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# Confucius Institutes and the University: Distinguishing the Political Mission from the Cultural

CHRISTOPHER R. HUGHES

*The rapid spread of Confucius Institutes (CI) around the world has received growing attention from both critics and admirers. The former question whether it is right for organizations funded and governed by the Chinese state to operate on campuses in liberal-democratic societies; the latter claim that the CIs contribute to the general good by facilitating the teaching of the Chinese language and enhancing academic exchange. This paper will scrutinize the role of the Confucius Institute by debating over the missions of the university and the institute itself. A careful look at the organizational links between the institutes and the CCP will be provided. This paper argues that the clash of missions may be seen as risks by academic staff and students in host institutions; they are merely the consequences of the CIs fulfilling the mission with which they have been entrusted.*

**KEYWORDS:** Confucius Institute; Hanban; CCP; political mission; cultural mission.

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After China started to establish Confucius Institutes (CIs) around the world in 2004, a first wave of academic analysis appeared that was far from conclusive in deciding whether this was a

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welcome development. Some observers raised concerns over the implications for academic freedom of having organizations funded and governed by the Chinese state operating on campuses in democratic societies.<sup>1</sup> Others found little evidence that they were engaged in political activity beyond the kind of cultural diplomacy that is legitimately pursued by many governments.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the debate on whether the CIs are compatible with the core mission of the university in a democratic society has continued to intensify, especially since the publication of a harsh critique by the distinguished University of Chicago anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, in October 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Little of this discussion, however, has explored how the spread of the CIs has been encouraged by changes in the nature of higher education that are driven by factors such as the shifting of funding away from government spending and the need to bolster the social legitimacy of universities by providing policy relevant research and employment focused training. For the first time in history, however, these developments are providing the context within which a one-party state is able to use its growing economic capabilities to influence the work of universities in democratic societies found in North America, Europe, Australasia, Japan and India.<sup>4</sup> It is important to bear this in mind when assessing the impact of the CIs, because if the university is understood to be one of the most

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<sup>1</sup>Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 165.

<sup>2</sup>Falk Hartig, "Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2012): 53-76; James F. Paradise, "China and International Harmony: The Role of Confucius Institutes in Bolstering Beijing's Soft Power," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 4, (2009): 647-69.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall Sahlins, "China U.," *The Nation*, October 29, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/176888/china-u#>; For a rejoinder, see Edward A. McCord, "Confucius Institute: Hardly a Threat to Academic Freedoms," *The Diplomat*, March 27, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/confucius-institutes-hardly-a-threat-to-academic-freedoms/>; for a broad range of perspectives triggered by the growing dispute see also Perry Link, "The Debate Over Confucius Institutes," *ChinaFile*, June 23, 2014, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes> (accessed October 3, 2014).

<sup>4</sup>For the purposes of this discussion a "democratic" society can be taken to mean a society that allows more than one party to engage in free and fair elections and places a high value on the freedom of expression and association and the rule of law.

important institutions shaping the values of a democratic society, its status as an independent source of critical knowledge is important not only for education but also for the healthy development of democracy itself.

This article will thus attempt a reassessment of the debate over the CIs by setting the basic positions in the early literature in the context of a brief discussion of the changing nature of the university itself. It will then present the available information concerning the mission of the CIs and their relationship to the Chinese Party-State. This will be followed by an account of the risks that are involved in the hosting of CIs. Finally, an assessment of the ability of universities to manage such risks will be made in light of the latest developments. In the process, it is particularly important to look at how incidents that have occurred with the CIs in recent years allow us to begin to move beyond Paradise's conclusion in 2009 that "only time will tell whether the Confucius Institutes can help spark a more sympathetic understanding of China and usher in a more benign view of it."<sup>5</sup>

### **The Mission of the University**

Very little was said about the changing mission of the university in the first wave of literature on the impact of the CIs. Paradise's groundbreaking article in 2009, for example, is primarily concerned with whether the CIs are effective tools for the promotion of a positive international image for China. Hartig's 2012 account of the operation of CIs in Germany also largely focuses on asking whether they are engaged in the same kind of cultural diplomacy as organizations sponsored by democratic states, such as the Goethe Institutes or the British Council.<sup>6</sup> Although Starr looks at the impact of CIs on education, he is mainly concerned with pedagogical issues, such as the political implications of the exclusion of traditional

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<sup>5</sup>Paradise, "China and International Harmony," 664.

<sup>6</sup>Hartig, "Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China."

characters and dialects from their curriculum,<sup>7</sup> rather than the evolution of the broader mission of the university.

When assessing the impact of the CIs, however, it is important not to assume that the mission of the university is unchanging. It has undergone constant change since World War Two, since, like all institutions in democratic countries, the authority of the university to determine its own purpose has been challenged by a series of crises. Events like the Vietnam War and the rise of the “counter-culture” movement, combined with new social demands such as the call to give minorities greater access and accommodate their interests in curriculum changes, the need to solve domestic problems related to issues such as the environment, health and housing, and the need to supply personnel equipped to work in a post-industrial society have all had an impact. In 1970, the sociologist Daniel Bell (not to be confused with the eponymous advocate of Confucian meritocracy currently based at Tsinghua University in Beijing) provided a useful way of conceptualizing this dynamic process by proposing that the values of the university could be understood as defined by a tension between what he called “classical” and “pragmatic” models. The former was rooted in the origins of the university as an organization entrusted by society to pursue the truth and evaluate culture through a theoretical questioning of anything and everything. The latter sees the role of the university as being primarily to serve society through training large numbers of people, the application of knowledge and providing personnel to serve in government and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

Although much has changed in society and the university since the days of the anti-Vietnam War movement, Bell’s categories still stand as a useful starting point for understanding the origins of the debate over the mission of the university today. This is because much of the discussion of the mission of the university in the subsequent decades can be seen as

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<sup>7</sup>Don Starr, “Chinese Language Education in Europe: the Confucius Institutes,” *European Journal of Education* 44, no. 1 (2009): 65-82.

<sup>8</sup>Daniel Bell, “Quo Warranto?—Notes on the Governance of Universities in the 1970s,” *National Affairs*, no. 19 (Spring 1970): 63.

the search for an optimal balance between his two models. Some have decried the decline of the university as an institution defined by nothing more than the mission to pursue knowledge for its own sake.<sup>9</sup> More moderate voices accept the need to meet pragmatic demands but still argue that the university must never forget that it also has a role in protecting and promoting the humanistic conception of the individual as a citizen, which makes the university “intrinsically related to the extension of democracy. . . .”<sup>10</sup> Most academics would agree with the view put forward by Craig Calhoun and Diana Rhoten that while it is right for the university to be engaged in the practical affairs of society, it should also maintain a public mission of cultivating citizenship and advances in civil society, as well as presenting scientific inquiry and debate as a model for the kind of behavior citizens need to practice for democracy to work.<sup>11</sup>

Maintaining the classical model has become increasingly hard as the growing demands on universities have been combined with diminishing financial support from the state. At the same time, the rise of neo-liberal economics and the greater ease of travel and communication leave universities competing for students and prestige in an international market. The global financial crisis in 2008 only added to the pressure, as institutions have seen diminishing returns from alternative sources of income, such as endowments. A raft of reforms to higher education introduced in the United Kingdom in 2010, for example, dramatically raised tuition fees and removed government funding for teaching the arts, humanities and social sciences. The result of such global trends is the emergence of the “enterprise university,” in which decision-making is increasingly centralized at the expense of governance procedures that were put in place to

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<sup>9</sup>Kenneth Minogue, *The Concept of a University* (1973; repr., New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Docherty, *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), Kindle Loc. 577.

