

**The civil society in Hong Kong in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic: The impact of law of the people's republic of China on safeguarding national security in the Hong Kong special administrative region**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present article addresses the origins and potential effects of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region as adopted on June 30, 2020 by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China on the contemporary civil society of Hong Kong. Based on the critical analysis of the academic literature, norms of constitutional jurisprudence pertaining to the legal status of Hong Kong within China, and relevant news items, this study shows why the adoption of that national security law should be considered a rupture in the evolution of the political regime of the former colony that was originally inspired by the liberal rule of law model based on the maxim of "one country, two systems". In the 2010s, the progress of the integration of the Hong Kong liberal rule of law system to the socialist rule of law in mainland China has led to increased civil society mobilizations in the Hong Kong region, which was accompanied by tendencies toward a certain radicalization of part of the local civil society. In this context, the national security law implements a series of reforms to the institutions of the autonomous region of Hong Kong, while codifying new criminal law provision that entail a limitation of the possibility for Hong Kong-based local civil society organizations to defy the socialist system of the People's Republic of China.

**KEYWORDS:** civil society, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, People's Republic of China, national security law

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**1.Introduction.** In the aftermath of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is undergoing the greatest political and institutional transformation since the return of sovereignty of the former British colony to the People’s Republic of China in 1997. After the consolidation of economic integration between the autonomous region and mainland China In the 2000s, the central government accelerated the integration of Hong Kong’s legal and institutional system with that of mainland China. This integration encouraged a wave of civic protests, whose genesis dates back to 2012 with the mobilizations against the introduction of patriotic education in schools and which escalated in 2014, with the so-called ‘umbrella movement’ that claimed the extension of universal suffrage. After these mobilizations, a new generation of political actors emerged that was unable to access the institutions due to the creation by the central government in 2016 of an ideological filter of candidates for the elections, thus questioning the political pluralism that had historically characterized Hong Kong society (Hung & Ip, 2012). Later, in 2019, the protests against the legislative amendment project to create a system for the extradition of prisoners to mainland China reached an unprecedented level of violence, causing a “perfect storm” and the paralysis of the region’s institutions (Chan, 2019). In response to this situation, the central government promulgated the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereinafter LNS), adopted on June 30, 2020 by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, to prevent both new threats to public order and the development of pro-independence movements (Lo, 2020).

In effect, the central government presented the LNS as a reform of the “one country, two systems” principle, which adapts administrative autonomy to the recent radicalization of part of Hong Kong civil society. For this reason, the law has been introduced in the annexes of the Basic Law of the autonomous region, thus giving it a constitutional normative rank in the Hong Kong legal system (*National Laws to be Applied in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2021*). With the entry into force of the LNS, liberal observers would refer to the greatest reduction in freedoms since the creation of the autonomous region, deepening its gradual transition towards authoritarianism in the last decade, as part of the literature on Hong Kong constitutional law had pointed out (Chan, 2018). In this context, this study analyses the origin of the LNS and its impact on the institutional framework and the regime of fundamental rights and freedoms of Hong Kong, based on a critical analysis of the literature in law and political science, of the regulations and norms of constitutional jurisprudence of the region, and relevant media reports. To do this, this article will examine, first, the evolution of the Hong Kong political system from its creation in 1997 to its recent exposure to the socialist rule of law model; and, second, the origin and content of the LNS, especially in relation to the limits it imposes on the freedom of action for liberally minded Hong Kong civil society organizations.

**2.Literature Review.** Although the expression “one country, two systems” has been popularized in the Western media to characterize the specificity of Hong Kong’s political system, its origin lies in the Chinese government’s policy towards Taiwan that began in 1979 with the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping (Vogel, 2011, pp. 477-487). Thus, in a 1983 speech on the peaceful reunification of mainland China and Taiwan, Deng coined this expression and promised to respect the island’s capitalist system, independent judiciary, and armed forces (Deng, 1994, pp. 28-29). For this, the Constitution of the

