities held at the Pillar from 1998-2021, and third, the contestation over the eventual removal of the Pillar in December 2021.

Contestation over Installation

Contestation over the Pillar Installation began almost immediately upon its arrival in Hong Kong. While Hong Kong still had a month left of British rule before the handover to China on July 1, when the Pillar arrived in Hong Kong from Denmark on May 31, 1997, both Galschiøt and members of the Alliance expressed fears that the exhibition of the Pillar might already be problematic due to political sensitivities.²⁸ These fears were, to some extent, justified with the Swiss logistics company that had initially been contracted to move the Pillar from the Kwai Chung Container Terminal to Victoria Park for the annual June 4 candlelight vigil breaking its contract because it did not want to offend China.²⁹ The Alliance nevertheless managed to transport the Pillar with its own means to Victoria Park.

The Alliance's original plan after the candlelight vigil was to send the Pillar on a series of exhibitions across public parks in Hong Kong after the candlelight vigil.³⁰ However, these plans were scuppered by the Urban Council's repeated rejections of attempts to lease out these parks as venues, likely due to political sensitivities, even though many of these exhibitions would have taken place before the handover of Hong Kong to China on July 1. These rejections are noteworthy given that the Urban Council was an elected municipal government body with a majority of members sympathetic to the pro-Democracy movement in Hong Kong and the Alliance. Nonetheless, they decided not to lease the parks as display venues for the Pillar.

Indeed, Galschiøt recollects that the Alliance was fully aware that over 7,000 foreign journalists were in Hong Kong to cover the 1997 handover. While no dramatic changes occurred in the immediate aftermath of the handover, the Pillar display attracted significant press coverage as a

²⁷ 鄭靖而 [Zheng Qinger], "97年學生市民護送國殤之柱入港大 當年學生:24年前的擔心今日發生" ["In 1997 Students and Citizens escorted the Pillar of Shame into HKU. Students from 1997: Fears from 24 years ago occurred today"], 衆新聞 (Hong Kong Citizen News), October 16, 2021.

²⁸ Presse-Clearing, "The Pillar of Shame." *Various Local Hong Kong Newspapers*, September 29, 1997.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ 鄭靖而 [Zheng Qinger], "97年學生市民護送國殤之柱入港大 當年學生:24年前的擔心今日發生" ["In 1997 Students and Citizens escorted the Pillar of Shame into HKU. Students from 1997: Fears from 24 years ago occurred today"], 衆新聞 (Hong Kong Citizen News), October 16, 2021.

prominent symbol of fears regarding the handover to China in 1997.³¹

The Alliance thus settled instead on a plan of sending the Pillar on a series of exhibitions across various university campuses in Hong Kong. The first location for the exhibition was the University of Hong Kong, where a very visible process of contestation occurred: As the Pillar was being escorted from Victoria Park to the HKU campus, Alliance activists and university students found their path blocked by HKU's private security. HKU subsequently called the police, provoking a standoff where the activists and students formed a human protective chain around the cargo truck transporting the Pillar.³² Faced with the obstacle of security guards and policemen, the activists and students sat and sang anthems such as 'We Shall Overcome' and 'The Internationale,' while shouting slogans such as 'the police protect the people,' 'the police protect democracy,' and 'Protect the Pillar of Shame.'³³ Amidst the jostling, the police snatched away the car keys of the cargo truck, though the clashes did not escalate further.³⁴ Ultimately, after three hours, the police and security guards relented, the cargo truck keys were returned, and the truck transporting the Pillar was allowed passage onto the HKU campus.³⁵

Regarding the initial struggle to get the Pillar into the HKU Campus, Galschiøt recollects that press coverage made a decisive impact in facilitating the entrance of the Pillar into the HKU Campus. The struggle to get the Pillar into the campus attracted the attention of numerous Western journalists in Hong Kong to cover the handover. These journalists broadcast live footage of events to the world, and according to Galschiøt's anecdote, Governor Chris Patten saw this footage on CNN. Patten then phoned the Hong Kong Police and instructed them to stand down, thus allowing the Pillar to successfully enter the HKU Campus.³⁶

After two weeks of being exhibited on the HKU Campus, the Pillar was sent on an exhibition tour around six other Hong Kong universities. After the tour's conclusion, the Hong Kong University Students' Union (HKUSU) held a referendum on the permanent exhibition of the Pillar on the HKU campus. Of the 2,200 students who voted, around 75% voted in favour of permanently exhibiting the Pillar at the podium of the Haking Wong Building at HKU.³⁷ While the University authorities did not officially endorse this, no action was taken against the exhibition of the Pillar there until December 2021.

³¹ Jens Galschiøt, interview by IHRJ Research Team, April 1, 2022.

³² Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, "國殤之柱" ["The Pillar of Shame"], *Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China*, May 20, 2009.

