

China sends spies to US universities - human rights activist

A Chinese economist and human rights activist who was recently expelled from a Chinese university said Thursday American universities' education system is at risk due to cooperation with China's intelligence services. Democracy advocate Xia Yeliang also said that top US universities may unwittingly help China's authoritarian system by educating its elites.

Xia was speaking at the Cato Institute, a Washington think tank where he took up a job this month after his expulsion in October from a leading Chinese university where he had been teaching for 13 years. His removal was widely seen as sign of the ruling Communist Party's efforts to tighten controls on public discourse.

"Maybe it's not a good example, but if Hitler was here he would try to cooperate with Western universities," Xia said. "Some people will say you can't compare with that, but some aspects are quite similar."

"I don't mean I want to encourage universities to cut off the cooperation or any type of contacts but you have to keep those principles in your mind. Maybe those people just want to borrow your good name and ruin that name," he said.

Xia Yeliang is one of the original signatories of Charter 08, a bold petition for reform whose Nobel Prize-winning lead author Liu Xiaobo is in prison.

Now Xia is feeding into a debate about the lucrative opportunities for US universities in catering to the tens of thousands of Chinese students who come to America, and by establishing campuses in China, as New York University has done in the southern city of Shanghai.

Peking University representatives said that Xia was fired for poor teaching. Xia rejected the charges, saying he had received positive reviews during his 13 years at Peking University and daring administrators to fire other professors over their teaching abilities.

The former professor contended that top Chinese officials send their children abroad because they distrust China's own educational system and want the country's next generation of leaders to have a

comparable education to their Western peers. Chinese President Xi Jinping's own daughter attended Harvard.

"I have a warning for all those top universities in the States. You think you got some benefit through cooperation with China but who will win in the future? It's hard to tell," Xia said.