People's Republic of China of 1982 included in its Article 31 the creation of "special administrative regions" if circumstances so require. In September 1984, with the visit of Margaret Thatcher to Beijing, Sino-British negotiations began to resolve the situation in Hong Kong with a view to ending in 1997 the cession of the "New Territories" to the north of the Kowloon peninsula, agreed by the Chinese Empire and the United Kingdom in 1898. Faced with the possibility that China would adopt a unilateral solution, the United Kingdom ended up accepting an agreement for the return of sovereignty in which the Chinese government promised to maintain the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong within China. The Sino-British Joint Declaration of December 19, 1984 established that the return would take place on July 1, 1997 and that for 50 years the inhabitants of Hong Kong were guaranteed to maintain their 'economic and social systems', 'way of life' and 'public policies' (Chen, 2009). Then began the process of drafting the Basic Law by a committee made up of experts from Hong Kong and mainland China to normatively develop the 'high degree of autonomy' of the future Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The text was presented on February 17, 1989 at a special ceremony to Deng Xiaoping, who described the draft law as an "innovative masterpiece" (Vogel, 2011, p. 508) and was finally adopted by the National People's Congress on April 4, 1990.

However, the events in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 ended the dynamic in which the diplomatic negotiations had developed. Then a march in support of Chinese students took place in Hong Kong in which a million people participated, a sixth of its population. Since then, every year a vigil ceremony has taken place in Victoria Park with the participation of thousands of citizens building a collective memory of the events that is alternative to the official one (Cheng & Yuen, 2019). In addition, the British government appointed Chris Patten, a critic of the Chinese government, as the colony's last governor, rather than a diplomat with expertise in Chinese affairs as his predecessors had been. In 1991, the colonial administration adopted a reform so that part of the seats in the Legislative Council – the region's single-chamber parliament – were elected by universal suffrage, provoking complaints from the central government for distancing itself from previous agreements. This reform gave rise to the current system of political parties in the region dominated by the Democratic Party and the Alliance for the Improvement and Progress of Hong Kong, divided by cleavage, which structures the entire political life of the region, into two factions: the yellow pro-democracy (pan-democrat) and the blue pro-central government (pro-establishment) (Lam, 2010, pp. 58-62). In theory, the Basic Law thus guaranteed the maintenance of political pluralism, freedom of expression and the holding of free elections to elect part of the representatives of the autonomous region who should progressively increase their share in the local parliament.

Effectively, though, the subsequent evolution of the Hong Kong political system has ended up confirming the conception of the principle of "one country, two systems" through the use of the scarce but decisive mechanisms of articulation of the two legal and administrative systems. One may refer here to the progressive reduction in the number of members of the legislative branch elected by universal suffrage and the growing power to interpret the Basic Law of the region by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly of the People's Republic of China. Regarding the second mechanism, the interpretations are binding for the Hong Kong authorities to guarantee the constitutionality of the

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administrative acts and laws adopted by the autonomous region (Zhu & Chen, 2019). In this way, on November 7, 2016, the Standing Committee pronounced its interpretation of Article 104 of the Basic Law regarding the obligation to swear to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China by judges, officials and representatives before assuming public office (Qin & Zhou, 2019). The committee decided that oaths that do not read the exact terms established in the law or that are made in "a manner that is not sincere or solemn" should not be considered valid (Zhu & Chen, 2019). On this basis, the regional government obtained from the courts the annulment of the election of five members of the Legislative Council who had become public figures during the 2014 'umbrella movement' and who had criticized China in their oaths. In addition, the regional government introduced from then on in the registry of candidacies a control on the previous public declarations of the possible candidates (Zhu & Chen, 2019). In short, the central government introduced an ideological filter in Hong Kong to exclude candidates in favour of independence or self-determination in the region.

The central government was then able to develop its conception of the "one country, two systems" principle weakly developed in the Sino-British Declaration of 1984 and the Basic Law. For Beijing, this model did not imply political autonomy comparable to that of other regions of asymmetrical unitary states (Henders, 2010). On the other hand, for pro-democracy Hong Kong political actors, the Basic Law had until then represented a kind of founding myth of a rule of law of British heritage that should evolve towards full democratization without questioning its belonging to the People's Republic of China (Fong, 2017). For all these reasons, one may consider that the expression "one country, two systems" should not be confused as a general principle of law or a constitutional doctrine as part of the literature had previously suggested to characterize the "unprecedented constitutional experiment" of the Basic Law (Chan et al, 2000, p. 4). On the contrary, the expression "one country, two systems" must therefore be understood as a floating signifier, closer to ideological work than to legal sciences. This signifier is ambiguous enough to match a priori incompatible ideological positions, so that its legitimating effectiveness has diminished over time (Scott, 2017).