³³ 立場報道 ["Stand News Reporting"], "【國殤之柱 簡史】抗爭下入港大矗立24年 高志活預想昔日「言論自由試金石」或成碎片" ["【Pillar of Shame. A Short History】Entered HKU through struggle and displayed for 24 years. Galschiøt predicts that the then- "Freedom of Speech touchstone" might end up in pieces"], *Stand News*, October 13, 2021.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jens Galschiøt, interview by IHRJ Research Team, April 1, 2022.

³⁷ Ibid.

Contestation over Commemoration

Between 1998 and the Pillar's eventual removal in 2021, the governing body of HKU largely cooperated with Alliance efforts to maintain and repair the statue. Notably, in 2010 when cracks were discovered in the Pillar's base, the HKU governing body assisted in arranging the installation of extra steel supports to support the Pillar.³⁸ The governing body of HKU was motivated in doing so by the awareness that should any student or member of the public be injured as a result of an accident or any form of sculpture collapse, HKU would incur legal liability. Similarly, their counterparts in the governing body of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) also arranged for repairs to the base of the Goddess of Democracy statue situated at the CUHK campus, likely motivated by an awareness that any injuries caused by accidents related to the statue would incur legal liability for the university despite its presence never having been officially sanctioned.³⁹

There was only one noteworthy instance of contestation over the use of the Pillar of Shame as a permanent symbolic commemoration of the Tiananmen Square Massacre and as a centre for annual commemorations on June 4 itself. That instance occurred in 2008, coinciding with the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the holding of all 2008 Olympic equestrian events in Hong Kong.⁴⁰ Most notably, the 2008 Olympic torch relay, which passed through Hong Kong on May 2, 2008, was marked by protests and counterprotests along the torch relay route over democracy in Hong Kong and June 4. Prominent members of the Alliance, such as its founder Szeto Wah, lined the route waving inflatable plastic Olympic flames meant to symbolise democracy.⁴¹

This happened in conjunction with the Colour Orange campaign led by Galschiøt, which sought to draw attention to and combat alleged human rights violations in China.⁴² As part of the Colour Orange campaign, Galschiøt attempted to visit Hong Kong so he could repaint the Pillar in orange. However, he was barred from entering Hong Kong by the Hong Kong government, and as such, members of the Alliance did the repainting of the Pillar in orange instead.⁴³ It is noteworthy that this was only a temporary ban at the time: Galschiøt was permitted entry into Hong Kong to personally conduct repair work on the Pillar of Shame in 2013.⁴⁴

³⁸ 鄭靖而 [Zheng Qing'er], "97年學生市民護送國殤之柱入港大 當年學生：24年前的擔心今日發生" ["In 1997 Students and Citizens escorted the Pillar of Shame into HKU. Students from 1997: Fears from 24 years ago occurred today"], *衆新聞* (Hong Kong Citizen News), October 16, 2021.

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⁴⁰ Bloomberg News, "Hong Kong Hosts Torch Relay Amid Support, Criticism." *Bloomberg.com*, May 2, 2008.

⁴¹ Regina Leung, Robert Cains, and Cheung Chi Fai, "Tensions evident during HK torch relay." *South China Morning Post*, May 2, 2008.

⁴² Jens Galschiøt, "The Color Orange (OL china)." 2008.

⁴³ 立場報道 ["Stand News Reporting"], "【國殤之柱 簡史】抗爭下入港大矗立24年 高志活預想昔日「言論自由試金石」或成碎片" ["Pillar of Shame. A Short History"] Entered HKU through struggle and displayed for 24 years. Galschiøt predicts that the then- "Freedom of Speech touchstone" might end up in pieces", *The Stand News*, October 13, 2021.

⁴⁴ Jens Galschiøt, "September 2013: Jens Galschiøt gets into Hong Kong." AIDOH - Arts in Defense of Humanism 2013.

Contestation over Removal

The first significant act of contestation that led to the Pillar's removal occurred in early October 2021, when the pro-Beijing political organization Politihk Social Strategic (香港政研會) filed a report to the Hong Kong Police claiming that the Pillar conveyed an inflammatory message which breached the Hong Kong National Security Law.⁴⁵ Additionally, Politihk Social Strategic also claimed that it had received over 20,000 signatures supporting its claim that the Pillar conveyed demagogic anti-China and Hong Kong separatist messaging and had "incited the seeds of hatred" (荼毒學生心靈、散播仇恨種子) among the hearts of HKU students over two decades. Politihk further argued that the Pillar was unlawfully occupying a public space within the HKU campus and posed a potential threat to the personal safety of passers-by.⁴⁶



Figure 5: 'After the removal of the Pillar' Image by Studio Incendo via Flickr CC BY 2.0

