

Dear Vice-Chancellor Stuart Croft, President Ben Newsham,

My name is Zishi Zhang and I am the International Students' Officer (Non-EU) at the Warwick Student Union this academic year. I am writing on behalf of the Chinese students at our university who are extremely disappointed and upset by what took place at the Piazza today (Wednesday, 6th November 2019).

Four students who claimed that they are from Hong Kong staged a protest and they turned the wall into a so-called "Lennon Wall", filling it up with racist, discriminatory and misleading information full of blatantly factual mistakes, words of hatred and provocative sensationalism that aims to build divisions between the Mainland China and Hong Kong communities.

The official student newspaper on our campus, The Boar has reported that "the University replied to the request on 3 November" to allow this staged protest to go ahead. However, the protest has attracted a large group of Chinese students who are extremely angered, and might I add, righteously so, by the insulting pig image and other degrading racial languages that imply racist connotations. The invading Japanese army during the WWII invented the "Zhi Na pig" phrase to dehumanise Chinese people to that statue of less than human. this is the ultimate insult in Chinese culture – you cannot find more racist remark against Chinese people than this. This racial phrase is equivalent to those which were used by the colonisers against indigenous people. I am extremely shocked and saddened such incident is still taking place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As one of the leading universities in the UK with prestigious reputation, I have the full confidence that the Vice-Chancellor has not acted against such racist behaviour only due to the Vice-Chancellor has not been made aware of this specific incident. After all, we as a university would not wish to be seen as continuously falling our students after the group chat incident last year and being the only Russell Group institution not responding to a survey by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on racial harassment in higher education.

After I was made aware of the incident, I arrived on campus as soon as I could. I explained to the group of Chinese students gathered there that they can pass on their complaints, comments and criticisms through me to both the Student Union and the University. I have done so to avoid the likelihood that it might escalate any further with such a large group present. People were convinced to take the rational decision to leave in a calm and orderly manner. I later explained and thanked the members of Campus Security team present on the scene for their assistance.

On behalf of all the Chinese students who contacted me directly, on behalf of the Warwick Chinese Society, Warwick China Development Society and the Warwick Chinese Students and Scholars Association (Together, these three societies cover pretty much all different groups within the Chinese community), who agreed without hesitation to co-sign this letter, and as the democratically elected International Students' Officer (Non-EU), I put forward the following questions and demands:

1. Why has this request being approved without consulting the democratic student body – the Warwick Student Union who represents students on campus? (We all had the once-a-term Student Council Meeting yesterday, Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019, with all sabbatical, part-time student officers and chairs of committees present)
2. It has raised to my concern that how did this request pass the Impact Assessment Committee or the relevant body of our university? Has the university not thought about the potential reaction such aggressive and provocative behaviour might have caused, or even worse, might deliberately wish to cause?
3. To what extent has the university assessed what has been put out there compared to what they requested to display? As some, if not all materials contain foreign languages, have they and the university done the best to ensure that the part in Chinese and the part in English correspondent to each other and therefore not disingenuously misleading?
4. By allowing such request to go ahead, to what extent is the university implying they endorse or support the stance taken by the four Hong Kong students today?
5. I have also been sent a screenshot of an Instagram account with official Warwick University logo as their profile photo which promotes separatist messages, insulting racist language and inflammatory provocative posts. Does the university endorse such behaviour by blatantly allowing the account to use the official logo? (Please see the attachment named "Instagram")
6. To formally review the entire request and the process which decision was made to grant the permission for it.

7. If the university decided after review that this “protest” is deemed as extremely discriminatory and inappropriate, relevant disciplinary measures must be applied to the students in question.

As the International Students’ Officer, I, of course welcome peaceful, mutually respectful and rational debates which would allow us to learn, exchange, debut different opinions with substantiated evidence, reasoned arguments and clear logic. I have been actively engaging with different societies and groups on campus, including Russian Speaking Society, African Summit Society and other cultural societies. Since I have been elected on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019, I have written, proposed and passed a motion to the All Student Vote which encourages our university to campaign to petition the government for the Post Study Working Visa to be introduced now rather than later to avoid the international students being discriminated against when seeking employment. I believe my record of supporting student activities and representing student community in general speaks for itself. As the university decided to grant permission for today’s event to go ahead, I respect they have the permission and that was exactly the reason why I told international students who came to Piazza to pass on their frustrations in a peaceful manner, as I am doing so right now on their behalf.

However, the three societies and myself will not tolerate any deliberate attempt to insult my community, to delegitimise the existence of my country and to spread hateful misinformation across the campus. What happened today is an absolute disgrace. We, thereby signed individuals, societies, officer and the wider Chinese community seriously demand an explanation and formal apology from the university alongside with the guarantee that future requests such as this will go through a thorough process of risk assessment and reviewed by the democratically elected student representatives so such unfortunate event will not take place yet again.

The point that not all Hong Kong students support this kind of protest cannot be emphasised enough. Thus, this was an unfair representation of their image and community on the campus as well. I have received many comments from both students from Mainland, China and Hong Kong. Please see some of them selected below:

“Florence”, a Hong Kong student, who wished to introduce herself as “a Hongkong citizen who DO care the future of Hong Kong”:

“The meaning behind the slogan ‘stand with Hong Kong’ is not what it seems like supporting the city and make this place prosperous again. Behind it, is a shout-out and support for all the thuggish things that the protesters has done. As a Hong Kong citizen, my life has been hugely affected by those non-peaceful protests, from damaging the MTR (Mass Transit Railway) to organising illegal and violent assemblies at the airports; From throwing firebombs on to the streets to beating people with different options. They are not standing up for the REAL democracy, they are not making Hong Kong prosperous again.”

Dawei Zhou, a first year Management Student who consented and insisted to use his real name:

“I am deeply disappointed that our university allowed such politically biased demonstration without prior notification to neither SU, student bodies or the general student community. This could be misunderstood to send a wrong message that the university is supporting a separatist group and interfering the internal politics of a sovereign nation.”

“Lexi”, a Second-Year student who is from Mainland, China:

“As an international student, I’m sure that I understand individuals have freedom to express their thought, but the way of expression should be peaceful and legal.

Social media companies choose to report partial facts which lead to asymmetric of information from both sides. For my personal experience, I was in Hong Kong during this summer. Witnessing what happened there, the whole economic environment and social stability were ruined by illegal protestors.

The meaning of democracy does not mean violent action should be permitted.”

I have attached pictures of the materials went on display today for your information. I have also attached an Excel document with the names and university ID of those who wish to co-sign this letter using their real names, without anonymity.

Yours sincerely,

Zishi Zhang, International Student Officer (Non-EU), Warwick Student Union

Warwick Chinese Society

Warwick China Development Society

Warwick Chinese Students and Scholars Association