Much has been written about the "long march towards the rule of law" in the People's Republic of China (Peerenboom, 2002), an issue that goes beyond the scope of this study. However, it should be briefly noted that, since the creation of the People's Republic of China, the conception of the legal system (*fazhi*) has moved from classical Marxist legal theory and the Soviet model to its own theory since 1978, as synthesized in the expression 'govern the country according to the law' (*yifa zhiguo*), which served as the basis for the reforms to reduce the personalist exercise of power that marked the Cultural Revolution, increase the institutionalization of the state apparatus and introduce the socialist market economy (Li, 2019, pp. 21-47). After Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, a new stage was opened with the official adoption of the "socialist rule of law theory with Chinese characteristics" in the decision of the 4th Plenum of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 23, 2014. This decision represents the first time in the history of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China in which a plenary meeting of the party addressed the issue of the socialist rule of law (Li, 2019, p. 34). As Lin Li, a law researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, puts it, "promoting governance through law in a comprehensive manner will never weaken the leadership of the Communist Party of China, but, on the contrary, will strengthen the ruling basis, strengthen ruling

authority, enhance ruling ability, and raise the governance level of the Communist Party of China” (Li, 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, the theory sanctioned at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2014 would deepen the original Marxist conception of law as a relationship of domination. This theory thus comes to discursively legitimize the growing penetration of the Party in the State since Xi Jinping came to power. These considerations may allow one to understand the ideological basis that inspired the limits on political rights imposed on Hong Kong since 2016. In this context, the political pluralism present in the autonomous region must be understood as a kind of transitory exception close to its end, the result of the past diplomatic agreements, whose integrity and stability over time is not guaranteed. In other words, political pluralism in Hong Kong is subordinate to the maintenance of public order and national unity, which would have corresponding implications for the local civil society in its relationship with the state.

**3. Methodology.** Consequently, this article explores the case study of the LNS through a lens of the Chinese central government’s continuous attempts to assimilate the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to the socialist rule of law system through adopting a new approach toward penalizing ‘political’ crimes, under which category a bulk of previously acceptable activities of Hong Kong civil society would be considered from now on. The article thus argues that the tension between the Basic Law and the LNS would be ultimately solved in favour of the latter, hence representing an expression of the criminal law of the enemy, a phenomenon that has been discussed in depth from the doctrinal point of view by Günther Jakobs (Golser, 2016). This phenomenon, close to Carl Schmitt’s theory of the absolute State, presumes the establishment of the category of exceptional crimes and procedures, in which the rule of law is suspended to combat the state’s enemies (Lehtinen & Brunila, 2021). The criminal law of the enemy is distinguished from the criminal law of the citizen following a warlike and anti-liberal logic, as could be observed in contexts marked by the presence of terrorist movements whose danger to the maintenance of institutions justifies this exceptionality in the eyes of governments (Lehtinen & Brunila, 2021). Accordingly, the analysis of the effects and repercussions of the LNS for Hong Kong civil society after 2020, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenon that would already fall under the Schmittian notion of the state of exception (Lehtinen & Brunila, 2021) will proceed from the aforementioned methodological perspective to allow the researcher to either prove or disprove that contention.

**4. Results.** The evolution of the Hong Kong political system in the last decade shows that a new generation of political leaders could not access the institutions, thus preventing the renewal of political personnel or the introduction of new issues on the government agenda. This non-permeability of the system contributed to increasing society’s distrust of the authorities and contributed to the radicalization of the protests, as was evident in the anti-extradition movement in 2019. Regarding the origin of these protests, in the first place, it should be noted that the Basic Law does not regulate powers related to national security. Thus Article 23 of the Basic Law is limited to establishing that the Hong Kong authorities must adopt the necessary laws to guarantee the criminal prosecution of acts of “treason, secession, sedition and subversion against the central government” and prevent activities of foreign political organizations in the region. In 2003, the regional government attempted to adopt the national

