THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES: UNDERSTANDING THE OPPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

Confucius Institutes (CIs) are Chinese public educational organizations that promote Chinese language and culture around the world. The Chinese government has invested over $1 billion in establishing 500 of these CIs in existing academic institutions. The rapid growth and behavior of these CIs, however, have resulted in significant opposition from academic institutions. By analyzing statements made by faculty members and administrators, this paper concludes that widespread CI opposition stems from concerns over academic freedom. This research further elucidates the underlying causes of widespread CI opposition and examines the potential impact on China and the United States’ global image.
The research and writing of this thesis
is dedicated to everyone who helped me along the way.

Many thanks,
Andrew Switzer
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Introduction

As China becomes a global economic power, more students in the United States (U.S.) are studying Chinese. The number of students in the U.S. that attended an Advanced Placement Chinese exam quadrupled over the last decade.\(^1\) This increase in Chinese language studies is largely driven by the fact that many people believe that studying Chinese will provide better job opportunities in the future.\(^2\) In response to the growing global presence of the Chinese language and the need for more Chinese speakers, the U.S. government has also supported—and even stimulated—Chinese language education; in 2006, former President George W. Bush launched the National Security Language Initiative, funding new and existing Chinese language programs.\(^3\) President Barack Obama continued to prioritize Chinese language programs by launching the 100,000 Strong initiative in 2009, providing scholarships and support to students studying abroad in China.\(^4\) By sending more Americans to China, President Obama believed that this increase in people-to-people relationships would strengthen the U.S.-China relationship.\(^5\)

The U.S. government’s investment is not the only source of funding for Chinese language education in the U.S. The Chinese government has spent tens of millions of dollars in the U.S. on Confucius Institutes (CIs), non-profit public educational organizations that promote Chinese language and culture. By creating language and culture programs within partner universities and colleges, China hopes to quicken the international “popularization” of the Chinese language and strengthen “cultural exchanges” between people, ultimately allowing students to have a better

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\(^1\) Zhou, 2017  
\(^2\) Lee, 2010  
\(^3\) Powell, 2006  
\(^4\) 100,000 Strong, 2007  
\(^5\) Ibid.
understanding of and respect for China.\textsuperscript{6} CIs complement President Obama’s investment in the 100,000 Strong initiative, which also aims to strengthen the U.S.-China relationship through cross-cultural communication.\textsuperscript{7}

A unique aspect of CIs is that they partner with and reside in an existing academic institution. By agreeing to house a CI, the host university or college receives funding, teachers, and teaching materials from Hanban, a managing organization affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education.\textsuperscript{8} These resources are very attractive to cash-strapped colleges and universities that struggle to provide high-quality Chinese language instruction for their students. As a result, Hanban has been able to establish 110 CIs in the U.S. and a total of 500 worldwide.\textsuperscript{9} The steady increases in CIs’ annual budgets suggest that the number of CIs in the U.S. will continue to grow.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite CIs’ growing attraction, there has been a significant amount of pushback in the U.S. For instance, a CI closed at the University of Chicago due to opposition by professors.\textsuperscript{11} This opposition has also extended beyond the U.S. into Canada, Sweden, and even Japan, where CIs were also closed as a result of substantial opposition.\textsuperscript{12} The concern has become so widespread that The House of Representatives Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs even held a hearing regarding CIs in 2012.\textsuperscript{13}

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\textsuperscript{6} Minter, 2014\textsuperscript{7} 100,000 Strong, 2007\textsuperscript{8} “About Confucius Institutes,” 2017\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.\textsuperscript{10} Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2006; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2007; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2008; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2009; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2010; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2011; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2012; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2013; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2014; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2015; Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2016\textsuperscript{11} Redden, 2014b\textsuperscript{12} Sahlins, 2013, p.52; Sahlins, 2015; Zhou, 2016, p.640\textsuperscript{13} “The Price,” 2012
\end{flushleft}
of such opposition makes one wonder why scholars and government officials resist CIs despite the fact these institutes provide colleges and universities with funding, teachers, and educational materials that promote Chinese language education.