Given their opacity, it is difficult to fully recount and analyse the decision-making processes surrounding the removal of the Pillar in the early morning of December 23, 2021. That said, several aspects of this process can be identified based on publicly available information. First, it is clear that the decision-making process was contained solely within one organisational body: The Governance Structures of the University of Hong Kong, and in particular, The Council (校務委員會) of the University of Hong Kong, which 'is the governing body of the University, and is responsible for the management of financial and human resources of the University and its future developments.'⁴⁷ The Council exercised its authority over the removal of the Pillar because it was

⁴⁵ 東方日報 ["Eastern Daily News"], "港大國殤之柱遭團體舉報 指涉違國安法散播仇恨" ["HKU Pillar of Shame is reported by an organization; Accused of breaking the National Security Law and spreading hatred"], *Eastern Daily News Online Edition*, July 30, 2021.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The University of Hong Kong, "Governance Structure." HKU, January 2022.

located on HKU property, and it appears that the Pillar placement at that location between 1998 and 2021 was the result of informal acquiescence by HKU's governance bodies over the years.⁴⁸ Much like similar sculptures at other universities in Hong Kong, the presence of the Pillar of Shame was never endorsed by the HKU Council or legally codified.⁴⁹ As such, throughout the entire duration of its presence at the HKU campus, there was a constant risk that the Pillar could be removed or even dismantled had the HKU Council simply chosen to end its informal acquiescence to the Pillar's presence or if other factors affecting the continued existence or presence of the Pillar shifted. The eventual removal of the Pillar was precipitated by the latter dramatically happening in the form of the NSL being imposed upon Hong Kong in mid-2021. Indeed, Galschiøt observed in a 2022 interview that after the imposition of the NSL, he had expected the Pillar would soon be removed and had accepted that all that could subsequently be done was to delay its removal.⁵⁰

On October 8, the American law firm Mayer Brown sent a letter on behalf of the HKU Council to the liquidators of the Alliance demanding the removal of the Pillar by October 13. At this point, the Alliance had self-dissolved two weeks prior and subsequently had its operating funds frozen by the Hong Kong Government under the provisions of the National Security Law.⁵¹ The liquidators of the Alliance responded with a letter refusing to do so and stating that as a centre of Speech and Academic Freedoms, HKU had a societal responsibility and mission to retain the Pillar.

Significantly, Jens Galschiøt also responded to this letter in a statement released on October 12. Galschiøt stated that he accepted HKU's right to demand the Pillar's removal. As the Pillar owner, he had asked a lawyer in Hong Kong to act on his behalf in possible negotiations with HKU to relocate the Pillar out of Hong Kong.⁵² The HKU request for the Pillar's removal also prompted a pressure surge in the West against removal. Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod raised the issue with the Chinese government, noting that 'the freedom to express opinions peacefully is a fundamental right of all human beings. This goes for Hong Kong too.'⁵³ While the pressure campaign did not manage to secure any concessions from HKU regarding the status of the Pillar, it did successfully bring about the resignation of the US law firm Mayer Brown from acting on behalf of HKU in its attempts to secure the removal of the Pillar.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ 鄭靖而 [Zheng Qinger], "97年學生市民護送國殤之柱入港大 當年學生：24年前的擔心今日發生" ["In 1997 Students and Citizens escorted the Pillar of Shame into HKU. Students from 1997: Fears from 24 years ago occurred today"], 衆新聞 (*Hong Kong Citizen News*), October 16, 2021.

⁴⁹ Jens Galschiøt, interview by IHRJ Research Team, April 1, 2022.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ 立場報道 ["Stand News Reporting"], "港大要求支聯會下周三前移走國殤之柱 否則視為放棄 蔡耀昌：不合理" ["HKU Demands that the Alliance removes the Pillar of Shame before next Wednesday, or be seen to have abandoned the Pillar. Richard Tsoi: This is unreasonable"], *Stand News*, October 8, 2021.

⁵² Jens Galschiøt, "Skamstøtten i Hongkong 2021; Latest news October 12. oct. of jens galschiøt," October 12, 2021.

⁵³ 立場報道 ["Stand News Reporting"], "港大要求移走國殤之柱 丹麥外長：已向北京表關注 以藝術和平表達是基本人權" ["HKU demands that the Pillar of Shame is moved; Danish Foreign Minister: Has expressed concerns to Beijing, Freedom of Artistic Expression is a Basic Human Right"], *Stand News*, October 15, 2021.

⁵⁴ Tom Grundy, "US law firm Mayer Brown will no longer represent University of Hong Kong on removing Tiananmen Massacre statue," *Hong Kong Free Press*, October 16, 2021.