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security law, provoking the largest citizen mobilization since the demonstration in support of the student protests in Tiananmen in 1989 (Lo, 2008, pp.151-183). Various civil society groups considered the law a threat to their civil rights and liberties and gathered around half a million people in a peaceful march on July 1, 2003. Tung Chee-wah, the region's first Chief Executive, two months later he announced the abandonment of the bill due to the lack of a majority in the Legislative Council and resigned two years later. The following regional governments did not attempt to legislate on the matter, until, in April 2019, the Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced the legislative amendment project by which an extradition mechanism would be created between the autonomous region and the People's Republic of China. Between April and November 2019, the escalation of protests against the proposed amendment reached a degree of violence between police and protesters unprecedented in the region. The government's perseverance in not withdrawing the bill until September 4, 2019, and outrage at an unprecedented police crackdown (Purbrick, 2019) contributed to transforming the essentially peaceful anti-extradition movement based on mass marches into an openly violent anti-government revolt (Lo et al., 2021). Among the most serious acts were the attack and occupation of the Legislative Council and the attack on the façade of the central government's Liaison Office on July 1 and 21, respectively; the attack on protesters by triads at the Yuen Long subway station on July 27, 2019; and the siege by the police on the campus of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in which protesters took refuge from November 17 to 29 and during which more than a thousand people were arrested (Purbrick, 2019). These events contributed to polarizing previous political positions, leading to a blockade of the Hong Kong Legislative Council. Council members belonging to the pro-democracy camp adopted practices of parliamentary profligacy such as absenting themselves from meetings in order not to reach the quorum of the chamber, or directly interrupting them, or blocking the renewal of the House Committee and parliamentary committees (Lo et al., 2021). In this new scenario, the adoption of a law related to national security by Hong Kong institutions, as established by the Basic Law, ceased to be a politically complex task and became practically impossible. The central government then decided to promote the adoption of the LNS directly, taking advantage of the fact that, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, protests had been reduced in Hong Kong due to health restrictions (Ismangil & Lee, 2020). The adoption of the LNS on June 30, 2020 must therefore be understood as the response to the radicalization of part of Hong Kong society and the blockade of its institutions after the political crisis of 2019.

Certain aspects of the central government's discourse to justify the promulgation of the LNS may be notable here. For instance, at the press conference to launch the LNS, the Director of the Liaison Office of the central government in Hong Kong explained that the law aims to end "loopholes", protects the principle of "one country, two systems" and puts "a sword" on "the minority that threatens national security" (China Daily, 2020b; Ng et al., 2020). Article 62 of the LNS establishes that the text prevails over the ordinary laws of the region, while Article 65 vests the power to interpret the law in the Standing Committee of the National Assembly of the People's Republic of China, as is the case with the Basic Law. Based on the foregoing, the LNS can be analysed at two levels, first, the institutional reforms that it operates and, second, the characterization of new criminal offenses in norms with constitutional status. The law has created new public bodies that represent the largest exception to date to the general principle