As CIs continue to multiply and situate themselves in academic institutions in the U.S. and around the globe, it is necessary to learn from previous hosts about the potential drawbacks of these institutes. The fact that some academic institutions are cancelling and not renewing CI partnerships signals that CIs are more problematic than initially anticipated; only something that has more influence than much-needed resources would result in such opposition. Do CIs have a more elusive mission—one that extends beyond merely promoting Chinese language and culture? Are CIs Trojan horses like some experts suggest? Or are some academic institutions xenophobic? Although there may be many reasons underlying why an academic institution would reject to host a CI, opposition from these institutions is primarily a result of their concerns about maintaining academic freedom.

By analyzing public statements from faculty members and administrators who are associated with CIs, this research finds that academic freedom concerns are the leading cause of widespread opposition to CIs. In this paper, I first provide a deeper investigation of CIs and then discuss why these institutes may be perceived as limiting academic freedom. After identifying alternative explanations to the widespread CI opposition, implications of my argument are discussed followed up with a conclusive summary of the findings.

\[14\] Ibid.
Confucius Institutes

Beyond teaching Chinese language and culture, CIs are meant to reinforce “friendship and cooperation between China and the rest of the world.” The first CI was established in South Korea in 2004, which was soon followed by the creation of a CI at the University of Maryland. Since the conception of CIs, these institutes have been erected on every continent except for Antarctica. Such progress has culminated in an ambitious goal by Hanban to create 1,000 CIs around the world by 2020.

It is assumed that China is establishing these CIs to increase its soft power around the world, with Donald Clarke, a professor of China Studies at George Washington University, describing CIs as “China’s official soft power project.” A concept first developed by Harvard professor Joseph Nye, soft power is the “ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion.” Unlike hard or economic power, which uses coercion or payment to push another country towards a desired objective, soft power pulls a country in a prescribed direction. This new type of power is of increasing interest to Chinese leaders. For instance, following President Hu Jintao’s 2007 speech to the 17th Party congress, where he stated that China must “enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country,” the CI program “grew rapidly in scope and ambition.” Xi Jinping continued investing in CIs, saying that the Chinese government “should

15 “About Confucius Institutes,” 2017
16 Guttenplan, 2012
17 Ibid.
18 Letian, 2006
19 Goldkorn, 2013
20 Nye, 2014
21 Nye, 2012
22 Full, 2007; Guttenplan, 2012
increase China’s soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China’s message to the world.”

Structurally, CIs are managed by Hanban, which is officially described as being “affiliated with the Ministry of Education.” By investigating, however, the type of ‘affiliation’ between Hanban and the Ministry of Education, Marshall Sahlins, a professor at the University of Chicago, found that the Hanban is “governed by a council of high state and party officials from various political departments and chaired by a member of the Politburo, Vice Premier Liu Yandong.” Sahlins interprets this as Hanban being an “instrument of the party state operating as an international pedagogical organization.” Hanban also manages Confucius Classrooms (CC), which are similar to CIs but intended for K-12 students, and CI Online, which is an online platform to teach Chinese language and culture. According to their website, CI Online has over 604,000 registered students around the world. Furthermore, CIs and CCs have been growing steadily over the past 10 years, as illustrated in Figure 1. CI contracts between Hanban and the host university or college gives Hanban the right to supply teachers, textbooks and curricula of the courses it manages. In 2014, Hanban dispatched over 15,000 teachers worldwide, as shown in Figure 2. Moreover, research on China that utilizes CI funds requires approval by Hanban. Although there have been exceptions to some of these requirements, such as if Hanban wants to enlist a prestigious university (i.e., Stanford University or the University of Chicago), a typical contract between Hanban and the host academic institution will have a number of stipulations.

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23 Yan, 2014
24 Sahlins, 2013
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 “About Confucius Institutes,” 2017; Confucius Institute Online, 2017
28 Confucius Institute Online, 2017
29 Ibid.
Figure 1: Total amount of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms worldwide.