Despite numerous attempts by Galschiøt to reach an accommodation with HKU between October and December 2021 and the issuing of multiple legal letters and public appeals by Galschiøt to that effect, the HKU Council did not respond to Galschiøt's attempts to start negotiations on the removal of the Pillar. When interviewed by reporters on December 19, HKU Chairman of Council Arthur Li claimed that 'it was difficult to deal with' [處理上有困難] the Pillar and that after the self-dissolution of both the Alliance and the HKUSU over the past few months, it was 'rather difficult to trace ownership' [較難追溯管有權] of the Pillar.⁵⁵

Four days later, from around 10 pm on the evening of December 22, HKU subcontracted construction workers to erect temporary barriers around the Pillar of Shame. Drilling and other construction sounds were heard for the next six hours, until around 4 am in the early morning of December 23, when the construction workers began transporting large objects wrapped in a white cloth and transparent plastic out of the Haking Wong Building.⁵⁶ Witnesses assumed that the Pillar had been split into sections for easy transportation at 6 am. The lights were 'suddenly shut off' as the construction workers worked in the dark to wrap up and move the base of the Pillar of Shame.⁵⁷ By around 7 am, the entire Pillar and its components had been removed and placed in a container, which was then driven away by a lorry.

The context behind contestation

It is important to frame and understand the removal of the Pillar of Shame from the campus of HKU not as an isolated event or case but rather as part of a broader process of contestation whereby the numerous objects memorialising the events of 1989 that had been located throughout various universities in Hong Kong were all contemporaneously removed. The removal of the Pillar of Shame from HKU was followed one day after by the removal of the Goddess of Democracy statue from the campus of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)⁵⁸ and the dismantling a sculpted relief depicting Tiananmen Square at the Lingnan University campus.⁵⁹ The removal of the Pillar of Shame, the Goddess of Democracy at CUHK and the Tiananmen Square relief at Lingnan were all conducted in the dead of night. Like their counterparts at HKU, the governing bodies of CUHK and Lingnan University highlighted the legal ambiguity of these objects being situated on their campuses without expression of permission and approval in the first place. Also, they cited health and safety concerns as part of their reasoning for removal.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ 黃麗莎 [Lisa Wong], “李國章：國殤之柱難處理 高志活：雕塑恐將被破壞、被移走” [“Arthur Li: Difficult to handle Pillar of Shame ; Jens Galschiøt: Fears that sculpture will be damaged, removed”], 衆新聞 (*Hong Kong Citizen News*), December 19, 2021.

⁵⁶ 衆新聞記者 [Citizen News Reporter], “港大深夜突襲拆卸國殤之柱 校委會決定即日執行 通宵分割 8小時消失” [“HKU suddenly demolishes Pillar of Shame in the middle of the night ; HKU Council decision immediately executed ; (Pillar) separated into pieces overnight ; Disappears in 8 hours”], 衆新聞 (*Hong Kong Citizen News*), December 23, 2021.

⁵⁷ The University of Hong Kong, “HKU Council Statement on the Removal of a Statue from Campus.” HKU, December 23, 2021.

⁵⁸ Candice Chau, “Two more Hong Kong universities tear down Tiananmen Massacre monuments in early hours of Fri.” *Hong Kong Free Press*, December 24, 2021.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Crucially, these similarities in the removal process between these objects' shed light on some unique local dynamics. When considering how universities in Hong Kong responded to the National Security Law, the removal of these memorialisation objects was not at all surprising. Given the general chilling effect of the National Security Law on civil society and sensitive political issues such as the commemoration of the events of June Fourth, the key issue for many became not the removal of such objects but the retrospective question of why universities had passively acquiesced to the display of such objects for almost two decades after the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. Another crucial point of context relates to how June Fourth commemoration in Hong Kong gradually came under attack during the 2010s before being entirely suppressed after the imposition of the NSL. For over two decades, Hong Kong was the only place under Chinese rule where the events of 1989 were freely discussed, written about, and commemorated. In 2016, notable cases emerged of publishers in Hong Kong. He had been printing and distributing politically sensitive books on Chinese history, including the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, kidnapped into Mainland China where they were imprisoned and made seemingly coerced confessions on state television.⁶¹ Mere months after the imposition of the NSL, the Alliance's Museum commemorating the events of June Fourth was forcibly closed down by the government on the grounds that it had broken various building safety regulations.⁶² At the same time, the annual June Fourth vigil that had been held since 1989 was banned for the first time under the pretext that it would violate COVID measures.⁶³ This ban persisted into 2022, when hundreds of armed Police were deployed into various public spaces in Hong Kong on June Fourth in a manner reminiscent of how June Fourth commemoration has been for decades suppressed by the security services in Mainland China.⁶⁴ It is in this sense apparent that the Pillar of Shame, and its subsequent removal, evidently falls into the narrative of being an object that commemorates an event the Chinese government wishes to see omitted from history, as has been the case in Mainland China since 1989. After the passage of the NSL in July 2021, Hong Kong was fully brought into line with Mainland China in this regard.

