

CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES IN THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

In 2004, the first ever Confucius Institute (CI) was established in Seoul, South Korea. Since its inception, approximately 500 CIs have been implemented worldwide.^{1 2} Based on a model set forth by other International Cultural Institutes (ICIs), such as the British Council, the Goethe-Institut and the Alliance Française, Confucius Institutes are a part of a governmentally-funded project with the aim of increasing awareness and appreciation of Chinese language and culture across the globe. In comparison to its predecessors, however, Confucius Institutes are distinct in three ways: (1) unlike other ICIs, Confucius Institutes are hosted on the campuses of pre-established universities in foreign countries. (2) Prior establishing a Confucius Institute, the host institution must partner with a Chinese university willing to provide additional support and resources as needed. (3) Confucius Institutes are partially funded by, and operate directly under the control of Hanban: a “public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education”.³ Hanban’s affiliation with the Ministry of Education means that CIs are ultimately under the control of China’s primary governing body, the Communist Party of China (CPC).

¹ Calculation of total CIs was made based on information provided by the official Hanban website. Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban). 2014. *About Confucius Institute/Classroom*. Accessed March 23, 2016. http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm.

² This does not include the number of Confucius Institute classrooms located throughout the world. This number, also calculated from the Hanban website, is 1,000.

³ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban). 2014. *About Confucius Institute/Classroom*. Accessed March 23, 2016. http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm.

The placement of CIs on the campuses of American universities as well as their connection to the CPC has caused many scholars to become wary of, and even outright denounce, the motives behind the Confucius Institute project. Among the many criticisms of CIs, many scholars have argued that, unlike other International Cultural Institutes, Confucius Institutes represent China's attempt to regain a dominant position in the international, political and educational spheres. In other words, CIs are seen as no more than a ploy for the Chinese government to increase its soft power abroad by spreading cultural and political propaganda.⁴ Scholars have also claimed that the professors and teaching materials provided by Hanban are substandard, and that CIs limit the academic freedoms of their host institutions by not allowing for open discussions of "topics sensitive to the Chinese government".⁵ There have also been smaller accusations of espionage and concerns regarding the cost of implementing and maintaining CIs across the globe.

It is the goal of this research to explore these claims fully and ultimately discern if Confucius Institutes have rightfully earned the negative reputation they have gained over the past decade. While many of these accusations have been made in several countries around the world, this research will focus specifically on the arguments against the implementation of CIs in the United States. When it comes to Confucius Institutes, the U.S. exists in a paradox of sorts. The U.S is a nation that argues against the implementation of Confucius Institutes, yet has more CIs and CI classrooms than any other country in the

⁴ d'Hooghe, I. (2008). Into high gear: China's Public Diplomacy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 3(1), 37-61.

⁵ Sahlins, M. (2013, October 30). China U: Confucius Institutes censor political discussions and restrain the free exchange of ideas. Why, then, do American universities sponsor them? Chicago, Illinois, United States of America.

world.⁶ The examination of these criticisms, and the history from which they emerged, will be used to suggest that the objections to CIs held by American scholars and educators are primarily based in American prejudices against the CPC and U.S anxieties surrounding its status in the world. While I do attempt to offer some solutions to the problems faced by CIs in the United States, this work, in no way, intends to assume that this is an issue that can be easily addressed.

Chapter One, entitled “Confucius Institutes: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”, will present the literature that has been written, both scholarly and popular, regarding the benefits and repercussions of the Confucius Institute project. Much of this chapter will focus on criticisms regarding soft power, the spreading of cultural and political propaganda, and the CIs role in limiting the academic freedoms of the host institutions. Chapter Two, entitled “Challenging the Criticisms of Confucius Institutes”, will consist of an analysis and critique of each of the three afore mentioned criticisms. The critiques of each of these arguments are ultimately used to suggest that American scholars and educators have taken a special, and seemingly biased, interest in CIs that they have not taken in other International Cultural Institutes. Based on this conclusion, Chapter Three, entitled “Admitting U.S. Anxieties about Chinese Power”, explores the history of the relationship between the United States and China in an effort to understand where these criticisms came from.

Studying the controversy surrounding the implementation of Confucius Institutes in the United States is in the interest of students, professors, corporate professionals, and language enthusiasts alike. The demand in the U.S. for second language learning –

⁶ According to the figures posted on the official Hanban website, of the 157 CIs in both North and South America, the U.S. hosts 109. Additionally, of the 544 CI classrooms, the U.S. houses 348.

particularly for learning Mandarin – is growing at an uncontrollable rate. Not being able to meet this need could put the United States in a disadvantaged position politically, economically, and socially. It is possible that if CIs were to be implemented and managed properly and fairly, they could be the perfect way to ensure that this need is met and that the United States does not fall behind.

Chapter 1

Confucius Institutes: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The unprecedented growth of Confucius Institutes and their partner classrooms in the United States has caused scholars to question the quality of instruction taking place in these institutes as well as the motives behind their inception. This skepticism has led to a heavy, and often times heated, debate amongst scholars, educators, and politicians in the U.S. and abroad. Those in support of Confucius Institutes commend Hanban for providing host institutions with the funds, teachers, and teaching materials necessary for building and maintaining an in-house, Chinese language and culture department. The Confucius Institute at New Mexico State University (NMSU) for example, also serves as a hub for fifteen Chinese instructors, all of whom also teach at nearby elementary, middle and high schools. When asked about the outreach program between the CI at NMSU and several local K-12 schools, history professor Ken Hammond, stated: "New Mexico's a poor state, there's not a lot of spare cash sloshing around here, but we've been able to do things academically in terms of programming and involvement with the public schools that we never would have been able to do without this."⁷ Hammond's statement is only one of the many that identify the implementation of a CI as having a profound effect on the university's ability to increase language and cultural programming. Despite the optimism of many CI supporters, however, those in opposition to Confucius Institutes, maintain that

⁷ Redden, Elizabeth. 2012. *Confucius Says... Debate over Chinese-funded institutes at American universities*. January 4. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/01/04/debate-over-chinese-funded-institutes-american-universities>.

these benefits do not outweigh their limitations and repercussions. Both sides of this argument will be presented fully in the pages to follow.