Figure 2: Total number of dispatched teachers to Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms worldwide, in thousands.
Often compared to the British Council, France’s Alliance Française, or Germany’s Goethe Institute, Chinese CIs differ in two main respects. Firstly, CIs are housed within existing institutions; aside from some global Goethe Institutes, most, if not all, of these European organizations are stand-alone organizations operating out of their own premises. Secondly, Britain, France, and Germany’s language institutes represent a government, not a political party. This difference is subtle, but the fact that China is a one-party state suggests that CIs represent the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It is because of these two reasons that scholars hesitate to associate CIs with other countries’ language and cultural institutions.

CIs are not an inexpensive investment. According to CI annual reports, Hanban spent just over $50 million (USD) on CIs in 2006. Annual investments in CIs have continued to increase, with the exception of 2010. In 2015, China’s annual investment in CIs rose to over $300 million. China’s growing investment in CIs is illustrated in Figure 3.

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30 “Xi’s Statements,” 2017; Guttenplan, 2012
31 Guttenplan, 2012; Hughes, 2014, p.58
32 Hughes, 2014, p.57
33 Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2006
34 Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2015
CIs are not only restricted to teaching language and culture. In fact, many CIs adapt to the environment in which they are located. For example, the CI at the University of Arkansas provides business training sessions for professionals to help them expand their trade in China, while the CI at the University of California Los Angeles focuses on health and medical issues. Moreover, CIs have different responsibilities at different schools. In larger colleges and universities, CIs tend to be responsible for only a portion of the overall Chinese curriculum, but in smaller academic institutions, CIs have more control of the language and culture instruction. Therefore, although CIs are identical in name, their activities are not uniform across the U.S. or around the world.

*Data from CI Annual Reports

**Figure 3: Confucius Institute total expenditures, in millions (USD).**

\[\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\hline
\text{Data} & 56.7 & 74.5 & 132.7 & 199.0 & 137.8 & 164.1 & 196.3 & 278.4 & 300.3 & 310.9 \\
\end{array}\]

35 Walden, 2008; Paradise, 2009, p. 652
36 Kluver, 2014, p. 2
Selecting Confucius as a symbol of CIs is an interesting choice given China’s recent history. Chairman Mao Zedong led an anti-Confucius campaign during the 1970s, vilifying Confucius as a symbol of backward feudalism.\textsuperscript{37} Mao despised Confucius so much that he even “dispatched red guards from Beijing to destroy the Confucius temple built in his honour in his hometown of Qufu.”\textsuperscript{38} Now after using ‘Confucius’ in the title of 500 established CIs around the world, the Chinese government has clearly changed its interpretation of the philosopher. By embracing Confucius, the Chinese government is using his image to promote the CIs’ mission of “reinforcing friendship and cooperation between China and the rest of the world.”\textsuperscript{39} However, even the use of Confucius has failed to bring about cooperation between CIs and host institutions in certain instances.

Academic Freedom Concerns

This paper utilizes the definition of academic freedom as described by Cary Nelson, President of the American Association of University Professors: engaging in “intellectual debate without fear of censorship or retaliation.”\textsuperscript{40} By this definition, many scholars fear that CIs censor academic dialogue at colleges and universities. The American Association of University Professors passed a resolution calling for all academic institutions to either terminate their CIs or renegotiate their contracts to ensure academic institutions’ full control over academic matters, noting that “allowing any third-party control of academic matters is inconsistent with principles of academic freedom.”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{37} “A message,” 2009; McGregor, 2007
\textsuperscript{38} McGregor, 2007
\textsuperscript{39} “About Confucius Institutes,” 2017
\textsuperscript{40} Nelson, 2010
\textsuperscript{41} Association’s Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, 2014
There is evidence that CIs within academic institutions directly and indirectly censor academic discourse. The director of the Modern Tibetan Studies Program at Columbia University described a “strange silence about Tibet” around the same time the CI was established at the school.\(^\text{42}\) While this event could have been a mere coincidence, it is also plausible that the new CI stimulated more self-censorship. At North Carolina State University, the CI director told the University’s provost that a planned visit by the Dalai Lama, a proponent of freeing Tibet from Chinese rule, would disrupt “some of the strong relationships we were developing with China.”\(^\text{43}\) The visit was ultimately canceled, partly due to concern over a Chinese backlash.\(^\text{44}\) In this instance, the CI directly influenced the University in a way that may not have been possible had the CI not been there. One junior faculty member at a U.S. campus with a CI explained that criticizing the CI would end his career.\(^\text{45}\) The professor stated, “I am an untenured professor in a department which receives a lot of money from a CI, which is run by senior faculty that will vote on my tenure case.”\(^\text{46}\) In this instance, self-censorship, which has stemmed from the apparent financial needs of the academic institution, plagues the professor’s ability to be critical of the CI.