<sup>11</sup>Craig Calhoun, “The Public Mission of the Research University,” in *Knowledge Matters: The Public Mission of the Research University*, ed. Diana Rhoten and Craig Calhoun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), Kindle Loc. 539; Diana Rhoten and Craig Calhoun, “Preface,” in *Knowledge Matters*, Kindle Loc. 274.

preserve the values at the heart of the classical model, in order to meet targets set by governments and achieve status in league tables.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these radical changes, however, when the literature on the changing mission of the university broadens its focus to the international context, it remains rooted in an age when the major question was whether developing countries would follow the model set by the advanced industrialized democracies. As developing societies became richer, it was expected that they would follow the model of allowing their institutions to unite freedom of intellectual inquiry with the creation of new knowledge through research, the nurturing of a scholarly community, open public communication and efforts to make knowledge widely available as a public good.<sup>13</sup> With China on track to become the world's biggest economy by the middle of this century, putting its government in an increasingly strong position to shape social values in democratic societies through their universities, such a perspective is rather anachronistic.

By 2008, the complex dilemmas that this power shift presents for academic institutions had already begun to emerge through episodes such as the claim made by the *China Daily* that the vice-chancellor of London Metropolitan University had sent a letter of apology to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after a report appeared in the Chinese press that migration agents and students were threatening to boycott his institution for awarding an honorary doctorate to the Dalai Lama.<sup>14</sup> The university itself claimed that no letter had been sent and that its vice-chancellor had only "expressed regret at any unhappiness that had been caused to Chinese people" by the award of the honorary degree to the Dalai Lama in a meet-

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<sup>12</sup>Simon Marginson and Mark Considine, *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jan Currie and Janice Newson, *Universities and Globalisation: Critical Perspectives* (London: Sage Publications, 1998); Jan Currie et al., *Globalizing Practices and University Responses: European and Anglo-American Differences* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

<sup>13</sup>Calhoun, "The Public Mission," Kindle Loc. 313.

<sup>14</sup>"Duo jia liuxue zhongjie biaoshi dizhi ting 'Zang du' Yingguo gaoxiao" (Several overseas study agencies say they will boycott the British university that supports "Tibetan independence"), *Huanqiu shibao* (Global Times), June 13, 2008, <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/57506/7380085.html> (accessed February 18, 2013).

ing with staff from the Chinese embassy.<sup>15</sup> Whatever form the university's response took, though, a member of the embassy staff was reported to have demanded that the university should refuse speaking platforms to Tibetan independence groups if it wanted the relationship to return to normal.<sup>16</sup> Yet commentators like Hartig and Paradise do not look at the implications of this shifting context for the long-term impact of CIs, even though the Chinese government aims to establish 1,000 around the world by 2020, a target that has already been half-met in 2014.

With CIs in the United States being offered volunteer teachers and USD150,000 as startup funds from the Hanban and “provide a set amount of annual fund [sic] according to needs,”<sup>17</sup> the attractions for cash-strapped universities seem strong, even if they are expected to provide matching funds and local laws often mean that Chinese staff have to be paid at standard rates.<sup>18</sup> Many of the first assessments of the CIs, however, did not see such a relationship with the Chinese state as problematic because they tended to equate the new organizations with institutions such as the British Council or Germany's Goethe Institutes.<sup>19</sup> Such sanguine appraisals, however, do not stand up to scrutiny when attention is paid to the way in which the work of the CIs is tied to the interests of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), an organization that promotes the ideals of a one-party system and adopts policies that are seen by many inside and outside China as not only detrimental to many individuals and social groups but also as incompatible with the democratic aspects of the classical model of the university. To test this point, it is worth looking again at

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<sup>15</sup>“Regret at Unhappiness’ over Dalai Lama’s Degree,” *Times Higher Education*, July 9, 2008, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/regret-at-unhappiness-over-dalai-lamas-degree/402720.article>.

<sup>16</sup>Xiang Li, “London School Regrets Honoring Dalai Lama,” *China Daily*, August 7, 2008, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-07/08/content\\_6826398.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-07/08/content_6826398.htm).

<sup>17</sup>“Agreement Between Confucius Institute Headquarters of China and [country and institution name] on the Establishment of Confucius Institute at [institution name].”

<sup>18</sup>Peter Schmidt, “At US Colleges, Chinese-Financed Centers Prompt Worries About Academic Freedom,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 22, 2010, <http://chronicle.texterity.com/chronicle/20101022a?pg=8#pg8>.

<sup>19</sup>Hartig, “Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China,” 68-69.

the available information concerning how the mission of the CIs is shaped by the Chinese Party-State.

### **The Mission of the CIs**

The Confucius Institute Headquarters in Beijing, commonly known as the “Hanban,” presents its mission in terms that appeal to both the classical and the pragmatic models of the university, being “committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide, it goes all out in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world.”<sup>20</sup> The template contract that the Hanban uses to agree partnerships with universities also declares that the purpose of the CIs is to “strengthen educational cooperation between China and [the host country], support and promote the development of Chinese language education, and increase mutual understanding among people in China and in [the host country].” Article 4 of the contract establishes the scope of CI activities in more detail as:

1. Teaching Chinese language and providing Chinese language teaching resources.
2. Training Chinese language instructors.
3. Holding the HSK examination (Chinese Proficiency Test) and tests for the Certification of the Chinese Language Teachers.
4. Providing information and consultative services concerning China’s education, culture, and so forth.
5. Conducting language and cultural exchange activities.
6. Other activities with authorization and by appointment of the Headquarters.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>“About Us,” Hanban website, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7719.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7719.htm) (accessed February 13, 2013).

<sup>21</sup>“Agreement Between Confucius Institute Headquarters of China and [country and institution name] on the Establishment of Confucius Institute at [institution name].”

This stress on the pragmatic aspects of language training and international cooperation is certainly attractive to many universities around the world, which are grateful for the provision of language teachers in particular. Yet the political system in China is built on an understanding of the relationship between culture and politics that is very different from that found in the democracies that sponsor organizations such as the British Council. This has its origins in a long CCP tradition that still refers to the series of lectures on culture given by Mao Zedong (毛澤東) in the CCP base area of Yan'an in May 1942, in which he instructs an audience of artists, musicians and writers to understand that "There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics." According to Mao, the task of cultural policy is to form a "cultural army" that is "absolutely indispensable for uniting our own ranks and defeating the enemy."<sup>22</sup> Although Mao's speech was delivered in the very different context of the war against the Japanese and political struggles against opponents in the CCP and the Guomindang Nationalists, it is still celebrated on its anniversary down to today. If anything, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the spirit of Yan'an has been strengthened, as indicated by his speech to the Beijing Forum on Literature and Art Work in October 2014, in which he reminds his audience that "serving Socialism" is the fundamental orientation of the arts, which should combine socialist ideology with Chinese tradition in order to "implement the Party's literature and art principles and policies well, and grasp the correct orientation of literature and art development."<sup>23</sup> The persistence of this linkage between culture and the interests of the CCP in foreign relations is evident in the expectation that cultural produc-

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<sup>22</sup>Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yen'an (sic.) Forum on Literature and Art," [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3\\_08.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm) (accessed February 13, 2013).

<sup>23</sup>A summary was published by the Xinhua news agency and the original text of the speech was not published. An English version can be found online at "Xi Jinping's Talk at the Beijing Forum on Literature and Art," *China Copyright and Media*, October 16, 2014, <http://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/10/16/xi-jinpings-talks-at-the-beijing-forum-on-literature-and-art/>.

tions made for export should convey a positive view of modern China and in pressure on the foreign organizers of overseas events not to allow activities that are deemed to be a source of possible embarrassment.<sup>24</sup> In the process, criticisms of the CCP and its policies are erased.