The Benefits of Confucius Institutes in the United States

According to an article published in 2013 by Marshall Sahlins, once an institution has been approved to begin renovations for a CI space, Hanban sends the host institution a grant of 100,000 to 150,000 USD to help establish the Confucius Institute. Hanban also covers 50% of the costs necessary for operation of the institute over a five year period, and covers the travel costs and salaries of the teachers sent from China.⁸ After the five year contract has expired, the university has the option to either, renew their contract and continue receiving operational funds from Hanban, or close down their CI in order to finance their own Asian Studies department. Considering that nearly all of the CIs in the United States are hosted at public, state-funded universities that cannot afford to finance their own Chinese or Asian Studies department, it comes as no surprise that many schools decide to renew their contract.⁹ In addition to being a source of revenue, hosting a Confucius Institute on campus is the only way many American universities can afford to teach their students what is currently the most widely spoken language in the world.^{10 11}

This effort, though noble, is not completely altruistic. Establishing Confucius Institutes in the United States also has political and economic benefits for China. Promoting

⁸ Sahlins, M. (2013, October 30).

⁹ Stambach, A. (2014). *Confucius and Crisis in American Universities: Culture, Capital and Diplomacy in U.S. Public Higher Education*. 16. New York: Routledge.

¹⁰ According to statistics published by the Ethnologue Chinese is the most commonly spoken language in the world. This work does not, however, specify the Mandarin dialect as the most common dialect.

¹¹ Lewis, Paul M, Gary F Simons, and Charles D Fennig. 2016. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Nineteenth edition*. Accessed April 2, 2016. <http://www.ethnologue.com/statistics/size>.

Chinese language learning in the U.S. allows American students and businessmen to better engage with China for personal and professional purposes, thus increasing tourism and business relations between China and the United States. Having Confucius Institutes on several American campuses also creates a positive image of China as a nation ready to reclaim a strong position in the global market.

Criticisms of Confucius Institutes in the United States

Despite the economic and educational benefits of CIs, U.S. scholars and politicians have raised a plethora of concerns regarding the way CIs have been established and how they are being managed. Two of the most prominent political concerns are: 1) that the primary purpose of these institutes is not to teach foreigners Chinese, but to increase China's soft power abroad, and 2) as a direct result of this political agenda, these institutes work to spread cultural and political propaganda by presenting inaccurate and/or incomplete representations of China's history and culture.¹² Associate professor Lionel M. Jensen expands on the latter argument by denouncing CI programming as no more than "culturetainment". Jensen says: "The diversity of China's cultures has been reduced by Hanban to a uniform, quaint commodity, characterized by Chinese opera and dance performances. The term most appropriate for CI programming is 'culturetainment'."¹³ In other words, the image of China being presented by CIs is one that has been packaged to include only the most superficial and non-threatening aspects of China's history and culture.

¹² 1) d'Hooghe, I. (2008). 2) Although not having stated it explicitly, several scholars including Stambach, have, implicitly, suggested that the representations of Chinese culture and history presented by CIs are either inaccurate or incomplete in one way or another. This can be seen in Stambach's recounting of a "History of China" class she sat in on during her research of CIs. Stambach, A. (2014). 37-44.

¹³ Redden, Elizabeth. 2012.

In doing so, Hanban does not allow foreign students to see the parts of Chinese history, culture, or politics that could lead to critical discussions of China.

Regarding concerns of soft power, Professor Jeffery Gil of Flinders University in South Australia perfectly articulates the viewpoint many scholars have on CIs as a mechanism for increasing China's soft power. Gill says:

The Chinese government is promoting the learning of Chinese throughout the world almost as much as they are pushing foreign language learning in China. This can be seen as part of a broader effort to accomplish China's overarching foreign policy goal of resuming its once central place in both Asia and the world through the spread of soft power.¹⁴

According to Professor Gil, there are four major factors that resulted in China's adoption of soft power as a strategy to achieve its political goals. First, China's recent economic development gave both the Chinese government and its international audience greater confidence in China's ability to compete in an international market. Second, in the wake of the world's reaction to the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, China's leaders realized that they needed to improve ties with neighboring countries as well as the U.S. in order to take a greater international role. Third, China's attempts to achieve its political goals through the use of hard power did not work. This failure not only demonstrated that China could not yet compete with the United States in terms of hard power, but also antagonized and alienated other countries. Finally, Chinese scholars began to argue that the United States' soft power had declined significantly since the end of the Cold War and that China could compete on this front.¹⁵

¹⁴ Gil, J. (2008). The promotion of Chinese language learning and China's soft power. *Asian Social Science*, 4(10), 116.

¹⁵ Gil, J. (2008). 117.

The extension of soft power is not a novel political strategy. Yet, despite assurances from scholars such as Stuart Harris – who argues that while China will *want* to extend its influence as a regional and international power, its *ability* to exercise that power and influence will be limited – many scholars and politicians have begun to associate Confucius Institutes with an increase in China’s soft power and, consequently, a decrease in the political influence of the United States.¹⁶

In addition to concerns surrounding China’s use of CIs to gain political power, scholars have also claimed that Confucius Institutes are limiting, if not eliminating entirely, the academic freedoms of the host institution by censoring discussions of several “China sensitive” topics.¹⁷ Due to the fact that neither the contracts between Headquarters and the host institutions, nor the contracts between Hanban and its teachers, are typically published, there is no way to know for certain if Hanban explicitly mandates that there be no discussion of certain topics. According to the constitution and by-laws page of the Hanban website, however, every contract states that the host institution has an obligation to “uphold and defend the reputation and image of the Confucius Institutes,” and “accept both supervision from and assessments made by the Headquarters”.¹⁸ Hanban considers the following actions in violation of these obligations:

- Any activity conducted under the name of the Confucius Institutes without permission or authorization from the Confucius Institute Headquarters.