Academic freedom concerns were so severe at the University of Chicago that 108 faculty members petitioned the University to discontinue the CI.\(^\text{47}\) The deputy director of the Center for East Asian Studies at the University admitted that there was a “certain amount of self-censorship” on campus due to the presence of a CI.\(^\text{48}\) The deputy director further alluded to the censorship of the CI when claiming, “thank goodness we have money for the Center for East

\^\text{42}\) Yeoh, 2014, p.510  
\^\text{43}\) Minter, 2014  
\^\text{44}\) Ibid.  
\^\text{45}\) Guttenplan, 2012  
\^\text{46}\) Ibid.  
\^\text{47}\) Jaganathan, 2014  
\^\text{48}\) Sahlins, 2013
Asian Studies; we can go there for these kinds of projects.\textsuperscript{49} Although the deputy director recognized the self-censorship imposed by CIs, he or she downplayed the issue since the University had other sources of funding independent of CI influence. It is worth noting, however, that not all academic institutions share this same privilege. Due to the substantial opposition from faculty members, the University ultimately suspended renewal negotiations and closed the CI.\textsuperscript{50}

Some schools are able to negotiate a better deal with Hanban—one that guarantees academic freedom. Stanford University was offered $4 million by Hanban to host a CI and endow a professorship.\textsuperscript{51} The University rejected the initial offer since it came with a suggestion that the professor refrain from discussing Tibet, but after renegotiations, Hanban and Stanford University were able to come to an agreement.\textsuperscript{52} The University would still receive $4 million, and the endowed professor would teach classical Chinese poetry, which by one professor’s account is “convenient for everyone concerned.”\textsuperscript{53} Due to Stanford University’s highly-esteemed reputation, the University was able to negotiate a better deal that minimized academic freedom concerns.

Academic institutions that do not host CIs are well aware of the academic freedom concerns that come along with CI agreements. June Teugel Freyer, a professor of Chinese government and foreign policy at the University of Miami, told the New York Times how she understood CIs: “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 –

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Redden, 2014b
\textsuperscript{51} Guttenplan, 2012
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Guttenplan, 2012; Sahlins, 2013
these are all off limits.” Although her university does not host a CI, she said that the rapid growth and potential influence of CIs are regularly discussed among China specialists. Freyer’s account speaks to the widespread awareness among academic institutions, even those who do not host CIs, of the risks of taking on such a partnership.

Scholars affiliated with CIs, even if only loosely connected, may self-censor their publications and activities out of a fear of retaliation by the Chinese government. Due to the political sensitivities of the Chinese government, there are topics that are widely known among China scholars that the Chinese government does not want to be discussed at all, known as the ‘Three Ts:’ Taiwan, Tibet, and Tiananmen. Some scholars who have ignored the Chinese government’s wishes and published on politically sensitive topics have been found to be blacklisted and banned from entering China. Perry Link of the University of California and Andrew Nathan of Columbia University have been denied entry into China since the 1990s due to the fact that they were two of the main editors and translators of The Tiananmen Papers, a book describing the 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement in China. Beyond barring entry, China has even detained scholars for publishing politically sensitive materials. In April 2017, Chongyi Feng, a scholar who had been vocal about Beijing’s influence in Australia, was banned from returning back home to Sydney after a visit to China. He was eventually allowed to return home, but the details of his detention are still publicly unknown. Although these events have not dissuaded all academics from publicly engaging in politically sensitive topics,