Public Symbolism

A crucial element that underpinned the perceived Public Symbolism of the Pillar of Shame and its removal was local and international media coverage, the former highly shaped by the aforementioned chilling effect of the NSL on civil society in Hong Kong. Both pro-China and pro-democracy media outlets noted the Pillar removal domestically in Hong Kong. While the former tended to offer a few sentences on the removal of the statue as a long overdue move to rid

⁶¹ Vivienne Zeng, "The curious tale of five missing publishers in Hong Kong." *Hong Kong Free Press*, January 8, 2016.

⁶² Rhoda Kwan, "Explainer: How Hong Kong sought to erase the memory of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre." *Hong Kong Free Press*, October 23, 2021.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hong Kong Free Press, "In Pictures: High security, arrests and mini acts of defiance as Hong Kong seeks to thwart Tiananmen crackdown commemorations." *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 4, 2022.

the city of yet another seditious object,⁶⁵ the coverage of the removal by the latter reflected a much more sombre tone. Indeed, the removal of the Pillar of Shame was one of the last things covered by the major online media outlet *Stand News*, which ceased operations less than a week after the removal of the Pillar after its offices were raided by National Security police and six of its staff arrested on suspicion of publishing 'seditious material'.⁶⁶ In that sense, the Pillar removal also reflected broader changes in the room for the Freedom of Speech in Hong Kong, where a general clampdown on the press has increasingly limited what can and cannot be said. The contrast between this limited local media coverage, and the much more extensive and critical coverage offered by Western media outlets, which framed the removal of the Pillar as a testament to the destruction of Freedoms of Speech in Hong Kong,⁶⁷ is stark and indicative of how Hong Kong has changed since its days as the free press capital of East Asia.

This contrast between domestic and Western press coverage arguably further highlights some significant limitations to the perceived symbolism of the Pillar and its removal. Fundamentally, after a brief period of public display in 1997 and 1998, the Pillar was only seen regularly by HKU students and visitors to the HKU campus. As such, while students and other members of the HKU community might have particularly cared for the symbolism of the Pillar, the extent to which broader society in Hong Kong cared for such symbolism is questionable. Indeed, the resonance of June Fourth and the events of 1989 in Hong Kong had arguably faded over time, even prior to the passage of the NSL. As seen in the Umbrella Movement of 2014 and the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement of 2019-20, the locus of the pro-democracy movement had shifted from the memorialisation of June Fourth and the fight for a democratic China that had predominated in the 1990s and 2000s to one centred on Hong Kong localism and a fight against the creeping 'mainlandisation' of Hong Kong.⁶⁸ This divide between older and younger generations of democrats was most clearly highlighted in the gradual drop in attendance during the 2010s of the annual Alliance-led commemoration of June Fourth at Victoria Park⁶⁹ and by the decision of elected Student Union representatives from the various Hong Kong universities to end their traditional practice of attending the commemoration..⁷⁰

As a result of this shift and the broader fading resonance of June Fourth in Hong Kong's civil society, by the time of the Pillar's removal, what it symbolised among the local community in

⁶⁵ 大公報 [Ta Kung Pao], "正本清源！港大移走反中雕像" ["Root-and-branch reform! HKU removes anti-China sculpture"], 大公報 [Ta Kung Pao], December 23, 2021.

⁶⁶ Hong Kong Free Press, "Stand News closes, content deleted following arrests and police raid; Chief Sec. slams 'evil elements'." *Hong Kong Free Press*, December 29, 2021.

⁶⁷ Mike Ives, "Hong Kong Removes Statue That Memorialized Tiananmen Victims." *New York Times*, December 23, 2021.

⁶⁸ Max Fisher, "'One Country, Two Nationalisms': The Identity Crisis Behind Hong Kong's Turmoil." *New York Times*, September 27, 2019.

⁶⁹ Kris Cheng, "Donations to Tiananmen vigil organiser drop HK\$340,000 with reduced attendance." *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 6, 2017.

⁷⁰ Ellie Ng, "8 Hong Kong university student unions will not attend June 4 vigil to commemorate Tiananmen Massacre." *Hong Kong Free Press*, May 19, 2018.