¹⁶ Harris, Stuart. (2006). China's regional policies: how much hegemony? *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 481.

¹⁷ This claim has been made by many scholars including: Grossman, R. (2014, May 4), Von Mayrhauser, M. (2011, November 11), and Wang, D., & Adamson, B. (2014).

¹⁸ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban). 2014. *Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes*. Retrieved from Hanban.org: http://english.hanban.org/confuciusinstitutes/node_7880.htm#no7

- Any violation of the Agreement or this Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes that causes losses of capital or assets or damages or tarnishes the reputation of the Confucius Institutes.

In any instance in which the host institution is believed to be failing to uphold these obligations, the Confucius Institute Headquarters reserves the right to “pursue legal action to affix responsibility and invoke punitive consequences on any person/party”.¹⁹

Although not wanting the reputation of the institute to be damaged or tarnished may seem like a harmless request, some scholars argue that this particular mandate has often led to host institutions not being able to host certain events or discuss certain topics in the classroom. During an interview in 2011 with Marshall Sahlins, Ted Floss, the former associate director of the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, was asked if Chicago’s CI had ever organized lectures or conferences on issues controversial in China.²⁰ Floss said: “I can put up a picture of the Dalai Lama in this office. But on the fourth floor [where the seminar rooms for the Confucius Institute were located] we wouldn’t do that”.²¹ Along those same lines, in 2012 *The New York Times* published an article quoting June Teufel-Dreyer, a professor of Chinese government and foreign policy at Miami University, saying: “There is a whole list of proscribed topics, you’re told not to discuss the Dalai Lama—or to invite the Dalai Lama to campus. Tibet, Taiwan, China’s military buildup, factional fights inside the Chinese leadership—these are all off limits”.²²

¹⁹ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban). 2014.

²⁰ In the interview, Sahlins used the issues of Tibetan independence and the political status of Taiwan as specific examples. This explains why Floss referenced the Dalai Lama specifically.

²¹ Sahlins, M. (2013, October 30).

²² Guttenplan, D. (2012, March 4). *Critics worry about influence of Confucius Institutes on U.S. campuses*. Retrieved from The New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/us/critics-worry-about-influence-of-chinese-institutes-on-us-campus.html?_r=0

Although many CI professors have asserted that they have never experienced any instances of academic infringement on their campus, other institutions, such as the University of Chicago (UC), Pennsylvania State University, and North Carolina State University (NCSU), have openly discussed their experiences with Chinese infringement on the academic freedoms of their respective institutions.

In 2009 NCSU cancelled a scheduled on-campus appearance by the Dalai Lama, citing concerns about a “Chinese backlash” as well as a shortage of time and resources.²³ On September 25, 2014, UC released an official statement on their website declaring their decision to discontinue the Confucius Institute on their campus. According to an article published in the *Chicago Tribune*, 108 UC professors signed a petition to suspend the institute on the grounds that it forced UC to participate in a “worldwide, political, pedagogical project that is contrary in many respects to its own academic values”.²⁴ Only a few days after UC closed its institute, Penn State announced that it too would be closing its CI due to its goals not being compatible with those of the Confucius Institute Headquarters.²⁵ The closure of the Confucius Institutes at the University of Chicago and Penn State has left professors at other universities questioning the compatibility of their established CIs.

²³ Golden, D. (2011, November 1). *China Says No Talking Tibet as Confucius Funds U.S. Universities*. Retrieved from Bloomberg Business: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-11-01/china-says-no-talking-tibet-as-confucius-funds-u-s-universities>

²⁴ Grossman, R. (2014, May 4). *U. of C. profs want China-funded institute evicted from campus*. Retrieved from Chicago Tribune: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-05-04/news/ct-confucius-institute-met-grossman-20140504_1_confucius-institute-petition-drive-language-instruction

²⁵ Inside Higher Ed. (2014, October 1). *Another Confucius Institute to Close*. Retrieved from Inside Higher Ed: <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2014/10/01/another-confucius-institute-close>

A less common, yet highly controversial, critique of CIs is the concern over China's stated mission to replace English as the first leading language in the world. A study conducted by R.S. Zaharna, a professor of strategic communication at American University, suggests that one of the reasons China chose language as the vehicle for advancing their soft power is because soft power is an inherently communication-based activity. Therefore, any attempt at increasing soft power must necessarily involve a plan to improve education practices in the realm of international communication. Zaharna goes on to argue that communication is most effective when it turns the target audience into stakeholders: "individuals who see themselves as co-creators of the initiative and therefore work to sustain and further expand the structure in place."²⁶ In other words, in order for China to use the U.S. to advance its political agenda, the two nations must see themselves as striving toward a common goal; this will only happen if there is a shared language. Despite Zaharna's findings, however, scholars such as Wang and Adamson argue that "even enthusiastic proponents of Chinese do not predict that it will overtake English as the world's most commonly used language in the near future".²⁷

From a financial perspective, critics of CIs have argued that the Chinese government is spending a massive amount of money on these institutes and have questioned why they are "subsidizing Western educational institutions when China has millions of children without proper schools?"²⁸ According to the article published by Wang and Adamson, reports have shown that the Chinese government has spent more than \$500

²⁶ Zaharna, Rhonda. 2014. "China's Confucius Institutes: Understanding the Relational Structure and Relational Dynamics of Network Collaboration." *Confucius Institutes and the Globalization of China's Soft Power*, September: 9-32.

²⁷ Wang, D., & Adamson, B. (2014). 232.