54 Guttenplan, 2012
55 Ibid.
56 Volodzko, 2015
57 The Editorial Board, 2014
58 Ibid.
59 Liu, 2017
60 Saulwick, 2017
many have refrained from being outwardly critical because they worry about their future careers.\footnote{Ibid.}

The academic freedom concern goes all the way up to the U.S. federal government. In March 2012, The House of Representatives Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing pertaining to CIs undermining academic freedom.\footnote{“The Price,” 2012}

In the hearing, Mr. Rohrabacher, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, described CIs as “penetrating…public education to spread its own state propaganda.”\footnote{Ibid.} There was even some concern over CIs at the State Department. In 2012, the State Department issued a directive stating that CI Chinese professors were violating their J-1 visas.\footnote{Cheng, 2012} Despite the issue being eventually resolved, the State Department nonetheless signaled its awareness of the controversy surrounding CIs.

The closing of CIs due to academic concerns is not only a phenomenon in the U.S. Stockholm University was the first university in Europe to shut down its CI after faculty accused the CI of damaging the University’s academic integrity.\footnote{Sahlins, 2015, p.52} To mitigate fears that this closure would create a domino effect, Xinhua published an article stating that Stockholm University’s decision to close their CI would not “cause a chain reaction.”\footnote{Greatrex, 2014} In France, the CI at Lyon University closed its doors; the Chair of the CI Board of Directors stated it was because “it seemed that our institutional and intellectual independence became unacceptable to Beijing.”\footnote{Sahlins, 2015, p.49}
Universities and colleges abroad are also equally concerned about CIs limiting academic freedom.

Academic institutions abroad that still host CIs acknowledge CIs’ limitations on academic freedom. In a case study of German CIs, Falk Hartig, a professor at Queensland University of Technology, believed that it was “obvious” that scholars would not risk losing money coming from Hanban by covering “anti-China topics.” Even at liberal arts universities like Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany, the deputy director of the CI said that CIs may not be the correct venue to debate sensitive issues like Tibet, and such topics were better left to Sinology departments. At Sydney University in Australia, a scheduled trip of the Dalai Lama was canceled to avoid jeopardizing CI funding sources. These concerns have brought about significant opposition; concerns were so severe in Canada that the Canadian Association of University Teachers called for all academic institutions to sever ties with their CIs due the “fundamental violation of academic freedom.” In Israel, a judge concluded that Tel Aviv University violated freedom of expression by shutting down a student-organized Falun Gong oppression art exhibition. It was revealed that the University acted in this way out of fear that the exhibit would jeopardize CI support. Therefore, academic institutions that host CIs still struggle to find a balance between the benefits of acquiring much-needed resources and the very real concerns about limits to academic discourse.

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68 Hartig, 2010
69 Sahlins, 2013
70 Agencies in Canberra, 2013
71 Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2013
72 Schmidt, 2010; Ghoreishi, 2011
73 Ibid.
CI censorship was the most evident in a European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS) Conference in Braga, Portugal. Upon orders from Xu Lin, the Director-General of Hanban, portions of the EACS Conference program were deleted after the conference had commenced.\footnote{Greatrex, 2014} The President of EACS was outraged, stating in a letter that the “seizure of conference materials and deletion of pages in an unauthorized manner…was extremely injudicious.”\footnote{Ibid.} He continued on to say that “providing support to a conference does not give any sponsor the right to dictate parameters to academic topics or to limit open academic presentation and discussion, on the basis of political requirements.”\footnote{Ibid.} This event, now referred to as the ‘Braga Incident,’ has made many confirm what they already suspected: CIs subvert academic freedom.\footnote{“Madam,” 2014}