Hong Kong was changed and, to an extent, diminished since its original installation in 1997 when June Fourth and the events of 1989 were still freshly held memories and integral parts of popular memory within the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. Considering its placement away from the general public and within the HKU campus for over two decades, it can be broadly concluded that by the time of the Pillar's removal in 2021, its symbolism had mainly become twofold. Firstly, at a local level, its continued presence symbolised a level of Freedom of Speech in Hong Kong above that of Mainland China, where the commemoration of June Fourth has always been tightly Policed and suppressed. As noted by Galschiøt in a 2022 interview, the Pillar was in many ways 'the last man standing' as a symbol of Freedom of Speech in Hong Kong, with its continued display and existence showing that people were still allowed to remember the events of June Fourth in 1989 and practice a 'Western way of thinking' rather than one based on political conformity.⁷¹ To Galschiøt, removing the Pillar was a crime against Free Speech in Hong Kong, and Universities in general, given the importance of Freedom of Speech to academic learning and debate.⁷²

Secondly, the Pillar gained an outsized symbolic value within Western media coverage and Western perceptions of contemporary Hong Kong. Its removal marked a symbolic end to the Freedoms, which had differentiated Hong Kong from the Chinese Mainland since 1997. Ultimately, by the time of the Pillar's removal, its symbolic significance was arguably greater within a Western lens than a local one: The removal of the Pillar had been regarded by many in Hong Kong as only a matter of time since the imposition of the NSL in mid-2021, and between then and the removal of the Pillar in December, significant changes had already occurred in Hong Kong. For a Western audience, the removal of the Pillar drew attention to and symbolised many of these significant changes that the people of Hong Kong were firmly aware of and had already been living through for months.

Decision-Making Processes

The clearest piece of evidence we can find for understanding the decision-making processes behind that Pillar's removal is an HKU Council press statement released on December 23, which stated that the Council had 'made a decision at its meeting on December 22 (Wednesday) to remove a statue, widely known as the Pillar of Shame, from campus.'⁷³ The statement added that this decision was 'based on external legal advice and risk assessment for the best interest of the University' and also emphasised that 'no party has ever obtained any approval from the University to display the statue on campus, and the University has the right to take appropriate actions to handle it at any time.'⁷⁴ Additionally, the statement highlighted the 'potential safety issues

⁷¹ Jens Galschiøt, interview by IHRJ Research Team, April 1, 2022.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ The University of Hong Kong, "HKU Council Statement on the Removal of a Statue from Campus." HKU, December 23, 2021.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

resulting from the fragile statue'. It stated that 'continued display of the statue would pose legal risks to the University based on the Crimes Ordinance enacted under the Hong Kong colonial government.'⁷⁵ Finally, it was noted that the Council decided that the statue should be 'put in storage' after removal.⁷⁶

In response to the removal of the Pillar, Jens Galschiøt released a statement noting that the removal was 'completely unreasonable and a self-immolation against private property in Hong Kong.' Importantly, Galschiøt pointed out that he and his Hong Kong lawyer had attempted to contact HKU regarding the Pillar for the past three months, but it had been 'completely impossible to get in touch with them.'⁷⁷ Galschiøt further emphasised that the Pillar was his 'private property' and that the Alliance had also issued a statement noting that the Pillar was Galschiøt's property. They had only taken it 'on loan for the exhibition' at HKU. Galschiøt concluded by stating that the removal 'is a disgrace and an abuse and Hong Kong universities or other responsible authorities – It is a disgrace and an abuse and shows that Hong Kong has become a brutal place without laws and regulations such as protecting the population, the arts and private property.'⁷⁸

In an interview with the IHRJ Research Team in April 2022, Galschiøt recounted that shortly after the Pillar's removal, HKU wrote a letter to Galschiøt's lawyer in Hong Kong in which the University accepted that the Pillar was Jens' property. Galschiøt observed that HKU took great care in removing the Pillar, aware of the potential legal liability that damaging the Pillar could incur.⁷⁹ Galschiøt also detailed how he has since seen photos of the Pillar residing in a shipping container. He observed that while the Hong Kong Government would wish for the Pillar to be transported out of Hong Kong, the prospects for achieving this remain limited.⁸⁰ Importantly, Galschiøt noted that even with the help of Danish and American diplomats, legal representation in Hong Kong, the shipping company Maersk, and the cooperation of city authorities in the Czech Republic, who earmarked space for the long-term display of the Pillar in Prague, little progress has been made regarding the transportation of the Pillar out of Hong Kong.⁸¹ In an echo of the transportation problems encountered in 1997 when the Pillar first reached Hong Kong, Galschiøt divulged that as many as 11 transportation companies had been approached regarding moving the Pillar to a container terminal so it could be shipped out of Hong Kong. However, all 11 companies have declined due to the negative political associations brought about by the Pillar.⁸²

It is noteworthy, though, unsurprising that after the Pillar's removal, those who had decided to