²⁸ Ruan, L. (2014, October 17).

million on the Confucius Institute project worldwide and has plans to expand it further in the near future.^{29 30} That same article also stated that the Chinese government spent an additional six million dollars on an online version of a Confucius Institute that has earned notoriety in China as being “the most expensive website in history”.³¹

When looking at these numbers, it is important to note that the \$500 million spent was over a period of seven years and throughout more than 105 countries worldwide. This amounts to over \$71 million spent each year, with each country receiving just over \$680 thousand. According to Ruan’s article in *Foreign Policy*, this number increased four-fold and in 2013 alone China spent over \$278 million on Confucius Institutes worldwide.³² If one takes into consideration how much China spends per year on education costs, however, the \$278 million spent on Confucius Institutes only makes up about 0.4 percent.³³

The expansion of soft power, the spreading of cultural and political propaganda, academic censorship, and costs are only the most common complaints that U.S. scholars have raised against Confucius Institutes over the past decade. There have also been accusations of espionage, substandard teaching materials, and discrimination in Hanban’s hiring process which results in the hiring of under qualified teachers.³⁴ While these issues will not be discussed in depth here, they certainly require further analysis.

²⁹ Wang, D., & Adamson, B. (2014). 225.

³⁰ At the 2011 conversion rate of 6.46 yuan/USD, China has spent about 3.2 billion yuan on CIs worldwide.

³¹ At the same conversion rate listed above, that is 38.7 million yuan spent.

³² At the 2013 conversion rate of 6.23 yuan/USD, that is 1.7 billion yuan.

³³ According to the full report of China’s central and local budget from 2012-13, in 2012 China spent \$60.698 billion on education alone. At the 2012 conversion rate of 6.23 yuan/USD, that is 378.152 billion yuan.

³⁴ Stambach, A. (2014). 36.

Conclusion

In light of the many benefits and limitations of CIs identified by both American and Chinese scholars, it would seem that, despite their heavy handed attempt, China has made minimal progress thus far in improving their image domestically and internationally via Confucius Institutes. CIs have gained a bad reputation, not just in the United States, but in several other countries, including India and Australia. Some would argue that this is due to the fact that the terms of the contract favor the interests of Hanban more than those of the host institution. There is little factual evidence, however, to back this claim. It goes without saying that Confucius Institutes are not perfect and have a long way to go before they are ever accepted as worthwhile programs in American academia. When it comes to assessing the worth of these institutes, however, it seems as though scholars have been demonizing them based on the bad experiences of a few institutions, while disregarding the fact that many universities are happy with the role their CI has played in bringing Chinese language and culture to their students and community. The fact of the matter is, every one of those 500 universities had to apply for the CI and agree to Hanban's terms. If the terms set forth did not align with the goals of the host institution why sign the contracts? The following chapter will take a closer look at some of the most prominent criticisms of Confucius Institutes and critique the arguments used to support them. These critiques will be used to ascertain if the criticisms of CIs were ascribed due to the wrongdoings of the CI or if they arose from American prejudices against China.

Chapter 2

Challenging the Criticisms of Confucius Institutes

Of the many concerns presented in Chapter One regarding the implementation of Confucius Institutes at American universities, the most pressing concerns – those that will be further explored in this chapter – are: 1) that the primary purpose of these institutes is to increase China’s soft power abroad, 2) as a direct result of this political agenda, these institutes are attempting to spread cultural and political propaganda, and 3) that Confucius Institutes are limiting, if not eliminating entirely, the academic freedoms of the host institution. In the pages to follow, these arguments will be dissected in an effort to judge their merit. The critiques of these claims will lay the foundation for the third and final chapter.

Claim: China is looking to increase its soft power abroad via Confucius Institutes.

Of the three, this is probably the most cited and heavily debated allegation against Confucius Institutes. While each author has their own way of saying so, the general consensus on this point is that CIs have been viewed with skepticism, and in many cases distaste, because of their connection to the Communist Party of China. The connection between CIs and the CPC places China in the unique position of having a direct connection between its government and a large segment of the American population. The unstated concern is that this connection could be exploited to persuade American students to view China more positively, thus leading to United States politicians being pressured to be more accepting of the CPC’s goals and policies. This concern is reinforced by the fact China’s

government officials have made it clear that increasing China's soft power through spreading Chinese language and culture is a top priority. In a report delivered at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on Oct. 15, 2007, former president of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hu Jintao, stressed the need to enhance the country's "soft power". President Hu said: "Culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength;" [we must] "enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests,". In pursuit of increasing China's soft power, President Hu suggested that China "continue to develop nonprofit cultural programs as the main approach to ensuring the basic cultural rights and interests of the people, increase spending on such programs, and build more cultural facilities in urban communities and rural areas".³⁵ Although Hu does not explicitly identify CIs in the United States, it is quite clear that they are a part of the "cultural facilities" to which he is referring.

While the increase in China's soft power is not a subject that ought to be dismissed by the U.S, there are a few problems with the way in which American scholars have used soft power as a means of criticizing CIs. First, the literature on this issue presents the increase in China's soft power as though it were a hidden agenda rather than a blatant political objective. In other words, despite very clear statements from China about the intentions of their cultural facilities, American scholars have written about the soft power effect as though China is being deceitful in their actions. Of course China is looking to improve their ties with the U.S. by presenting a more positive image of itself to the

³⁵ Hu, Jintao. 2007. *Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on Oct. 15, 2007*. Report, Beijing: Xinhua.

American public, this is not a secret and China is not denying it. As previously stated, teaching American students Chinese, at China's expense, is not an altruistic endeavor. Further integration with the United States is a part of what China gets out of the deal. Even without explicit statements from the CPC, this should have been clear to American scholars from the beginning.