Scholars are not the only ones who feel pressured to self-censor. Chinese students were upset to find that the London School of Economics hosted a CI because these students felt that they were under Chinese surveillance, even abroad.\footnote{Hughes, 2014} Arthur Waldron, a professor of international relations at the University of Pennsylvania, notes that “Chinese embassies and consulates are in the business of observing Chinese students,” and since CIs answer to the CCP, academic institutions should think twice before inviting CIs onto their campuses.\footnote{Guttenplan, 2012} By hosting a CI, Chinese students may feel the need to censor their own academic discourse due to a fear that the CI is monitoring them.
The secrecy of the arrangements between each local academic institution and CI only exacerbates academic freedom concerns. The agreements themselves have nondisclosure clauses, barring anyone familiar with the agreement from publicizing its content. Even early negotiations with CIs do not involve senior faculty who conduct research on Asian affairs. A member of the faculty at the University of Oregon found out that the University was hosting a CI only after it came out in the press; the professor stated that the whole process of hosting a CI was done under an “orchestrated silence.” Even Bruce Cumings, a tenured professor who is on the board of the University of Chicago’s East Asian study center, was never informed about the University’s agreement to host a CI “until the day it was opened.” At the University of Hawaii-Manoa, the Faculty Senate submitted a formal complaint to the administration about being inadequately consulted about the CI before it was established at the school. Faculty members fear what is being hidden from them in the secret negotiations and contracts with nondisclosure agreements.

By directly and indirectly censoring academic discourse at academic institutions, CIs have led faculty members around the world, U.S. government officials, and Chinese students to fear the infringement of their academic freedom. Although the main factor causing widespread CI opposition is the concern over academic freedom, there are other, less significant variables that contribute to the extensive CI opposition. These alternative explanations will be discussed in the next section.

80 Sahlins, 2015, p.59
81 Sahlins, 2015, p.55
82 Guttenplan, 2012
83 Schmidt, 2010
Alternative Arguments

There are three other alternative explanations that may help explain why there is opposition to CIs around the world: academic rigor concerns, hiring practice concerns, and xenophobia. These three arguments will be analyzed within the context of the previously discussed academic freedom concerns to better understand how they fit into a larger framework for understanding the opposition to CIs.

It is possible that concerns regarding CIs’ academic rigor fuels opposition to these institutes. There is a broad understanding among Chinese language teachers in the Washington, D.C. area that teachers from China who volunteer to teach at CIs are more interested in traveling abroad than actually teaching.\(^\text{84}\) This sentiment is not limited to Washington, D.C.; China scholars at the University of Pennsylvania rejected the idea of hosting a CI on campus due to the fact that they did not want a program of inferior pedagogy competing with their own.\(^\text{85}\) Therefore, academic institutions that already have respectable Chinese language programs may neither have the need nor the desire to host a Chinese language program that has a reputation of being of a lower quality.

Many of these concerns are realized by the Chinese government. China’s Minister of Education, Yuan Guiren, said in a 2013 speech that academic institutions hosting CIs are demanding higher quality services from Hanban.\(^\text{86}\) Even last year, the Deputy Director General at Hanban, Wang Yongli, admitted that CIs have a long way to go and that he is working to improve the level and quality of the Chinese-language education services provided by CIs.\(^\text{87}\)

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\(^{84}\) Conversation with a Chinese language teacher in the Washington, D.C. area
\(^{85}\) Sahlins, 2015, p.55
\(^{86}\) Xinhua, 2013
\(^{87}\) Qian, 2015
Christopher Hughes, a professor of international relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, noted that Chinese citizens often complain that the instructors selected to teach Chinese abroad in CIs are typically poorly trained. Thus, the academic rigor concerns are recognized within Hanban.

Despite the concern over the pedagogical quality of CI Chinese teachers, this is a minor concern compared to restrictions on academic freedom. There seems to be more concern coming from the Chinese government than from the academic institutions themselves. This lack of widespread criticism from academic institutions suggests that academic rigor concerns are neither compelling nor unique to CIs. Therefore, while concerns over the academic rigor of CIs are valid, greater controversy stems from concerns over the freedom of academic discourse.

A second alternative explanation for the widespread CI opposition is the Hanban’s hiring practices. In Canada, McMaster University failed to renew its agreement with its CI following a discriminatory hiring complaint filed by Sonia Zhao, a CI instructor. Zhao claimed that the university was “giving legitimation to discrimination” because she was forced to conceal her belief in Falun Gong under her CI work contract. Furthermore, there is evidence that CI contracts discriminate based on age, disability, religious belief, and political belief. The situation led to the closure of the CI at McMaster University. Andrea Farquhar, McMaster’s assistant vice-president of public and government relations, confirmed that the decision was due to Hanban’s hiring practices, saying “it’s really about the hiring decisions, and those decisions were being made in China.”