While the more modern idea of public diplomacy has been very attractive in China in recent years, it is still shaped by the norm of seeing culture as a tool for the preservation and promotion of CCP power. That the CIs are no exception to this instrumentalism was evident when Li Changchun, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, proclaimed to the Hanban in April 2007 that the CIs are “an important part of China’s international popularization (*xuanchuan*).”<sup>25</sup> How such a statement is understood by a foreign audience depends largely on what is meant by the Chinese term “*xuanchuan*” 宣傳, rendered by international news organizations such as *The Economist* as “propaganda” when translating Li’s speech.<sup>26</sup> In recent years, however, this term has been rendered into English as “publicity,” a practice that is adopted by Paradise. More recently, in a response to the critique of the CIs by Sahlin, Edward A. McCord, an eminent professor of modern Chinese military history at George Washington University, has argued that *xuanchuan* has no negative connotations because it is similar to the use of “propaganda” by the Catholic church. When Li’s speech is understood in this context, he maintains, it is merely defining the role of the CIs in “more limited soft power terms.”<sup>27</sup>

Of course, equating *xuanchuan* with Vatican propaganda is itself problematic for advocates of academic freedom, given the long struggle

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<sup>24</sup>Sheila Melvin, “Commemorating Mao’s Yan’an Talks,” *ArtsJournal Blogs*, May 15, 2012, <http://www.artsjournal.com/china/2012/05/commemorating-maos-yanan-talks/> (accessed February 21, 2013).

<sup>25</sup>“Li Changchun: Zhashi zuohao hanyu guoji tuiguang gongzuo” (Li Changchun: Work Well to Internationalize the Chinese Language), *Xinhuanet*, April 24, 2007, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-04/24/content\\_6022792.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-04/24/content_6022792.htm).

<sup>26</sup>“A Message from Confucius: New Ways of Projecting Soft Power,” *The Economist*, October 22, 2009, <http://www.economist.com/node/14678507>.

<sup>27</sup>McCord, “Confucius Institute.”

between science and the Church. Moreover, it is rather misleading for McCord to equate *xuanchuan* with soft power terms in this way because the CIs are so closely tied to the program of a particular political party. There is no secret about this in CCP documents, its Central Committee even passing a key resolution on promoting the development of “socialist culture” at its plenary session in October 2011, in which CIs were described (along with the Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television) as part of the drive to “create new methods of *xuanchuan* to strengthen our international right to speak, respond to foreign concerns, improve international society’s understanding of our basic national conditions, concepts of values, road of development, domestic and foreign policies, to display our country’s image of civilization, openness and progress.”<sup>28</sup>

The way in which this cultural policy is designed to promote the CCP vision of a China characterized by “socialist culture” also makes it misleading to equate what the CIs do with the notion of building “soft power.” The inventor of this concept, Joseph Nye of Harvard University, distinguishes it from state power, seeing it as an attractive force that emerges from grass roots social and economic activity. He has explicitly cited CIs as an example of the misguided belief that government is its main instrument.<sup>29</sup> When interacting with foreign commentators, moreover, Chinese interlocutors thus shy away from acknowledging this link

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<sup>28</sup>“Chuangxin duiwai xuanchuan fangshi fangfa, zengqiang guoji huayu quan, tuoshan huiying waibu guanqie, zengjin guoji shehui dui wo guo jiben quoqing, jiazhi guannian, fazhan daolu, nei wai zhengce de liaojie he renshi, zhanxian wo guo wenming, minzhu, kaifang, jinbu xingxiang” (創新對外宣傳方式方法，增強國際話語權，妥善回應外部關切，增進國際社會對我國基本國情、價值觀念、發展道路、內外政策的了解和認識，展現我國文明、民主、開放、進步的形象), Hu Jintao (胡錦濤), “Shouquan fabu: Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shenhua wenhua tizhi gaige tuidong shehuizhuyi wenhua da fazhan da fanrong ruogan da wenti de jueding” (Official proclamation: Resolution of the central committee of the CCP on some big problems related to deepening reform of the cultural system to promote the great flourishing of socialist civilization), *Xinhuanet*, October 26, 2011, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2011-10/25/c\\_122197737\\_7.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2011-10/25/c_122197737_7.htm).

<sup>29</sup>Joseph S. Nye, “What China and Russia Don’t Get About Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2013, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/29/what\\_china\\_and\\_russia\\_don\\_t\\_get\\_about\\_soft\\_power?wp\\_login\\_redirect=0](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/29/what_china_and_russia_don_t_get_about_soft_power?wp_login_redirect=0).

between the CIs and the interests of the Party-State. Paradise, for example, describes how a university administrator he interviewed in Shanghai stated that it is “misleading” to think that CIs have anything to do with soft power, leading him to propose there is a division between academics and a political elite that does believe in the importance of soft power.<sup>30</sup> Yet even the most cursory survey of writing about CIs in Chinese academic journals shows that there is no hesitation in presenting them as tools for the enhancement of the “soft power” needed to advance the CCP’s “go global” economic policy and turn China into a major world power.<sup>31</sup> Chinese academics note approvingly that the building of soft power is a target in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan for the economy (2011-2015).<sup>32</sup>

### **The Difference Between CIs and Other Institutions for Cultural Diplomacy**

This use of culture to promote the political programs of a particular party shows that it is quite wrong to equate CIs with cultural diplomacy organizations established by democratic states. Even if it is accepted that organizations like the British Council and Goethe Institutes use culture to

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<sup>30</sup>Paradise, “China and International Harmony,” 657.

<sup>31</sup>For a sample to show how articles on CIs in Chinese academic journals cite Nye’s concept of “soft power” as the inspiration for the CIs, see Wang Shuaidong, “Guanyu Zhongguo wenhua duiwai chuanbo xinxing celue zhi ‘Kongzi xueyuan da chun wan’ de sikao” (Thoughts on the “Confucius Institute Grand New Year Evening” and the new strategy for spreading Chinese culture abroad), *Jiaoyu jiaoxue luntan* (Education Teaching Forum) (Hebei), no. 39 (2012): 79; Liu Xiaoli, Li Hui, and Gui Ling, “Shijie qita yuyan wenhua tuiguang jigou fazhan moshi dui Kongzi xueyuan ke chixu fazhan de qishi” (Lessons for the consistent development of the Confucius Institutes from the mode of development of other organizations in the world for promoting language and culture), *Changjiang xueshu* (Yangtze River Academic) 3, no. 22 (2012): 122; Zhou Yun, “Cong guoji xingxiang shijiao kan Kongzi xueyuan zai Meiguo yuyan chuanbo de fazhan” (Looking at the development of language transmission of the Confucius Institutes in the United States from the perspective of international image), *Yunnan xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (The Journal of Yunnan Administration College) (Yunnan), no. 6 (2012): 162.

<sup>32</sup>Ding Zhongyi and Wei Xing, “Kongzi xueyuan: Zhongguo ruan shili jianshe de youxiao pingtai” (Confucius Institutes: An effective platform for establishing China’s soft power), *Lilun yu gaige* (Theory and Reform), no. 5 (2011): 122-25.

promote certain political values, the question of which values are being promoted by the CIs is what is important for universities in democratic societies. If guarding and cultivating ideals that are seen as necessary for democracy to work, such as freedom of thought and expression, models of citizenship, and advances in civil society, are critical, it is inappropriate for them to host and lend legitimacy to organizations that promote the values of China's one-party state, even when these are presented as "publicity" for China's "national conditions." On this point, it is important to stress that there is a big difference between organizing a conference with a Chinese university or working with academic colleagues from China on the one hand, and allowing an institution that has the mission of promoting the values and interests of the CCP to have a long-term base on campus and to share in the prestige of the university by having a page on its website and use of its logo, on the other.