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jens Galschiøt, "Pillar of Shame in Hongkong 2021." December 22, 2021.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jens Galschiøt, interview by IHRJ Research Team, April 1, 2022.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

remove it actively and publicly contested the commemorative narrative surrounding the Pillar and its discursive legitimacy as a memorial for the Tiananmen Square Massacre. At a radio interview on January 1, 2022, former HKU Chairman of Council Arthur Li (李國章), whose term as Chairman of the University's governing body had ended only the day prior, critiqued the Pillar as a 'sham' [騙局] and a fraud.⁸³ Li claimed that the Pillar was originally built to commemorate the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing victims. As such, the figures depicted in the Pillar 'were all Westerners, not Chinese, completely unrelated to June 4.'⁸⁴ Finally, Li also stated that the HKU Council had decided to remove the Pillar as the lack of clarity over its ownership meant that HKU might have had to bear legal liability if the Pillar toppled over and caused injuries and that the decision for removal had thus been taken after legal advice was sought.⁸⁵

Li's active contestation of the commemorative narrative surrounding the Pillar is not surprising if accounting for his background and the nuances of broader political shifts within HKU that were already underway years prior to the imposition of the NSL. Born into a wealthy tycoon family, Li spent most of his career as a medical doctor before ascending to senior posts in university management and government in the 1990s and 2000s. Notably, Li served as vice-chancellor of CUHK from 1996-2002 before taking up a post as the Hong Kong Government's top education official from 2002-2007. Li's tenure in both posts was occasioned by controversy, such as his rejection of renowned law scholar Johannes Chan's appointment as pro-vice-chancellor of HKU, demonstrating Li's pro-Beijing political stance to many.⁸⁶ The prospect of Li's appointment by Chief Executive Leung Chun-Ying (梁振英) as HKU Chairman of Council in 2015 was vehemently opposed by broadly pro-Democrat higher education unions and organisations. A poll then showed that most HKU academic staff had little faith that Li would uphold academic freedoms, with other polls showing that 87% of HKU Academic Staff Association members and almost 75% of the Hong Kong-wide Professional Teachers Union were opposed to Li's appointment.⁸⁷ During his term as HKU Chairman of Council, Li became known for his abrasive and confrontational leadership style, frequently clashing with the pro-Democratic Hong Kong University Student Union (HKUSU).⁸⁸ In the words of HKU Academic Staff Association chairman William Cheung Sing-wai in 2018, Li's appointment in 2015 had precipitated a notable "chilling effect" within the University, as the space for free academic expression seemingly shrunk amidst a gradual

⁸³ 明報即時新聞 ["Ming Pao Instant News"], "李國章：國殤之柱是騙局 與紀念六四事件無關" ["Arthur Li: Pillar of Shame is a sham; Completely unrelated to commemorating the June Fourth Incident"], *Ming Pao*, January 1, 2021.

⁸⁴ 信報財經新聞 ["Hong Kong Economic Journal"], "李國章：國殤之柱為紀念六四是騙局" ["Arthur Li: Pillar of Shame as a commemoration of June Fourth is a sham"], *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, January 1, 2021.

⁸⁵ 明報即時新聞 ["Ming Pao Instant News"], "李國章：國殤之柱是騙局 與紀念六四事件無關" ["Arthur Li: Pillar of Shame is a sham; Completely unrelated to commemorating the June Fourth Incident"], *Ming Pao*, January 1, 2021.

⁸⁶ Kris Cheng, "Arthur Li's term as chair of University of Hong Kong's governing council extended for 3 more years." *Hong Kong Free Press*, December 15, 2018.

⁸⁷ Ng Kang-chung, "Former students promise to use 'whatever action needed' to stop ex-minister 'King' Arthur Li taking over as chair of HKU Council." *South China Morning Post*, October 25, 2015.

⁸⁸ Karen Cheung, "HKU council chair says irrational students acted as if 'on drugs', Student Union president a 'liar'." *Hong Kong Free Press*, January 28, 2016.

pro-Beijing politicisation of what would remain permissible within the University.⁸⁹ Thus, within this context, Li's remarks were clearly unsurprising and perhaps even to have been expected after the passage of the NSL.

A report in the newspaper *Ming Pao* (明報) of Li's aforementioned radio interview prompted a direct rebuttal by Galschiøt, who stated on his website in response to Li's claims. First, Galschiøt stated that he 'strongly dissociate[d]' himself from what Li was saying and that 'it is Arthur Li who is trying to obliterate history and wants to oppress everyone who is in favour of citizens' free rights to debate.'⁹⁰ Galschiøt further speculated that Li 'is probably trying to create a breeding ground for a lie that June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Square Massacre never took place.'⁹¹ Finally, Galschiøt also clarified the background of the project: He had created the Pillar with the 'intention to create a monument that remembered various landmark crimes against humanity around the world' and erected the first 'Pillar of Shame' in Hong Kong in 1997 to 'mark the June 4 Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989.'⁹² For Galschiøt, this Pillar was 'the most important of the three Pillars he had created.'⁹³