“Hong Kong residents rule Hong Kong”. The law thus creates the Office for the Safeguarding of National Security in charge of intelligence tasks. This body is made up of Chinese officials and has the power to investigate the commission of crimes that, in some extremely serious cases, can be referred to the judicial system of mainland China (Article 55 of the LNS). The law further contemplates for the first time the possibility that certain crimes committed on Hong Kong soil be tried in mainland China, although this is only limited to emergency situations that are considered to threaten national integrity. The text also creates a special division of prosecutors in charge of investigating cases related to national security whose nomination must be approved by the aforementioned committee (Article 18). In addition, the law creates a specialized department within the regional government police authorized to recruit personnel from “outside Hong Kong” (Article 16), thus opening the door to the incorporation of Chinese officials. The LNS also creates the Committee for the Safeguarding of National Security in charge of coordinating and proposing public policies, made up of members of the regional government cabinet and chaired by the Chief Executive. In addition, an “advisor” appointed by the central government also participates in the committee (Article 15). On July 3, 2020, Liaison Office Director Luo Huining was appointed to this position (China Daily, 2020a). The issues incorporated in the notion of national security are so broad and the fact that the meetings of this committee are not public, reinforces the authority of the Director of the Liaison Office, which becomes de facto a key body in the Hong Kong executive branch (Lee, 2020). This can be interpreted as a centralization of powers and also as the end of the biggest legal vacuum in the Hong Kong system in terms of coordination between the central and regional governments. To date, the powers of the Liaison Office have not been regulated in any legal text. In fact, as its name suggests, this office is a kind of hindrance from the colonial era when there was no official Chinese diplomatic representation in the former colony. The application of the law has in fact increased the powers of the Director of the Liaison Office as a representative of the central government who until now acted as a kind of an informal prefect (Lo, 2021). Last but not least, the law includes other programmatic aspects that should guide the legislative agenda and public policies in the region through the work of the Committee for the Safeguarding of National Security. Among them, the regulation and supervision of “matters related to national security, including those related to schools, universities, social organizations, the media and the Internet” (Article 9) stands out. The implementation of this generic objective cannot be prejudged, but in theory it could contemplate the possibility of including Hong Kong within the ‘Great Firewall’, the internet network semi-closed to the rest of the world present in mainland China, which it would deprive activists of their main resource for mobilization. In the same way, it is expected that this rule will serve as a basis to restrict foreign journalists from obtaining residence and work permits (Davidson, 2020). It is also possible to expect the adoption of new measures affecting the personnel of primary, secondary and higher education, which may strengthen patriotic education in schools and reduce the academic autonomy of universities (Davidson, 2020; The Standard, 2020b).

In addition to these institutional aspects, the LNS creates new criminal offenses such as secession, rebellion, collusion with foreign agents, terrorism, and advocacy of terrorism. These offenses mostly require violent actions against property and/or persons in a manner comparable to criminal law in other liberal states of law. However, the effects of the LNS on freedom of information far exceed what one

can observe in other legal systems. In particular, Articles 21 and 23 of the law establish that the person who ‘incites’ others to commit the crimes of rebellion or secession, respectively, may be sentenced to up to ten years in prison. These crimes of incitement can therefore originate from oral or written public statements made by any individual, whether a public figure or not, in a demonstration, social networks or the media. On the other hand, the actions considered within the crime of collusion with foreign forces, provided for in Article 29 of the law, go beyond the traditional espionage and conspiracy activities, to include “provoking hatred” towards the central and regional governments and participating in the imposition of sanctions against China from abroad. However, the fact is that the field of law enforcement is probably the LNS’s most controversial aspect. The law expressly includes organizations and companies, such as foreign media, in addition to contemplating the possibility of charging these crimes against foreign and Hong Kong citizens for acts committed outside Chinese territory (Articles 37 and 38). Thus, nationals or foreigners who set foot on Chinese soil could in theory be charged for having made public statements from abroad that until now fell within the exercise of freedom of expression in Hong Kong. One may refer, for example, to declarations in favour of independence, calls to participate in unauthorized demonstrations or concentrations or defend the imposition of sanctions against China by foreign governments. Based on the foregoing, after the entry into force of the LNS on July 1, 2020, the authorities have charged numerous citizens of these crimes, opening the respective judicial processes. However, as of early 2022, no sentence has been pronounced, so one may only refer to fragmentary information from the media and the social network profiles of activists who have been affected by respective proceedings.

Regarding the impact of the law, its dissuasive effects must also be highlighted. Thus, on the same day that the LNS was adopted, the leaders of the pro-democracy political party Demosisto created in 2016, Joshua Wong, Nathan Law and Agnes Chow, announced their resignation to avoid criminal prosecution (The Standard, 2020a). In the following months, the most mediatic activists in Hong Kong have chosen to self-exile and have applied for asylum in order to continue acting politically in their host countries (Wong, 2020; Cheng, 2021; Wu, 2022). Glacier Kwong and Alex Chow, activists from student movements who became public figures during the umbrella movement, found themselves in the situation of exile, in Germany and the United States respectively. One can also mention find former members of the Legislative Council Ted Hui (Australia), Nathan Lau (UK) and Leung Chung-hang (USA); and other publicly significant activists in the 2019 anti-extradition movement such as Brian Leung (USA) and Simon Cheng (UK) (Cheng, 2021; Wu, 2022). It is also worth mentioning the process opened against 47 people —among whom one finds academics, political professionals, and young activists— who participated in the “35 plus campaign” and organized non-official primaries to choose the candidates for the next scheduled legislative elections for September 2020 that were postponed to the following year due to the pandemic (Low, 2021; Wong, 2021). These primaries took place on July 11-12, 2020 with the participation of more than 600,000 people, and with them they sought to select the most popular candidates to prevent pro-democracy candidates from competing with each other in the same constituencies. It was hoped in this way to obtain the majority of seats in the Legislative Council for the first time. The organizers of the primaries have been accused of the crime of conspiracy to subvert the power of the State (Article 22 of the LNS) based on public