In contrast to this kind of arrangement, an organization like the British Council goes to great lengths to ensure that it is not tied to any party political interests. Although it receives a government grant and presents an annual report on its objectives and programs to the Secretary of State and Parliament, it is established as a public corporation with a charter that ensures that it is free from direct political interference by the government, the state or political parties. Its executive board and board of trustees are composed of figures drawn either from the Council itself, or more broadly from the worlds of the arts, business and commerce. The only government representation is in the form of a member of the board of trustees who is an employee of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. When the Council's work can be described as having a political agenda, such as its mission to promote social change and voice and accountability for all by encouraging the institutional development of justice, the rule of law, civil society and economic development, this is openly stated on its website.<sup>33</sup> More importantly, this does not present a problem for universities

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<sup>33</sup>British Council website, <http://www.britishcouncil.org/governance-work-2.htm> (accessed February 21, 2013).

in countries where the Council operates because branches of the British Council are not located on campuses but in premises paid for by the Council itself.<sup>34</sup>

The CIs, on the other hand, are located on university campuses, are closely linked to the Chinese Party-State and have a political program that is openly discussed in China but not mentioned on their website or contracts. The contract signed between the Hanban and the host university, and the Constitution of the Confucius Institutes, moreover, give the Hanban a large degree of control. It goes so far as to state that CI activities “shall not contravene concerning (sic) the laws and regulations of China.”<sup>35</sup> There are two reasons why such a wide-ranging clause should give rise to concern. First of all, it constrains the freedom of the CIs to offer a balanced view of some of the issues of most interest to a foreign audience. The Anti-Secession Law, for example, makes it illegal to advocate the independence of Taiwan. Linked to this, these terms oblige the Hanban to filter out prospective personnel who might have been involved in activities such as organizing independent trade unions, joining certain religious groups and promoting democracy and human rights, all of which have been reasons to imprison individuals and proscribe organizations in China. The combination of these factors is what lies behind an embarrassing event like the application for asylum filed by a teacher posted to the CI at McMaster University in Canada, on the grounds that she found herself in the position of either having to hide her membership of Falun Gong in order to work at the university, or incriminate herself by refusing to sign. Yet if there is any disagreement with the host institution over what activities a CI is permitted to undertake, the bylaws of the Confucius

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<sup>34</sup>Germany’s Goethe Institutes have a slightly different model insofar as they do have a small number of offices in language colleges in China, but not in research universities. Li Xiangping, “Kongzi xueyuan yu Gede xueyuan bijiao yanjiu” (Comparative research on the Confucius Institutes and the Goethe Institutes), *Dangdai jiaoyu lilun yu shijian* (Theory and Practice of Contemporary Education), no. 11 (2012): 27-31.

<sup>35</sup>“Constitution of the Confucius Institutes,” August, 29, 2009, Chapter 1 Article 6. Available online at Confucius Institute Online, [http://college.chinese.cn/en/article/2009-08/29/content\\_22323.htm](http://college.chinese.cn/en/article/2009-08/29/content_22323.htm) (accessed February 13, 2013).

Institutes place the power of assessment and adjudication in the hands of the Hanban. The Hanban is even given the power to impose a range of sanctions, from terminating agreements to pursuing legal action to affix responsibility and to invoke punitive consequences on any person or party who engages in “any activity conducted under the name of the Confucius Institutes without permission or authorization from the Confucius Institute Headquarters.”<sup>36</sup>

In addition to this, the links between the CIs and the CCP can be seen in the broader system of governance in which they operate. Like Chinese universities, the CIs operate under the higher education law that is designed to serve the Chinese Communist Party by promoting “socialist material and spiritual civilization” and upholding the ideological orthodoxy of “Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory.”<sup>37</sup> Although many Chinese academics value unbiased and independent discussion of social issues through blogs and journal articles, they are also obliged to work within constraints on the freedom of expression and access to information that would not be acceptable in a democratic society, while students are subjected to political indoctrination through “patriotic education” and “national defense education,” and to counseling for harboring “radical thoughts.”<sup>38</sup>

To ensure that higher education institutions adhere to such directives, they are put under the dual leadership of an academic chancellor and a CCP president, who acts much like a political commissar. The Hanban is also a part of this system of higher education, being affiliated with the Ministry of Education. It thus operates through the same type of dual governance structure, with its Chief Executive, Mme Xu Lin (who has

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<sup>36</sup>“Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes.” Available online at the Hanban website, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7880.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7880.htm) (accessed February 13, 2013).

<sup>37</sup>Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, “*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jiaoyufa*” (Higher Education Law of the PRC), January 1, 1999, [http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe\\_619/200407/1311.html](http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_619/200407/1311.html) (accessed February 21, 2013).

<sup>38</sup>“University Calls ‘Radical Students’ for a Quiet Word,” *South China Morning Post*, March 26, 2011, 4.

a rank equivalent to a deputy minister in the State Council—the highest executive arm of the Chinese government—and developed her career in the Ministry of Education), working alongside a deputy who is the CCP secretary to the organization.<sup>39</sup> Three of the sixteen members of the Hanban’s governing Council are also members of the CCP Central Committee.<sup>40</sup> The most high-ranking of these is the Hanban Director, Mme Liu Yandong, a member of the Politburo since 2007. Liu has worked her way to the top through Party and state bureaucracies involved in propaganda work, including a stint as head of the United Front Department from 2002 to 2003, an organization that has its origins in the Leninist united front strategy adopted by the CCP in the early 1920s to overcome political opposition by winning over waverers, while isolating and undermining those categorized as irredeemable enemies. Since then she has continued this line of work as vice chairperson and a member of the group that represents the CCP in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a chamber that is presented as resembling an advisory upper house in which several other political parties are allowed representation in a “patriotic united front” under the leadership of the CCP.<sup>41</sup>

Another member of the Hanban Council whose presence sheds some light on the political mission of the CIs is Hu Zhanfan. A member of the CCP since 1975 and President of China Central Television (CCTV) since 2011, Hu was also deputy director of the State Administration of Radio Film and Television from 2001 to 2011, which acts as the main censor of the media. He became particularly controversial in China when, soon after his appointment to CCTV, he explained to the China National Media

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<sup>39</sup>“Guanyu women—Lingdao jianli” (About Us—Leaders’ Concise Histories), Hanban website, [http://www.hanban.edu.cn/hb/node\\_38260.htm](http://www.hanban.edu.cn/hb/node_38260.htm) (accessed February 21, 2013).

<sup>40</sup>This information about careers of the membership of the Council of the CI Headquarters was accessed online at [http://www.chinese.cn/conference11/node\\_37099.ht](http://www.chinese.cn/conference11/node_37099.ht) on May 24, 2012. When access was attempted again on December 17, 2012, the web page had been removed.

<sup>41</sup>The National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference website, <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2012/07/03/ART11341301557187103.shtml> (accessed October 20, 2014).

Association that “the first social responsibility and professional ethic of media staff should be understanding their role clearly as a good mouth-piece” and told journalists that they were fooling themselves if they thought they were independent professionals rather than “propaganda workers.” He warned that those who did not understand this concept “would not go far.” Chinese netizens reacted by comparing Hu to Joseph Goebbels.<sup>42</sup> Yet Hu was doing no more than echoing a speech given by Li Changchun to the All-China Journalists Association in October that year, in which Li explained that “the journalistic front must have a high sense of political responsibility and historical mission, deeply studying, propagating and implementing the spirit of the Sixth Plenum of the 17th Central Committee [of the CCP] in order to promote the great advancement and flourishing of socialist culture.”<sup>43</sup>

Given the high priority attached to isolating and annexing the island of Taiwan in Chinese foreign policy, the presence of Zhou Mingwei on the Hanban Council is also worth noting. This is because Zhou was a deputy director of China’s Taiwan Affairs Council (the highest state organization for the implementation of China’s Taiwan policy) and became something of a minor celebrity in diplomatic circles when he was dispatched to Washington in 2001 to lobby against arms sales to Taipei and any departure from the “one China principle” following the first transfer of power in Taiwan’s 2001 presidential election.<sup>44</sup> In common with these high-profile figures, it is safe to say that all of the members of the Hanban management team have developed their careers in the Party and state bureaucracies involved in United Front and propaganda work.

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<sup>42</sup>“Quote of the Day: Hu Zhanfan’s Propaganda Workers,” *The Fragrant Harbour* (blog), December 6, 2011, <http://thefragrantharbour.blogspot.com/2011/12/quote-of-day-hu-zhanfans-propaganda.html>.

<sup>43</sup>Dinah Gardner, “China Media Boss Says Propaganda Good, Journalism Bad,” *Uncut: Free Speech on the Frontline*, December 6, 2011, <http://uncut.indexoncensorship.org/tag/hu-zhanfan/>.