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88 Hughes, 2014, p.77
89 Sahlins, 2013
90 Ibid.
91 Hughes, 2014, p.62
92 Bradshaw, 2013
Opposition to CIs based on hiring practices actually aligns with concerns regarding their academic freedom. While it is permissible in China to refuse to hire someone due to their belief in Falun Gong, such discrimination is not tolerated in a country like Canada, as showcased in Sonia Zhao’s circumstance at McMaster University. By selecting teachers based on their religious and political beliefs, China is essentially discriminating against teachers with alternative beliefs during the hiring process. This results in a lack of ideological diversity among CI teachers, which further censors certain beliefs from CI classrooms. This is merely another form of censoring academic freedom, but it occurs during the selection process of teachers; if a teacher cannot practice or teach about Falun Gong, then the values of academic freedom are thus breached.

A third alternative cause of the widespread opposition to CIs is xenophobia. It is hard to ignore the fact that most, if not all, of the highly-publicized opposition to CIs comes from Western countries. This has led some to wonder if race does in fact play a role in the widespread CI opposition.93 There were tensions at a 2014 school board meeting in Hacienda Heights, California when protestors held up signs bearing such slogans as “America, not Confucius.”94 This reaction came from the same community that opposed the construction of a Buddhist temple on the hillside in the 1980s over fears that animals would be sacrificed and the chime of gongs would disturb the peace.95 Jane Shults, a middle school history teacher from the area, said the protests are not rational and are actually “xenophobic.”96 This event suggests that racist, xenophobic beliefs may in fact play a role in perpetuating CI opposition.

93 Olander, 2015
94 Adelman, 2010
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
The xenophobic fervor seen in the Hacienda Heights community cannot be ignored, but it should also not be overstated. It would be dishonest to suggest that xenophobia plays no role in some of the CI opposition, especially given the variety of ideologies held by CI critics, but widespread CI opposition seems to be mostly against the Chinese government, not necessarily Chinese people. Copenhagen University in Denmark rejected a CI in 2006, with the Dean for Academic Research at the time explaining that they “prefer to collaborate directly with Chinese academics at Chinese universities, rather than collaborate directly with the Chinese government.” 97 In fact, even the University of Chicago, which experienced a high-profile case against its own CI, continues to maintain a University of Chicago Research Center in Beijing. 98 The fact that institutions like the University of Chicago or Copenhagen University seek and maintain ties with China through alternative avenues provides evidence that they are not discriminating against Chinese people but rather are opposing the structure and academic restrictions of CIs.

These three alternative explanations, although helpful in understanding widespread opposition to CIs, play a relatively minor role when compared to opposition fueled by academic freedom concerns. Academic rigor concerns are shared more by Hanban than by academic institutions, hiring practice concerns amplify concerns regarding academic freedom, and although xenophobia may in fact play a role in some CI opposition, academic institutions’ willingness to engage with China in other ways suggests that such xenophobia plays a minor role in widespread CI opposition. In summary, these three alternative explanations play a relatively

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97 Sahlins, 2015, p.51
98 Center in Beijing, 2017
inconsequential role in CI opposition in comparison to the widespread concerns surrounding CIs’ restriction of academic freedom.

**Discussion**

Despite the widespread opposition to CIs in the U.S. and around the world, CIs continue to multiply. This is partly due to the fact that hosting CIs can bring an academic institution additional revenue. In recent years, there has been a 47-percent decline in U.S. government funding for language training and area studies programs.\(^9\) The additional resources from CIs have contributed to U.S. institutions of higher learning becoming heavily dependent on Chinese money.\(^10\) Colleges and universities that are financially independent may not need extra funding from Hanban, but academic institutions that are struggling financially are more inclined to accept to host a CI in order to add more revenue to the their struggling budgets. For instance, it was the University of Montana’s “institutional poverty rather than … greed” that motivated them to establish a CI.\(^11\) Terry Russell, the director of Asian studies at the University of Manitoba, argues that funding is, in fact, the major reason that academic institutions decide to open a CI, stating that “It’s not a huge amount of money, but for some [universities] it could be the difference between having a Chinese studies programme and not having [one].”\(^12\) Russell believes that there will always be institutions willing to capitalize on the Hanban’s resources.\(^13\)

