

Academic Freedom and University Governance: Lessons from Harvard and Elsewhere

William C. Kirby, Harvard University

The modern research university was created in Germany, which led the world of universities in the 19th century. The United States became home to many of the world's leading universities in the 20th century. Are the universities of Greater China poised to assume leadership in the 21st century?

For each of these systems, the promise (if not always the practice) of academic freedom and institutional autonomy has been central to their success. Leading universities have been defined by forms of governance that allow—indeed encourage—their faculty and students to pursue new areas of inquiry. Yet now, in both the United States and mainland China, governance structures appear weak in defending the core interests of higher education.

At this moment of tension, what can we learn from crises past and present, at Harvard, in China, and elsewhere in the world of universities?

William C. Kirby is T.M. Chang Professor of China Studies and Spangler Family Professor of Business Administration at Harvard University. His recent work includes *The World of Universities in the 21st Century* (Academia Sinica, 2019); and *Empires of Ideas: Creating the Modern University from Germany to America to China* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2022), now translated with a new introduction as 頂尖大學的條件 (台北: 聯經出版社, 2024).

History of Universities Seminar

Convened by Miles Taylor (Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany), Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang (Academia Sinica, Taiwan), and Heike Jöns (Loughborough University, United Kingdom). Hosted by the Humboldt University of Berlin on Zoom: <https://www.histgeog-uni.net/history-of-universities-seminar/>.