Secondly, this argument does not acknowledge the fact that soft power, as argued by R.S. Zaharna, is *inherently* a communication-based activity. Therefore, any instance in which a country displays a vested interest in expanding its language beyond its national boarder is an example of that country working towards increasing its soft power. This, by definition, includes the United States' continuous effort to maintain English as the number one language in the world. Every ESL course offered in China, every time an English translation appears on a Chinese sign or billboard, and every instance in which a Chinese student enrolls in an American university, all contribute to the United States' soft power in China. Yet, very few scholars are arguing that ESL acts as a Trojan horse for American soft power. Furthermore, no American scholars are arguing that the presence of French, German, Italian, and British International Cultural Institutes in the U.S are also examples of foreign countries attempting to develop their soft power abroad. In fact, whenever a comparison between Confucius Institutes and other ICIs is made, the similarity of their function and their shared history is often ignored completely. Every comparison discusses at length the fact that Confucius Institutes are hosted on the campuses of pre-established universities and that they are funded by, and operate under the control of, the Chinese government, yet very few give weight to the significant similarities between CIs and other ICIs.

Professor Gregory Paschalidis' *Exporting National Culture: Histories of Cultural Institutes Abroad* is one of the few sources that does. Paschalidis' work discusses Confucius Institutes as a product of a broader mission surrounding cultural institutes by providing a detailed progression of the development of International Cultural Institutes. Paschalidis begins by stating that the development of all cultural institutes occurred in four distinct phases. Phase one consisted of the development of the first cultural institutes, which Paschalidis calls the "three main protagonists": Italy, Germany and France. Phase two is marked by the significant increase in government involvement, which led to the "mobilization of intellectuals and artists in the service of official propaganda". Phase three was that of "cultural diplomacy", and phase four was, and continues to be, cultural capitalism.³⁶

Paschalidis identifies phase one as beginning in the 1870s and ending in 1914. In comparison to France, Italy and Germany achieved national unification relatively late and in such a manner that left several communities outside their "national space". Additionally, both countries had a significant number of expatriate communities due to emigration.³⁷ It was these ethnic communities that became the target of the first German and Italian cultural institutes.³⁸ What characterized cultural institutes at this phase was that, rather than being used as a tool for European expansionism, the aim of these organizations was to "preserve the language and cultural identity of Germans and Italians living outside the borders of

³⁶ Paschalidis, Gregory. 2009. "Exporting national culture: histories of Cultural Institutes abroad." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 275–289.

³⁷ Paschalidis, Gregory. 2009. 277.

³⁸ All-German School Association for the Preservation of Germanhood Abroad (1881) and the Società Dante Alighieri (1889).

their respective nation states.”³⁹ In this phase of development, cultural institutes were, for the most part, separate from their respective country’s government. The initiative, financial support and management of these organizations came from private donors and were placed in areas in which the language and culture promoted by the institute were already prominent. The few exceptions to this model were: the Italian institute in Libya and the French institutions: the Alliance Française (1883), the Mission laïque française (1902), and the Oeuvre des Ecoles de l’Orient (1855). Pierre Foncin, the first General Secretary (1883–1897) and sixth President (1899–1914) of the Alliance Française, proposed that the military conquest of the colonies should be followed by their “conquête morale”, primarily through teaching French to the native populations.

In phase two (1914-1945), Paschalidis argues that the cultural institutes became a standard feature of the official external cultural policy of the “great powers” (Germany, Italy, and France), typically under the control of the Foreign Affairs Ministries. The geographical spread of the institutes in this period largely follows the different states’ geopolitical priorities and interests. With the establishment of the Association Française d’action Artistique (AFAA) in 1934, France began to make a systematic effort to integrate cultural initiatives into its foreign policy. At the same time, the external cultural projection occurring in Europe took an aggressive turn. After the “vibrant display of propaganda” at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, as well as the “symbolic confrontation between the Soviet and the German pavilions in the 1937 Paris World Expo”, AFAA’s emphasis moved from creating an export market for French art to winning friends over to the French cause. The major objective became to “move the American public out of its cautious neutrality”.⁴⁰

³⁹ Paschalidis, Gregory. 2009. 278.

⁴⁰ Paschalidis, Gregory. 2009. 280.

German interest in cultural diplomacy only took off after the war, largely motivated by a belief in the “role propaganda had allegedly played in the defeat of the Reich in 1918”. By 1929, “the members of the Reichstag had become more aware of the need for Kulturpolitik [cultural policy]”, and, as a result, the Foreign Office increased funding for external cultural policy, devoting almost 15% of its total budget to it by 1931.⁴¹ It was in this climate of increased emphasis on external cultural policy that the Deutsche Akademie (1923), the precursor of Goethe-Institut, won sufficient state support to promote the German language among foreigners. The Deutsche Akademie however, remained a private association until 1941, when Hitler made it the official institution for helping the German Language to “assume its proper place as a world language”.⁴² Just like Nazi Germany, Italy also geared most of its cultural communication abroad to spreading political propaganda. Both countries sought support from their emigrant communities and mobilized them in order to build friendly political constituencies among potential enemies like the U.S. By the time of the establishment of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953, cultural institutes were “ready to embark on their global expansion at an unprecedented pace”, thus leading into phase three in the development of International Cultural Institutes.⁴³ Before moving on, it is important to note that at this stage of development, no research was published in the United States denouncing the French, German or Italian ICIs as mechanisms for increasing soft power.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Paschalidis, Gregory. 2009. 281.

⁴³ Paschalidis, Gregory. 2009. 282.

Phase three is marked by the expansion of the concept of culture as well as an ever present tension between building international alliances and the persistence of national cultural projection. In other words, at this stage of development the alliances built between nations – which were necessary for the continued operation of International Cultural Institutes – were unstable due to changing ideas about culture and the stigmatization of cultural propaganda as being aggressive.⁴⁴ The fourth and final phase of development is marked by the emergence of International Cultural Institutes from less powerful countries.