statements in which they expressed their intention, once the next legislative elections are held, to block the Legislative Council by voting against the region's budget law (Wong, 2021). The case with the most repercussions has been the accusation of collusion with foreign forces against Jimmy Lai, a business tycoon who owns the media conglomerate Next Media, to which the popular pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily* belongs (Davidson & Kuo, 2020). The facts that have given rise to this accusation are unclear and appear to be related to an informal group of activists and journalists who contacted the British government and Western media to denounce the actions of the Hong Kong government during the 2019 political crisis. To do this, they coordinated online fundraising campaigns and even hired professional lobbying services in the UK (Davidson & Kuo, 2020). Finally, at the demonstration traditionally held of July 1, 2020, the police arrested five people because their banners contained references to 'independence', which was construed as going counter to the newly promulgated LNS (Borger et al., 2020). A protester who rammed the police with his motorcycle while waving a black flag bearing the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" was also arrested and is currently awaiting trial on charges of secession and incitement to secession (Borger et al., 2020). The day after the demonstration, the regional government published a statement informing that reproducing in public through banners or chants the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times", popularized on social networks and in anti-extradition marches, "connotes the independence of Hong Kong" and may therefore constitute the crimes of incitement to rebellion and secession (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2020). All these cases may then be viewed as denoting the scope of the LNS as far as its use as a tool to constrain and restrict the activities of Hong Kong liberal civil society in its various forms may be concerned – hence making this civil society be treated as an enemy of the state.

**5. Conclusion.** In the last decade, the mobilizations in Hong Kong have multiplied to the point of reaching revolutionary overtones, causing the central government's strategy to harden, culminating in the adoption of the LNS. This law, despite representing the largest reform of the Hong Kong political system since the creation of the region, does nothing more than continue the long-term strategy of the central government for the integration of the autonomous region that began in 1997 and that should be completed in 2047. Hong Kong society is thus halfway along the path traced by the agreements for the decolonization of the territory, and everything seems to indicate that the central government has decided to accelerate the legal and political integration of the region, without a doubt the most complex task of this process. Although the LNS has alleviated the legal vacuum of the Basic Law in matters of public order and intelligence activities, the text has deepened the reduction of freedoms and political pluralism to which Hong Kong society has been accustomed. The LNS thus represents the last nail in the coffin of the Hong Kong liberal rule of law, since not only are certain independence options of the institutions excluded, but their public expression becomes a crime following the logic of the criminal law of the enemy that one can find in countries with presence of active terrorist groups. The LNS represents, accordingly, a sort of criminal law of the enemy of a preventive type that seeks to exclude from the public space the manifestation of certain political options that can feed the ideological radicalization of part of civil society. Indeed, although the violence present in the 2019 protests reached unprecedented

levels for the region, the anti-extradition movement cannot be compared to armed or terrorist movements present in countries that have adopted measures comparable to the criminal law of the enemy. Finally, the LNS has caused the voluntary exile of a generation of activists turned into political leaders after their participation in the ‘umbrella movement’ of 2014 and the anti-extradition movement in 2019. In this way, we are witnessing the transformation of the pro-democracy movements of Hong Kong into an international network of organizations and public figures particularly active in the UK, U.S., Canada and Australia. This network is currently dedicated to assisting Hong Kong citizens who decide to settle abroad for political reasons, lobbying foreign governments to try to reduce the penetration of the Chinese government in their countries and, more generally, offering for dissident Hong Kong communities some spaces free of information and debate about their identity and the political evolution of the region. This phenomenon should be studied in future research that may deal the construction of the Hong Kong diaspora as a transnational political actor and its impact on relations between China and Western countries.

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