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Preserve Our Ties and Our Ideals

Harvard should support liberal values but maintain its relationships in China

By [The Crimson Staff](#) 10 hours ago

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It is no secret that Harvard maintains close relationships with China and Chinese universities. Yet the recent dismissal of former economics professor and [dissident](#) Xia Yeliang from Peking University has caused American universities like [Wellesley](#) and Stanford to question ties with Beijing in the face of differing views on academic freedom. While Harvard's ties with China are essential to a globalized education, Harvard should stand up for academic freedom and structure its partnerships with foreign universities carefully.

While Peking University has claimed that its [decision](#) to terminate Xia Yeliang's position can be purely attributed to academic and not political reasons, there is strong reason to suspect that Xia's outspoken and liberal politics played a role in his dismissal. Xia helped draft Charter 08, which called for major pro-democratic change. The petition's primary author is another persecuted scholar-dissident—Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo. And heightened state attention in the lead-up to Xia's firing coincided with a political social media push from Xia abroad in the U.S. As he transitions to a new position at the Cato Institute, American universities are faced with the difficult decision of whether or not to react against Peking University and China's free speech restrictions by terminating partnerships. Harvard, as of yet, has not—and should not.

Through programs like the Harvard China [Forum](#), Harvard Business School's Senior Executive [Program](#) for China, and Harvard's [Shanghai](#) outpost, the University's partnerships with China allow students to gain global experience in a nation that doubles as rich culture and rising power. The Harvard China Forum boasts a place as America's leading student forum for China, a unique opportunity for students interested in work in and with Asia. The intellectual and professional benefits offered by Harvard's international alliances are part of what draws applicants to Harvard. The University should not act to terminate its broadly positive influence in China.

However, Harvard's ties with China provide a special opportunity to stand up for the ideals and principles we purport to hold—especially academic freedom. While not reason enough to terminate alliances, Harvard should certainly urge its corporate and university partners towards human rights and free speech. Harvard can engage with overseas universities while avoiding joint campuses that have raised [concerns](#) at other institutions.

Partnerships with China, a mutually advantageous relationship for China's economy and for global-minded students, offer benefits that Harvard cannot pass up. Cutting ties will solve little—but will isolate academic populations and curb the longer-term idea exchange that fosters real progress. Still, in the wake of Xia's dismissal, we must proceed with heightened awareness for the academic values Harvard as an institution stands for.