In the words of Paschalidis:

Until the epoch-making events of 1989, the instruments of external cultural policy (i.e. cultural institutes) were the prerogative of the great powers – Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the USA and Soviet Union. Since then, such instruments have been developed by a range of other countries as well, most of which are not members of the ‘big league’. The rising tide of this new phenomenon suggests that what was once the distinguishing feature of national might, is fastly becoming a standardized form of national representation and projection, a basic ingredient of the new system of international and intercultural relations.⁴⁵

Of the ‘little league’ nations creating International Cultural Institutes, Paschalidis names China as the “newest contender”.

In the past four years, it [China] has established 210 branches in 64 countries, with many more scheduled to open over the next few years. India is the other emergent world power that proceeded to establish Cultural Centers abroad. By placing most of them in Asia, [however], its location strategy has so far been much less ambitious than China’s.⁴⁶

This fourth and final phase serves to show that without the creation of the ICIs so revered in American society today, Confucius Institutes would not have a platform from which to

⁴⁴ Initially restricted to the humanistic (or élitist) idea of high culture, the definition of culture was gradually revised to include a more inclusive range of cultural expressions, as well as science and technology, the social sciences and development projects.

⁴⁵ Paschalidis, Gregory. 2009. 283.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

design its model. The Alliance Française’s “explicit interest in expanding their political influence via language learning and international appreciation of French culture”, and the Deutsche Akademie’s mission of helping the German Language to “assume its proper place as a world language”, are both examples of initiatives to increase a country’s soft power. These institutes, however, are not identified as devious ploys put in motion by their respective governments. In fact, many of the original ICIs are well renowned and many of their members are highly decorated. This leads one to question, why – if Confucius Institutes and other ICIs were founded with the same basic intentions – are CIs being criticized for attempting to increase China’s soft power while other ICIs are not being criticized on this same point?

Claim: Confucius Institutes work to spread cultural and political propaganda.

This claim often appears in conjunction with criticisms regarding soft power. In combining the two, scholars have made “the spreading of cultural and political propaganda” the second most widely used argument against Confucius Institutes. The general argument is that CIs aim to use propaganda as a means of injecting the cultural and political ideologies of the CPC into the American population, many of which are contradictory to the narrative currently established in the U.S. Many of the scholars whom argue against CIs on the basis of spreading cultural and political propaganda, often use “propaganda” as though it is an inherently negative term. This has resulted in the unequal usage of the word when describing the efforts of CIs in comparison to the efforts of other ICIs. Jensen, for example, states that “because the CIs are instruments of propaganda, they are necessarily controversial and should be anathema to colleges and universities.” This description of CIs stands in stark contrast to those associated with other ICIs. In fact, when describing other

ICIs, many authors do not use the terms “propaganda” or “culturetainment” at all. ICIs, such as the Alliance Française, are often described using more positive terminology.

In May of 2015, for example, an article published in the Denver Post described the programming of the Alliance Française de Denver as “encouraging Francophiles”. The article praises the AF as being “one of the city's oldest nonprofit organizations”. Moreover, despite having established “more than 800 locations in 137 countries”, proprietors of the AF assert that “Colorado is extremely lucky to have one” because “they're not everywhere, and it's been here a long time.” The linguistic and cultural programming of this Alliance Française is described as “perfect” and “beneficial” for anyone looking to learn to communicate with French speaking individuals and gain the tools necessary for better understanding their culture.⁴⁷ It is this striking difference in description that leads one to wonder 1) what the definition of propaganda is, and if it can be applied to both CIs and ICIs. 2) If the term can be applied to both CIs and other ICIs, why has it, and its negative connotations, only been associated with Confucius Institutes? In other words, why is it that when CIs host cultural events or offer Chinese culture courses, it is called propaganda, but when another ICI – such as the Alliance Française – does it, it's called an opportunity to better understand French culture?

Dr. L. John Martin's book, *International Propaganda: Its Legal and Diplomatic Control*, is a highly detailed work that examines the causes and effects of the international propaganda shared between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. As part of this examination, Martin spends the first few sections of his book attempting to construct

⁴⁷ Vaccarelli, Joe. 2015. *Alliance Francaise de Denver encouraging Francophiles since 1897*. May 7. Accessed December 12, 2015. http://www.denverpost.com/denver/ci_28054065/alliance-francaise-de-denver-encouraging-francophiles-since-1897.

a definition of the term “propaganda”. Ultimately, Martin defines propaganda as “a systematic attempt through mass communications to influence the thinking and thereby the behavior of people in the interest of some in-group.”⁴⁸ In his research, Martin qualifies that “writers who believe that propaganda must contain deceitful or unscientific information apparently confuse simple definition with the methods used.” Martin argues that, if only deceitful or unscientifically presented material is considered propaganda, then open and logical statements intended to influence behavior in the interest of some in-group cannot be named. Such a narrow definition would not include most of the activities of a modern propaganda agency. Martin’s definition, and the defense of his definition, of propaganda can be applied to CIs and other ICIs in the United States because, insofar as both institutes use foreign language and culture to integrate the home country with the United States, both institutes can be considered a vehicle for peddling propaganda to the American public. Just because China has taken a more direct approach and has been more verbal about their intentions does not mean that their propaganda is coated in deceit. Furthermore, this does not mean that the other ICIs in the U.S are not themselves involved in peddling propaganda. It is unfair and misleading to accuse CIs of spreading propaganda without accusing other ICIs of doing the same thing. Doing so suggests that American scholars do not have an objective interest in combating foreign propaganda, rather, a special interest in attacking the propaganda of Confucius Institutes specifically.

⁴⁸ In this work, Martin also adds the disclaimer that the “in-group” is not necessarily the most powerful group, rather it is the group whose interests are different from that of another group, the “out-group”.