<sup>44</sup>Joshua Cooper Ramo, “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Message,” *Time*, March 4, 2001, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,101335,00.html>.

### Risks from the Clash of Missions

The above evidence shows that it is misleading to compare the CIs to cultural diplomacy organizations in democratic societies because they are located on campuses and serve the interests of a particular political party. Moreover, the CCP's ideological and legal position that it is legitimate to maintain power by suppressing civil and political liberties and the freedom of thought and expression is wholly incompatible with the protection and promotion of democracy that is an important part of the mission of the classical model of the university. This makes it important to look more carefully at the risks involved in hosting CIs, rather than assume that they can be managed in the same way as other academic joint programs, as proposed by McCord. The most obvious of these risks are listed below.

**1. Employment Policy:** The Hanban's policy is in breach of the kind of employment rights found in most democratic societies today, because it discriminates on grounds of age, disability, religious and political belief. Until recently its own website explicitly stated that prospective teachers would only be considered if they were "Aged between 22 to 60, physical and mental healthy (sic), no record of participation in Falun Gong and other illegal organizations and no criminal record."<sup>45</sup> It is this discrimination that moved a teacher posted to the CI at McMaster University in Canada to file an application for asylum, on the grounds that she found herself in the position of either having to hide her membership of Falun Gong in order to work at the university, or incriminate herself by refusing to sign. Although the proscription of Falun Gong followers has now been removed from the Hanban website, the catch-all phrase of insisting on "no criminal record" is broad enough in the Chinese context to include not only Falun Gong adherents but also advocates of democracy and human rights. That

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<sup>45</sup>"Overseas Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program," Article 3rd. Available at Hanban website, [http://www.chinese.cn/hanban\\_en/node\\_9806.htm](http://www.chinese.cn/hanban_en/node_9806.htm) (accessed February 13, 2012).

concerned academics have condemned such a practice as “unethical and illegal in the free world” draws attention to the way in which the presence of a CI on campus poses a risk both to individuals and to the reputation of the university as a whole.<sup>46</sup>

- 2. Propaganda:** A degree of risk to the reputation of the university for academic integrity arises from the way in which CIs organize activities that are designed to promote an overly positive view of China, while not allowing critical discussion of controversial topics such as the status of Tibet and Taiwan, or of events such as the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre. When such events are touched on, they are presented by academics from China who have a record of promoting CCP policy. When the CI at Sydney University organized a public lecture on Tibetan history by an academic from the Chinese Center for Tibetan Studies in August 2012, for example, local pro-Tibet groups dismissed the Center as “a very good outlet for Chinese propaganda.”<sup>47</sup> Their concerns arose because the academic concerned, Zhang Yun, has openly declared on a number of other occasions that he is on a mission to explain that Tibet has always been governed by China and was rescued by the CCP from a scheme by the Dalai Lama to restore “a society of feudal serfdom even darker and more backward than medieval Europe . . . a dictatorship of monks and aristocrats.” He has also argued that the recent wave of Tibetan self-immolations was linked to “overseas plots.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Matthew Robertson, “At US Universities, Confucius Institutes Import Discrimination,” *Epoch Times*, August 24, 2011, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/united-states/at-us-universities-confucius-institutes-import-discrimination-60714.html>.

<sup>47</sup>Rowan Callick, “Uni Group ‘Propaganda’ Reshapes Lama Tale,” *The Australian*, August 13, 2012.

<sup>48</sup>Zhang Yun’s role in the propaganda response to the Tibetan uprising in 2008 has been covered in Warren W. Smith, *Tibet’s Last Stand? The Tibetan Uprising of 2008 and China’s Response* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 111. For more on Zhang’s views see “Self-Immolations in Tibetan Area Linked to Overseas Plots,” *Xinhuanet*, December 6, 2011. Online at China.org: [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-12/06/content\\_24087725.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-12/06/content_24087725.htm) (accessed February 21, 2013); “Tibetan Feudal Serfdom under Theocracy and Western European Serfdom in the Middle Ages,” *China Daily*, January 11, 2011, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-04/18/content\\_6627418.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-04/18/content_6627418.htm); “Chinese Tibet Scholars Share Expertise with Chicago Students,” *People’s Daily*, May 28, 2012, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/203691/7827823.html>.

**3. Confidence of Students:** The links between the CIs and the CCP can also have a negative impact on the confidence students have in the academic integrity of their institution. When the London School of Economics (LSE) opened a Confucius Institute for Business (London) (CIBL) in October 2006, for example, the local student union newspaper published a photograph on its front page showing the then LSE Director, Howard Davies, unveiling a plaque and statue of Confucius with Jia Qinglin, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, under the title, “China and LSE: hand-in-hand?” The accompanying report asked why the School was hosting a figure under investigation by a Spanish court for committing genocide and crimes against humanity due to his leading role in the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.<sup>49</sup> Chinese students revealed to the author that they were disappointed to arrive at a foreign university only to discover that their own government had established an organization on campus that made it feel as though they were still under the kind of surveillance that they had to live with in China. In the words of one such student, “The Confucius Institute, to me, functions like the closed circulation (sic) television and has the potential to scare away my critical thinking by constantly reminding me: we are watching you and behave yourself.”<sup>50</sup> The onus should be on host universities to find out how representative such views might be, paying special attention to vulnerable groups, such as advocates of political reform in China, Tibetans and Uighurs, followers of Falun Gong, advocates of Taiwanese independence and democracy advocates from Hong Kong, and whether such views are shared by local students.

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<sup>49</sup>“China and LSE: Hand-in-Hand?” *The Beaver*, November 14, 2006, 1.

<sup>50</sup>This quote is from an email dated May 25, 2012 from a Chinese student at the LSE who has not been identified due to considerations of privacy and safety. This is one of many emails that the author of this article received after the *Sunday Times* reported that he had cited the CI as being in an ethical dilemma during the debate at the LSE on how to develop an ethics code that could avoid a repeat of the scandal that shook the school when its links with the Colonel Gaddafi regime became the focus of media attention during the Libyan revolution of 2011. See “Beijing Cash Threatens to Plunge LSE into New Donations Scandal,” *The Sunday Times*, May 20, 2012.

- 4. Distortion of the Academic Agenda:** Another kind of risk posed to the work of universities concerns the longer-term development of Sinology and Chinese Studies as a discipline and a profession. Of particular concern to Sinologists is the way in which the Hanban insists that CIs can only use the standardized form of Putonghua Chinese and the simplified form of characters developed in the PRC. Spokespersons for the Chinese government are certainly not shy about seeing the promotion of the Chinese language as a tool to become a “strong state” (*qiang guo*) when talking to a domestic audience.<sup>51</sup> Academics in Chinese Studies outside China are thus concerned that the conditions laid down by the Hanban deny students the opportunity to learn dialects such as Cantonese and the full-form, traditional characters used in Taiwan, Hong Kong and favored by many overseas Chinese communities beyond the direct control of the CCP.<sup>52</sup> As Michael Churchman, a research student at ANU, explains, the Hanban directive that prevents foreigners from writing certain kinds of Chinese characters is based on the principle of encouraging them to extend their knowledge of China in ways that are only acceptable to Beijing, which is as political as the directive “You must not discuss the Dalai Lama.”<sup>53</sup>
- 5. Impact on Existing Academic Organizations:** Fears are thus growing that a generation of China scholars may be created who will only feel comfortable working with a simplified version of China and will have difficulty dealing with historical texts or using media outlets in Hong Kong and Taiwan that are critical of the CCP. This is exacerbated by a

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<sup>51</sup>See for example the article on the views of the relationship between language and great power status professed by Li Yuming (李宇明), head of the bureau for managing written cultural information at the Ministry of Information, in the leading CCP newspaper for intellectuals, *Guangming ribao* (Guangming Daily 2004). Li Yuming, “Qiang guo de yuyan yu yuyan qiangguo” (The language of the strong state and the linguistic strong state), *Guangming ribao* (Guangming Daily), July 28, 2004, [http://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/2004-07/28/content\\_65824.htm](http://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/2004-07/28/content_65824.htm) (accessed February 13, 2013).