In conclusion, it is difficult to correctly decipher the decision-making processes behind the HKU Council's decision to remove the Pillar. The only publicly available sources are the HKU statement released on December 23 after the removal of the Pillar and various interviews made by then-Chairman of Council Arthur Li before and after removal. A quick perusal of the HKU website reveals that minutes of Council meetings have not been updated since August 2021,⁹⁴ thus depriving the public of valuable potential insight into the deliberations and decision-making of the HKU Council between October 2021 when it issued a letter to the Alliance demanding that the Pillar be removed, to December 2021 when HKU removed the Pillar overnight. However, it is apparent that this removal process took place with almost no consultation outside of the HKU Council itself and its privately sought legal advice. Between October and December 2021, Galschiøt's repeated attempts to contact HKU regarding the removal of the statue from Hong Kong were all unsuccessful,⁹⁵ and despite Galschiøt's repeated claims that he was the owner of the Pillar of Shame, the HKU Council held to the position that the Pillar's ownership was unclear and unresolved after the self-dissolution of the Alliance and the HKUSU.⁹⁶

Ultimately, we can only speculate as to what motivated the timing of the HKU Council's actions in

⁸⁹ Su Xinqi, "Arthur Li to lead University of Hong Kong's governing council for another three years." *South China Morning Post*, December 14, 2018.

⁹⁰ Jens Galschiøt, "About my sculpture 'The pillar of shame'." *YMLP*, January 1, 2022.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ The University of Hong Kong, "Summary of matters dealt by the Council." HKUL, accessed March 25, 2022.

⁹⁵ Jens Galschiøt, "Pillar of Shame in Hongkong 2021." December 22, 2021.

⁹⁶ 黃麗莎 [Lisa Wong], "李國章：國殤之柱難處理 高志活：雕塑恐將被破壞、被移走" ["Arthur Li: Difficult to handle Pillar of Shame ; Jens Galschiøt: Fears that sculpture will be damaged, removed"], 衆新聞 (*Hong Kong Citizen News*), December 19, 2021.

October and December 2021. However, it seems likely that such motivations were political and closely tied to the 2019-20 Hong Kong protests and the imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law in June 2020. The HKU Council's demand in October that the Pillar is removed can be explained by the reporting of the Pillar to the Hong Kong Police in early October as a potential violation of the National Security Law.⁹⁷ Regarding why the Pillar was removed in December, *Citizen News'* assertion that an HKU source attributed the timing of the Pillar's removal to 'pressure from National Security agencies, which is almost direct pressure from the Central Government [in Beijing]' ['因為國安部門施壓，幾乎是直接中央施壓'] seems entirely plausible.⁹⁸

Summary and Conclusions

The Pillar of Shame at the University of Hong Kong commemorating the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Square Massacre is an especially important recent case which highlights the nuances of how monuments can be subject to the whims of political changes and severe institutional challenges to the freedoms of speech and expression at a nexus of contestation between governments, civic organizations, and public opinion. While the Pillar was conceived initially as part of a wider global series by sculptor Jens Galschiøt, the Pillar of Shame as a memorial to the Tiananmen Square Massacre quickly acquired unique resonance in Hong Kong, for many years, the only place on the geographic mainland of China where the events of June 4 could be commemorated. The Pillar was the most notable permanent monument to the events of June 4, located within Chinese territory. It was subject to contestation from the very beginning during its arrival in April 1997, several months before Hong Kong's handover to China on July 1, 1997.

The Pillar served as a permanent symbol of contestation over the historical memory of June 4 and the events of 1989 within Chinese culture and the psyche of Hong Kong's people. For many years the very existence and placement of the Pillar were not subject to significant contestation of its own. This changed in 2021 after the events of the 2019-20 protests and the imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law, culminating in the opaque and politically motivated decision by the Council of the University of Hong Kong to dismantle and remove the Pillar of Shame in the early morning hours of December 23, 2021. As noted by its sculptor at the time of its installation, the continued existence and display of the Pillar would hitherto serve as a litmus test for guarantees for human rights and freedom of expression in Hong Kong. With the Pillar having only been removed several months prior to the writing of this case study, what meanings the removal of the Pillar has for Hong Kong's contested civic identity and the broader contested memory of June 4 within Chinese culture and society remains to be seen.

⁹⁷ 東方日報 ["Eastern Daily News"], "港大國殤之柱遭團體舉報 指涉違國安法散播仇恨" ["HKU Pillar of Shame is reported by an organization; Accused of breaking the National Security Law and spreading hatred"], *Eastern Daily News Online Edition*, July 30, 2021.

⁹⁸ 衆新聞記者 [Citizen News Reporter], "港大深夜突襲拆卸國殤之柱 校委會決定即日執行 通宵分割 8小時消失" ["HKU suddenly demolishes Pillar of Shame in the middle of the night; HKU Council decision immediately executed; (Pillar) separated into pieces overnight; Disappears in 8 hours"], 衆新聞 (*Hong Kong Citizen News*), December 23, 2021.

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About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter- ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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