Martin, John L. 1958. "Definnition of Propganda." In *International Propaganda*, by John L Martin, 10-20. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Claim: Confucius Institutes limit the academic freedoms of their host institution

Closely tied with criticisms of spreading propaganda is the argument that CIs limit the academic freedoms of their host institution. Scholars have argued that one of the ways in which CIs peddle propaganda is through omission. By asking their teachers and host institutions to not allow for discussions of certain topics, Hanban is blinding CI students to the truth and therefore peddling an artificial image of China. Of the three major criticisms of CIs, this could be the most damaging. Insofar as scholars can prove that CIs have been explicitly and forcibly pushed by Hanban to omit certain topics from their discussions this could lead to the rightful expulsion of CIs from the United States. The problem with this argument, however, is that there is no concrete proof that Hanban has infringed upon the academic freedoms of their host institution. What little evidence does exist suggesting that CIs do so could also be used to argue that the complaints from the host institutions stem from the fact that they have been viewing CIs as though they are supposed to act as fully developed Asian Studies departments. If one examines the course listings of many American CIs, however, it is clear that CI courses are not meant to cover topics related to Chinese culture, history or politics, with the level of depth or breath employed by traditional Asian Studies departments. This misconception has led to many host institutions attempting to force an agenda upon the CI that it was not designed to have.

Recall, for example, the quote from June Teufel-Dreyer, the professor of Chinese government and foreign policy at Miami University, in which she states that topics such as the Dalai Lama, Tibet, Taiwan, China's military buildup, and factional fights inside the Chinese leadership are all "off limits". Dreyer used those examples to suggest that Hanban has a list of things that their teachers cannot discuss. Taking this list, as well as the stated

mission of the Confucius Institutes, and Jensen's argument about "culture retention", into consideration, Dreyer's comment forces one to wonder, under what circumstances would a question about any of these topics come up in a CI classroom? If CIs are truly language and culture focused institutes, whom only focus on the most superficial aspects of Chinese culture and offer no courses on Chinese politics, when would a student find an appropriate moment to ask about factional fights inside the Chinese leadership? Insofar as CI programming has been limited to language courses, calligraphy classes and the occasional History of China class, there does not seem to be a time in which questions about certain controversial issues would come up. So the question becomes: are American scholars upset that Hanban mandates that CIs cannot talk about certain things or are they upset because there is no place within the CI programming that allows them to do so? If the latter is the case, why was that limitation not taken into consideration before the implementation of the CI? If it is imperative that these discussions be had, yet clear that Confucius Institutes do not offer a space for that discussion to take place, why agree to host the CI in the first place? If this was considered but the host institution ultimately decided that the benefits outweighed the limitations, this argument is not grounds for criticizing the Confucius Institute; if anything it only reflects poorly on the host institution. Using such a flawed argument as the biggest problem with CI programming, again, suggests that there is something unsaid that is driving this criticism.

Conclusion

Much of the current scholarship surrounding Confucius Institutes has lent itself to identifying numerous reasons as to why CIs are bad for America, American students, and American interests. Very few works, however, have taken the time to confront these

arguments head on. In doing so here I have attempted to further complicate the discussion of CIs so that scholars, educators, and students alike may be able to think deeper about their assessments of the pros and cons of Confucius Institutes. My critiques of the criticisms against Confucius Institutes are primarily based in the undeniable similarities between the programming, history and intentions of CIs to those of other International Cultural Institutes in the United States. What I have endeavored to show here is that many of the criticisms ascribed to CIs can just as easily be applied to other ICIs, yet, this has not been done. This leads one to suspect that there is something else driving the criticisms of Confucius Institutes. In the final chapter of this work I attempt to uncover this hidden force by examining the circumstances that led to this debate in the first place. This chapter is an exploration of the relationship between the United States and China in an effort to understand where these criticisms came from.

Chapter 3

Admitting U.S. Anxieties about Chinese Power

The previous chapter endeavors to further complicate the arguments for and against Confucius Institutes by delving deeper into some of the major issues identified by American scholars. The critiques of these arguments suggest that they say more about American anxieties surrounding the United States' seemingly precarious position as a world leader, than they do about the institutes themselves. The fact that every one of the three main criticisms presented – increasing soft power, spreading propaganda, and academic censorship – can also be applied to other International Cultural Institutes, yet has only been used to denounce Confucius Institutes, suggests that there is something specific about CIs with which Americans have a problem. This “something” has very little to do with the programming employed by CIs, the history behind them, or their intentions (both implicit and explicit). If that “something” were any of those three critiques, it would necessarily result in the U.S. also having a problem with the other ICIs whom are doing the exact same thing.

Based on the information presented in the last two chapters, as well as a common understanding that China and the U.S. are often at odds with one another, the “something” that American scholars have a problem with – the only “something” that is specific to China – must be the Communist Party of China. American scholars do not have a problem with foreign language learning in the U.S, with foreign governments funding cultural institutes in the U.S, or with cultural institutes being used as vehicles for propaganda to increase

international soft power. To say that they do would be condemning the efforts of the French, German and Italian cultural institutes in the United States as well as American efforts abroad to do these very same things. What Americans actually have a problem with is the fact that China, specifically, has begun to participate in this long standing tradition. It is well known that relations between the United States and China have always been on shaky ground and that scholars are asserting that the United States' international influence is waning. Now that China has made the bold and shrewd move to invest in its own International Cultural Institutes, long stand anxieties and stigmas about China's rise to power can be readily seen. The following pages will explore the relationship between China and the U.S. in an effort to understand why the U.S is so suspicious of China – and vice versa – and how those suspicions could have led to an almost irrational prejudice against Confucius Institutes.