<sup>52</sup>Starr, “Chinese Language Education in Europe.”

<sup>53</sup>Michael Churchman, “Confucius Institutes and Controlling Chinese Languages,” *China Heritage Quarterly*, no. 26 (June 2011), [http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=026\\_confucius.inc&issue=026](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=026_confucius.inc&issue=026).

broader concern about the long-term impact of CIs on Sinological studies, as they allow universities and governments to scale down funding for existing centers of expertise and specialist libraries. Using teachers supplied by the Hanban might also deny job opportunities to scholars trained outside China, a concern that has been expressed by towering academic figures like Yu Yingshi, Emeritus Professor of East Asian Studies and History at Princeton University.<sup>54</sup> Prof Goran Malmqvist, Professor of Sinology at Stockholm University and a member of the Swedish Academy, has gone so far as to describe the advent of the CIs as amounting to another kind of Cultural Revolution because they have little relationship to real sinology and are allowing universities to wind down their support for established centers.<sup>55</sup>

**6. Marginalization of Academics:** Prof Yu has also warned that the CIs risk creating divisions in the scholarly community as academics who refuse to cooperate are marginalized from the development of Chinese studies in their own university, while their colleagues who do cooperate enjoy access to additional funds, contacts and the making of decisions that shape the relationship of their institution with China. In this situation, even the most well established experts in Chinese studies can find themselves isolated and at odds with their colleagues when they raise concerns. The worst-case scenario is when academics no longer feel able to work in a university that does not respect their professional standards, suffering ostracization, exclusion from the university and denial of promotion. At least one academic has described in personal correspondence with the author how he/she had to leave a senior post on a Chinese program at a university in the United States after a CI was

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<sup>54</sup>Yu Yingshi and Bei Ming, “Kongzi xueyuan ji qi yingxiang—zhuanfang Yu Yingshi” (The Confucius Institutes and their influence – An exclusive interview with Yu Yingshi), *Zonglanzongguo* (China in Perspective), March 22, 2012, <http://www.chinainperspective.com/ArtShow.aspx?AID=15064>.

<sup>55</sup>Ma Ruiran (馬悅然) (Goran Malmqvist), “Ma Ruiran: Sidegermo daxue zhongwenxi de wenhua da geming” (Goran Malmqvist: The Cultural Revolution in the Chinese department of Stockholm University”), *Ming Bao Monthly*, February 28, 2012, [www.21ccom.net/articles/sdbb/2012/0228/54568.html](http://www.21ccom.net/articles/sdbb/2012/0228/54568.html) (accessed February 21, 2013).

sprung on the faculty without warning, following secret negotiations conducted by the president of the university. Conditions became unbearable when the program was starved of funds until it had to accept “suggestions” from the CI on how to carry out its work.<sup>56</sup> New members of the teaching profession are in an even more vulnerable situation, especially if they have to commit themselves to working with a CI that is highlighted in job advertisements as a flagship project of the university.

- 7. Self-Censorship:** One of the most detrimental impacts of the threat of marginalization on the mission of the classical model of the university is that it can lead to self-censorship. Even McCord accepts that this is a legitimate concern, although he hopes it will self-correct if CIs become too overbearing.<sup>57</sup> Perry Link is less optimistic, seeing creeping self-censorship as the major threat posed by the CIs because it strikes at the heart of academic freedom.<sup>58</sup> Looking ahead, however, what academics see as measures to prevent the emergence of self-censorship are seen as obstacles to be overcome by the Hanban and the CIs in the expansion of their work into the core activities of the university through a kind of mission creep.

### **Mission Creep**

As concern has grown over the above risks, the Hanban has responded by seeking ways to allow the CIs to broaden out their work beyond the teaching of language and traditional culture by making greater efforts to penetrate the core activities of universities. The result is a kind of mission creep. As early as April 2007 it was evident that the remit of

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<sup>56</sup>Email to the author, June 18, 2012.

<sup>57</sup>McCord, “Confucius Institute: Hardly a Threat.”

<sup>58</sup>Perry Link, in his contribution to “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes,” *ChinaFile*, June 23, 2014, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes> (consulted October 3, 2014).

the CIs could expand beyond language and culture teaching, when Japan's Waseda University opened a CI in partnership with Peking University that includes a program to assist the research activities of graduate students studying in China. The Confucius Business Institute (London) at the LSE has expanded its remit in a different way by getting indirectly involved with new academic programs related to China through the provision of language teaching for new double degrees, such as an MSc in International Affairs with Peking University and an MSc in Global Media with Shanghai's Fudan University.<sup>59</sup> It also organizes discussions on topics such as China's financial system, its knowledge economy, its economic situation and the "China model," sometimes led by personnel linked to the Chinese embassy. It holds an economic forum for PhD candidates, hosts visiting professors from China and organizes talks by influential Chinese speakers. Such activities may be of interest to staff, students and the public, but they impinge on the core work of the university itself, which should be the property of those academic staff who have been through the rigor of the relevant procedures to gain employment and promotion in the profession. This expanding mission is particularly significant because the LSE was cited in 2009 by Hartig as a positive example of an institution hosting a CI that confined itself to the teaching of Chinese language for business.

It appears that the annual Hanban conference in December 2012 was a turning point in this movement towards overcoming the limits being imposed by host institutions. It was on that occasion that the CIs were congratulated on having made progress in moving into a new stage of "indigenization" (*bentuhua*) that goes beyond the teaching of language and traditional culture, but were also described as being marginalized by host institutions due to political concerns.<sup>60</sup> A number of strategies were thus recommended to break down the barriers preventing the "integration"

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<sup>59</sup>*LSE News and Views*, October 30, 2006.

<sup>60</sup>"Kongzi xueyuan. Zaoyu chengzhang de fannao" (Confucius Institutes hitting difficulties in their growth), *Xinhuanet*, December 19, 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/overseas/2012-12/19/d\\_124114541.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/overseas/2012-12/19/d_124114541.htm) (accessed February 13, 2013).

(*rongru* 融入) of the CIs into the mainstream activities of universities, schools and communities. Central to these strategies is the launching of the research-focused “Confucius China Studies Program” (孔子新漢學計畫), which is more accurately rendered into English as the “New Confucius Sinology Plan.” This involves cooperation between CIs and host institutions on the projects of doctoral students, youth leadership, study trips for scholars to “understand China,” international conferences and assistance for publishing research.

It was also explained at the conference that this strategy was to be accompanied by greater efforts to penetrate the broader academic system of the host country by holding Chinese classes in junior and middle schools and by designing the local curriculum. As the conference noted, the aspiration of over 40 countries to introduce Chinese into their national education systems presented a good opportunity to achieve this. The work of the CI at Kentucky State University was held up as an example, having supplied Chinese teachers and a curriculum for six schools. Building on such successes would require cultivating a “brigade” (*duiwu* 隊伍) of expert teachers, who could overcome the constraints on the penetration of host systems that arise from the current practice of hiring CI teachers on short term contracts and relying on ethnic Chinese volunteers, many of whom may speak English but do not even know the language of the country to which they are sent. According to Xu Lin, Hanban Chief Executive, this may involve the training of native teachers and efforts to indigenize teaching materials by making CIs responsible for teacher training in local high schools, a development that is already under way in Iowa.<sup>61</sup>

It is not hard to see how the offer of using CIs to teach school children may be attractive for financially stretched education authorities facing a growing demand for Chinese language instruction. Public controversy has already arisen, however, over issues such as the treatment of historical events in the teaching materials provided for schools under the auspices of the Hanban. When Hartig concluded that the materials used

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

by the CIs for language teaching do not amount to propaganda, he could not have been aware of the scandal that erupted in June 2012 when it was revealed that the Hanban was providing teaching materials for school children on its own website which described the Korean War as “The War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea,” which included computer animations that demonized the United States forces and portrayed the Chinese soldiers as heroes.<sup>62</sup> It may be an indication of the limited influence on the Hanban of those academics in China who do question the CCP propaganda interpretation of the Korean War (which has been condemned by liberal historians for failing to acknowledge that it was North Korea that attacked South Korea in 1950). When judging whether political change inside China is likely to make the operations of organizations like the Hanban more similar to those of academic organizations in democratic societies, it is also worth noting that even the minor successes of historians in 2010 in having the state-run media acknowledge that the war was started by Stalin and Kim Jong-il have since then been rolled back.<sup>63</sup>

While older students might be able to see through such attempts at indoctrination, their impact on younger children may have less certain long-term consequences. From the perspective of those pursuing China’s foreign policy goals, some satisfaction can be taken from evidence that indicates that the CIs are already inculcating more positive views among American children towards China and its government. According to one

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<sup>62</sup>This lesson was removed from the teaching materials available on the Confucius Institute Online website the day after the author of this article drew it to the attention of a colleague in a closed online discussion group for academics working on Chinese politics. The lesson can still be viewed at [http://shanghaiist.com/2012/10/16/watch\\_what\\_the\\_confucius\\_institute.php](http://shanghaiist.com/2012/10/16/watch_what_the_confucius_institute.php) (accessed February 11, 2013). Other Confucius Institute Online materials for teaching Chinese history can still be viewed at [http://kid.chinese.cn/en/node\\_1019\\_5.htm](http://kid.chinese.cn/en/node_1019_5.htm) (accessed February 11, 2013). A sense of the public controversy sparked by this issue can be gained from the ABC television news report available at <http://abcnews.go.com/US/Parenting/mandarin-language-classes-mixed-reaction-chinese-institutes-motives/story?id=17485209> (accessed February 11, 2013).

<sup>63</sup>“Junshi guangjiao’ Zhongguo guanmei shouci chengren shi Sidalin he Jin Richeng hemou fadongle Chaoxian zhanzheng” (“Military Corner”: China’s official media recognize for the first time that Stalin and Kim Il-song started the Korean War), *Junshi guangjiao*, June 25, 2010, <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-worldlook-361572-1.shtml>.

survey taken of students who had attended CI language classes at Bryant University and the University of Massachusetts, Boston, the vocabulary used to describe China had moved away from terms such as “boring, alien, complex, foot-binding and communism” in favor of “beautiful, civilized, intricate, advanced, amazing, smart, interesting, respect, cool idioms, original stories, fun, hard work, increasing population.” The proportion of those with “very positive” views of China had moved from 33 percent up to 52 percent, and those with “negative” or “slightly negative” views of the Chinese government had moved down from 28 per cent to just 3 per cent.<sup>64</sup>

While nobody should argue that schools should promote a negative view of China, it is important to ask whether it is right for universities to allow their authority and facilities to be harnessed to what looks like a propaganda campaign in the schools. Ultimately, it is part of the mission of the university in a democratic society to ensure that this does not happen. Moreover, when universities allow the activities of CIs to appear on their websites and to use their logos, they provide them with a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of students and the public who expect such brands to guarantee high standards of academic integrity.

The responsibility to protect this reputation for the entire higher education sector is especially important for the most prestigious and well-resourced universities, since there is growing evidence that smaller universities are more likely to be put under pressure by the Hanban. The University of Lyon is an example, having to close its CI in September 2013 because, in the words of its director, the Hanban hardened its strat-

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<sup>64</sup>Wu Xiaoping, “Zhongguo xingxiang de tisheng: lai zi Kongzi xueyuan jiaoxue de qishi” (Raising China’s image: Lessons from teaching at the CIs), *Waijiao pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review), no. 1 (2011): 94.

Wu’s statistics are from a survey of opinion conducted at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and Bryant University, of students aged 12-18 who have attended Chinese classes at the CIs. It is particularly interesting that these CI programs are funded by the Startup program, an initiative started by the George W. Bush administration in 2006 as part of the National Security Language Initiative to increase national capacity in languages such as Chinese, Russian and Arabic, which has contracted Chinese teaching out to Confucius Institutes at various universities.

egy to the extent that “it seemed that our institutional and intellectual independence became unacceptable to Beijing.”<sup>65</sup> The problem began when a new director had arrived with instructions from Beijing to question the content of courses and insist on a deeper integration of the institute into the University, including working with research centers and participating in teaching on degree programs. When the university resisted, Xu Lin demanded the resignation of the Chair of the institute’s board and announced, without warning, the suspension of the Hanban’s annual financial subsidy. The inflexible attitude of the Hanban prevented any possibility of reaching a compromise.

This was followed by an even more dramatic example of mission creep, when Portugal’s Minho University was forced to censor the conference materials it had produced for the biennial European Association of Chinese Studies (EACS) conference, which it co-hosted in July 2014 with Coimbra University. The Hanban’s Confucius China Studies Program had provided Euros 28,040 to the conference via Minho’s CI, which included Euros 7,000 to pay for the conference abstracts.<sup>66</sup> When the participants received these materials at the opening ceremony at Coimbra, four pages of the abstracts had been removed and three pages from the program, torn out by Hanban staff apparently because they contained information regarding Taiwan’s Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation (CCKF) and a book exhibition by the Taiwan National Central Library. According to EACS President, Roger Greatrex, the order to remove the pages had been issued by Xu Lin, who was visiting Portugal at the time.<sup>67</sup> Greatrex concluded his report on the incident by proclaiming that “censorship of conference materials cannot and will never be tolerated by the EACS.” That the Han-

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<sup>65</sup>An English version of Gregory B. Lee’s account can be found at “The Debate over Confucius Institutes, Part II,” *Chinafile*, January 7, 2014, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes-part-ii>.

<sup>66</sup>“Report: The Deletion of Pages from EACS Conference Materials in Braga (July 2014),” EACS website, August 1, 2014, <http://www.chinesestudies.eu/index.php/432-test>.

<sup>67</sup>“Letter of Protest at Interference in EACS Conference in Portugal, July 2014,” EACS, <http://www.chinesestudies.eu/index.php/433-letter-of-protest-at-interference-in-eacs-conference-in-portugal-july-2014>.

ban was able to perpetrate such an act of censorship by working through a relatively minor university, however, raises a number of questions over whether it is possible to manage the CIs within an acceptable margin of risk, especially when their status is given credibility through hosting by more prestigious and better-endowed universities.

### **Can the CIs Be Managed?**

Despite the risks listed above, there has been only minimal discussion of whether closer institutional links with China can be managed within limits that are compatible with the mission of the university (as defined in Bell's classical model) over the medium to long term. One advantage of seeing these problems as generated by a broader process of global change that is forcing two different missions for higher education to be more closely aligned is to minimize the tendency to call into question the motives of the individuals who are involved on the different sides of the debate. In the first place, teachers who are sent by the Hanban to work at the CIs should not be blamed for working within a framework that is established by China's laws and political leaders. The motives of those who argue that the CIs are a welcome source of support for over-stretched universities to help meet the growing demands of students and businesses should also be respected. Conversely, individuals should feel free to express their concerns over the risks that arise from the presence of CIs on campus without being stereotyped by spokespersons for the Chinese government as being opposed to academic engagement and as being "irresponsible" and blinded by "cold war thinking."<sup>68</sup> It is ironic when Chinese academics who see CIs as instruments for projecting "soft

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<sup>68</sup>See, for example, the speech delivered by China's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Liu Xiaoming, to the Joint Conference of European Confucius Institutes and Classrooms, held in Edinburgh, published by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Kingdom, "Speech by Amb. Liu Xiaoming at the Opening Session of the Conference of European Confucius Institutes," June 6, 2012, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/EmbassyNews/t938943.htm> (accessed February 13, 2012).

power” accuse those who question their location on university campuses of stirring up unnecessary fears of a “cultural invasion” based on a “China threat theory.”<sup>69</sup>

The best way to avoid such growing divisions in the academic community is to rebuild consensus on the ethical values that define the mission of the university. Most universities do already profess to abide by ethical standards that are drawn from the classical model, such as a commitment to oppose discrimination and to respect and promote diversity, collegiality and the protection and promotion of academic freedom.<sup>70</sup> However, many academics are unaware that they can refer back to little-read mission statements and codes of conduct when they come under pressure. Moreover, the increasing centralization of structures of university governance tends not to be accompanied by the building of sufficiently robust measures to ensure that ethical standards are implemented, as staff have to grapple with the complex challenges of working in a globalized system.<sup>71</sup> As is shown by the damage caused to the reputation of the LSE

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<sup>69</sup>Wang, “Guanyu Zhongguo wenhua dui wai chuanbo,” 80; Liu et al., “Shijie qita yuyan wenhua tuiguang jigou fazhan moshi,” 122; Zhou, “Cong guoji xingxiang shijiao kan kongzi xueyuan,” 162.