Current U.S-China Suspicions

In an article published in 2012, Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi present and analyze the underlying concerns the leaders of China and the United States harbor toward each other. Lieberthal and Wang's presentation of the reasons for China's distrust of the United States are as follows:

In Beijing's view, it is U.S. policies, attitude, and misperceptions that cause the lack of mutual trust between the two countries... Four sentiments reflecting recent structural changes in the international system contribute to this distrust: [1] the feeling in China that since 2008 the PRC has ascended to be a first-class global power; [2] the assessment that the United States, despite ongoing great strength, is heading for decline; [3] the observation that emerging powers like India, Brazil, Russia and South Africa are increasingly challenging Western dominance and are working more with each other and with China in doing so; and [4] the notion that China's development model of a strong political leadership that effectively manages

social and economic affairs provides an alternative to Western democracy and market economies for other developing countries to learn from.⁴⁹

These sentiments serve to show that China is steadily moving in the direction of no longer accepting Western hegemony as the standard. This passage reflects the belief of many scholars that it is just a matter of time before the U.S. is forced to take a less-encompassing position of power in order to make way for new power players. This belief does not, however, suggest that Chinese hegemony is on its way in. Instead, a certain level of equality between power players, such that no single nation has the upper hand, is on its way.⁵⁰ In light of the United States' aggressive response to the implementation of Confucius Institutes, it comes as no surprise that China believes that the U.S is seeking to constrain China's elevation in political status.

On the side of the United States, despite the current dominant view of national decision makers – who believe it is feasible and necessary to develop a “constructive long-term relationship with a rising China” – many American politicians are worried about China's approach to gaining power and what that means for the United States. According to Lieberthal and Wang, the concerns of American leaders are as follows:

1) The Chinese side thinks in terms of a long-term zero-sum game, and this requires that America prepare to defend its interests against potential Chinese efforts to undermine them as China grows stronger. 2) PLA aspirations for dominance in the near seas potentially challenge American freedom of access and action in international waters where such freedom is deemed vital to meet American commitments to friends and allies.⁵¹ 3) Economically, the United States worries that China's mercantilist policies will harm the chances of American economic recovery. China-based cyber theft of

⁴⁹ Jisi, Wang, and Kenneth G Lieberthal. 2012. *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust*. Series, Washington D.C.: Brookings.

⁵⁰ Chi-Cheung, Leung, and Hilary du Cros. 2014. "Confucius Institutes: Multiple Reactions and Interactions." *China: An International Journal* 82.

⁵¹ As China's strength in Asia grows, it is more important for America to maintain the credibility of its commitments to friends and allies in the region.

American trade secrets and technology further sharpens these concerns. 4) Americans believe democratic political systems naturally understand each other better and that [China's] authoritarian political systems are inherently less stable and more prone to blaming others for their domestic discontent. Authoritarian systems are also intrinsically less transparent, which makes it more difficult to judge their sincerity and intentions. 5) What Americans view as human rights violations (especially violations of civil rights) make it more difficult for the U.S. to take actions targeted at building greater mutual trust... 6) American leaders are especially sensitive to Chinese actions that suggest the PRC may be assuming a more hegemonic approach to the region. Lastly, 7) America is especially sensitive to Chinese policies that impose direct costs on the U.S. economy.⁵²

Much like the Chinese side, many of the American reservations revolve around the concern of one nation taking a dominant position that undermines the needs and aspirations of other nations. This passage suggests that many American leaders fear that any increase in Chinese power, be it hard or soft power, could result in a mass spreading of CPC biased politics. This fear is endemic enough to have spread to the American population as well. In his work, *Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China*, Falk Hartig notes that a CNN poll revealed that “58% of Americans believe China’s growing economic and military strength is a threat” to the United States.

While this fear explains why United States leaders and citizens are suspicious of any Chinese endeavor connected to the CPC, it does not explain why the U.S has taken such an aggressive stance against CIs. Other countries like Japan also harbor deep concerns regarding China’s ever-growing international influence, however, their response to CIs has been much more passive. According to Leung Chi-Cheung and Hilary du Cros’ *Confucius Institutes: Multiple Reactions and Interactions*, Japan’s reaction to CIs manifests itself in the form of soft power rather

⁵² Jisi, Wang, and Kenneth G Lieberthal. 2012. 9-10.

than outright aggression. Japan's concerns are expressed in the form of human rights, democracy and conformity with global regimes, environmental degradation, narcotics, and international organized crime.⁵³ Although one professor at Osaka Sangyo University openly accused CIs as being a "spy agency established to gather cultural intelligence", this statement was quickly rescinded. The United States' aggressive response to CIs, in contrast to Japan's semi-passive one, could be used to argue that America's aggression towards CIs, and the CPC in general, stems, not only, from political and economic concerns, but also from American sinophobic ideologies.

⁵³ Chi-Cheung, Leung, and Hilary du Cros. 2014. "Confucius Institutes: Multiple Reactions and Interactions." *China: An International Journal* 76.

Conclusion

Due to the critiques and concerns expressed by scholars, educators, and journalists, in both scholarly and popular sources, Confucius Institutes have gained a negative reputation in the United States. Although the critiques vary depending on the source, there are three that appear consistently: 1) that Confucius Institutes are [solely] a mechanism for the expansion of China's soft power, 2) that China is attempting to increase its soft power by using CIs to spread cultural and political propaganda, and 3) that CIs limit the academic freedoms of their host institutions. Further examination of these criticisms, however, reveals that not only are they employed unevenly between different International Cultural Institutes, but that they are rooted in American feelings of distrust towards China and the CPC. China's attempt to increase its soft power through language and culture instruction is in no way different from the efforts of other ICIs both in and outside the United States. The perpetuation of cultural and political propaganda is also not specific to CIs; nor is it inherently deceitful as scholars and journalists have portrayed it to be. On the contrary, Hanban and the Chinese Ministry of Education have been relatively open about the intentions and mission of the Confucius Institutes.

That being said, however, CIs are not perfect and one major area of improvement will have to be their willingness to create a space that allows for critical assessment of some aspects of Chinese history, politics or culture. As long as this avenue for academic exploration is closed, CIs will never be taken seriously in American academia. Only when China is willing to open up and the U.S. is willing to set aside its fears and distrust of the

CPC, will these two nations be able to work together. Not as superior and subordinate, but as equal partners. It is sure to be a long and difficult road but should this compromise ever be made, Confucius Institutes could become an important contributor to teaching and learning Chinese language, culture, history, and politics in the United States and abroad.

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