<sup>70</sup>A random sample of mission statements and ethics codes of research universities—both with and without a CI—reveals that all claim to put a high value on intellectual freedom, non-discrimination and allowing individuals to develop their potential to serve society. See, for example, Harvard and Cambridge universities (which do not host a CI) at <<http://www.harvard.edu/faqs/mission-statement> and <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/mission.html>>; and the LSE and Maryland (which do host a CI) at <<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/staff/humanResources/joiningLSE/prospectiveStaff/institutionalvalues.pdf>> and <<http://www.responsibleconduct.umd.edu/brochure.pdf>> (all accessed February 17, 2013).

<sup>71</sup>One of the main recommendations of the external inquiry carried into the links between the LSE and the Gaddafi regime, that were brought to public attention by the 2011 revolution in Libya, was to address such shortcomings by requiring the institution to draw up an ethics code and create an ethics committee. Lord Justice Woolf, *The Woolf Inquiry: An Inquiry into the LSE's Links with Libya and Lessons to be Learned* (London: House of Lords, 2011), 142. Available online: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/woolf/home.aspx>. After prolonged internal discussion, an ethics code was drawn up which commits the School to the protection of intellectual freedom, to respecting equality and diversity and which states that “in its dealings with states, organisations, and individuals, the School should not enter into any relationship that compromises, or could reasonably be perceived to compromise, its values, or that makes it complicit in illegal activity or the suppression of human rights.” London School of Economics and Political Science, “The

and the careers of several of its academics and managers following media revelations about its links with the regime of Colonel Gaddafi during the Libyan revolution in 2011, an awareness of ethical standards is not just an issue of moral concern. It also has a direct bearing on the material interests of a university and its staff. When partnerships and external sources of funding are established, this makes it important to assess the way in which the nature and stability of a foreign regime might impact such risks to reputations and careers. Repression inside China, growing instability in Hong Kong and the risks of a crisis engendered by a downturn in relations with Taiwan are only a few of the more obvious dynamics that could present a Libya-type situation for hosts of CIs.

Even those with a relatively pragmatic outlook should be aware that the scale, speed, resources and strategic thinking of the Hanban make it important to ensure that the risks involved in hosting a CI are properly considered. This means developing clear and robust ethical codes and ensuring that concerned university faculty are fully aware of their existence and are involved in their implementation. This might help to avoid the embarrassment of appearing to be ill-informed about the risks involved in key decisions, as when the Assistant Vice-President in charge of Public and Government Relations at McMaster University had to explain to the Falun Gong newspaper, *Epoch Times*, that her institution was unaware that employees of the CI are required to sign a contract that bans association with the Falun Gong.<sup>72</sup> By February 2013, McMaster had become so concerned about this situation that it decided to not renew its contract for a CI with the Hanban.<sup>73</sup>

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Ethics Code” (2012). Online: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/policies/pdfs/school/ethCod.pdf> (accessed February 17, 2013). It remains to be seen how this will be implemented.

<sup>72</sup>“Former McMaster Confucius Institute Teacher Seeks Asylum in Canada,” *Epoch Times*, August 31, 2011, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/canada/former-mcmaster-confucius-institute-teacher-seeks-asylum-in-canada-60805.html> (accessed February 21, 2013).

<sup>73</sup>“McMaster Closing Confucius Institute over Hiring Issues,” *Globe and Mail*, February 7, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/mcmaster-closing-confucius-institute-over-hiring-issues/article8372894/> (accessed February 13, 2013).

Such episodes have begun to multiply as faculty have felt the need to mobilize against the hosting of CIs due to a lack of consultation. One of the most prominent campaigns has been at the University of Chicago, where 170 members of the faculty have signed a petition opposing what they decried as an “academically and politically ambiguous initiative” that was established without the consent of the faculty or the Senate. Similarly, in 2007, academics at the University of Pennsylvania mobilized against proposals to establish a CI when its China experts expressed concerns that they were being bypassed by an administration that was looking for a way to “shoehorn” Chinese students in the university’s graduate programs.<sup>74</sup>

As these concerns have spread across the sector, teaching unions have also taken action, with the American Association of University Professors passing a resolution in June 2013 that calls for universities to either shut down their CIs or renegotiate their contracts to ensure that they have control over academic matters. This action was echoed by the Canadian Association of University Teachers in December that year. There is also growing concern at the school-level, with the Toronto School Board deciding to terminate its agreement for the CIs to provide elementary school Chinese teaching in the 2014-15 academic year. It is in this context of growing opposition that some of the leading universities have found a way out by simply not renewing their contracts with the Hanban on expiry, led by Chicago and Pennsylvania in 2014.

Despite this gradual turning of the tide against the CIs, however, their number continues to grow, especially in the developing world. This means that the ethical concerns that define the classical model of the university need to be made more systematically and transparently than has been the case so far. Yet it is also important not to take pragmatic arguments at face value. Headline figures of financial donations made by the Hanban make it easy to assume that host institutions make a net gain, for

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<sup>74</sup>Daniel Golden, “China Says No Talking Tibet as Confucius Funds US Universities,” *Bloomberg*, November 1, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-11-01/china-says-no-talking-tibet-as-confucius-funds-u-s-universities.html> (accessed February 13, 2013).

example. Yet if the costs of providing matching funds, accommodation and administrative support are factored into the balance sheet, there may well be more efficient ways to use scarce resources than the CI model can provide. The cost to the university of employing its own language teachers might be offset by advantages that can accrue from the in-house training of staff who are free from political constraints and motives and who are more familiar with the teaching methods used in the host country than the volunteers selected by the Hanban. In fact, one of the complaints made about the CIs in the discussion inside China is that the teachers selected by the Hanban are often poorly trained.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, if the Chinese government is genuinely interested in promoting teaching about China, it might be better for it to supply funds to support the provision and training of personnel by universities with no political strings attached. Rather than denying job opportunities to Chinese nationals, this would open the door to individuals who might be excluded under the Hanban system on political, religious or health grounds.

It may turn out that after submitting the decision to host a CI is submitted to a rigorous and transparent process of scrutiny, some universities will still decide that it is appropriate to go ahead with the project. If so, then the onus is on those who advocate such a position to publicly explain how hosting an organization that is linked so closely to the Chinese political regime is compatible with the public position of their university on defending and promoting values such as the pursuit of academic and intellectual freedom and respect for religious and political diversity. Another alternative is to remove such classical values from the mission of the university. If the university is understood to be an institution that both reflects and shapes the values of the society in which it is embedded, however, such a departure would have repercussions that go well beyond the fate of higher education and therefore should not be allowed to happen by default.

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<sup>75</sup>Liu et al., “Shijie qita yuyan wenhua tuiguang jigou fazhan moshi,” 120; Ding and Wei, “Kongzi xueyuan: Zhongguo de ruan shili jianshe de youxiao pingtai,” 124.

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