Besides the direct financial leverage, CIs may have additional leverage on publicly-financed state universities. When North Carolina State University canceled a scheduled visit of

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\(^9\) Sahlins, 2013  
\(^10\) Ibid.  
\(^11\) Kapp, 2014  
\(^12\) Marcus, 2013  
\(^13\) Ibid.
the Dalai Lama, the provost, Warwick Arden, cited China as being “a major trading partner for North Carolina.”

By being a university that is affiliated with a state with substantial economic ties to China, it may not make the most sense to criticize, let alone shut down, a CI because of a difference of opinion regarding the Dalai Lama. As long as China remains a large trading partner with individual states, it may become harder to resist CIs’ demands at state universities.

Additionally, as more highly-selective schools, like Stanford, host CIs, other schools may be more willing to sign an agreement with Hanban. A dean at George Washington University stated that the University of Chicago’s adoption of a CI—at least before that CI was shut down—increased George Washington University’s comfort level with hosting a CI. Highly-selective institutions’ acceptance to host a CI prompts others to open CIs as well, thus creating a domino effect. Because of the influence of prestigious schools, along with the financial incentives of opening and maintaining these institutes, CIs continue to multiply despite widespread opposition.

Since the CIs’ restriction of academic freedom has prompted a number of host colleges and universities to terminate their CI agreements, Hanban will face an uphill battle in extending its influence worldwide. Some pundits believe that CIs are meant to expand Chinese soft power, but the aforementioned high-profile opposition cases have proven that some CIs are actually detrimental to China’s image. CIs may also affect the U.S.’s reputation. One of the U.S.’s competitive advantages in the world lies in its deeply respected higher education—even Xi Jinping sent his daughter to Harvard. Due to the increasingly negative reputation of CIs, by hosting a growing number of CIs in the U.S., the global image of U.S. education could diminish.

104 Sahlins, 2013
105 Sahlins, 2015, p.59
106 Letian, 2006
107 Zhou, 2016, p.629
108 Osnos, 2015
Students already question if paying such high tuition in the U.S. is worth the degree, and if CIs continue to multiply in the U.S., less people may be willing to pay the steep tuition fees at colleges or universities that host CIs due to them limiting free speech and possessing sub-par programs.109

Moreover, CIs could prove to be a useful stepping stone in pushing other Chinese foreign policy objectives. In the online CI magazine that commemorated the 11th CI Conference, one of the articles was titled “Confucius Institute: A key player in the implementation of the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative.”110 The Vice Minister of Education and Executive Council Member of Hanban, Hao Ping, said in the article that CIs will meet the overall requirements for the development of the “Belt and Road” initiative.111 China is tying its CI initiatives to its “Belt and Road” initiative. It is important to note that China has more CIs in the U.S. than in any other country. While China’s “Belt and Road” initiative is limited to Eurasia, it will be interesting to observe which foreign policies, if any, will permeate CIs in the U.S. Although perhaps unanswerable at this point, it will be necessary to monitor how China implements broader foreign policy goals through CIs.

It is hard to know under which circumstances an academic institution should refuse external funding. Academic institutions require resources from multiple funding streams, but a problem emerges when colleges and universities accept outside funds that come with too many strings attached. In an imperfect analogy, would it be a good idea to accept money from Vladimir Putin if he was willing to sponsor a Russian Studies Center on the condition that Crimea and

109 Schoen, 2015
110 “Confucius Institute: a key player,” 2017
111 Ibid.
Ukraine could not be discussed?\textsuperscript{112} Moving forward, it will be important to discuss when and under what conditions it is appropriate to accept external funding sources.

In order for CIs or host institutions to mitigate academic freedom concerns, Shai Oster, an award-winning Bloomberg reporter, suggests taking CIs out of the academic institutions or taking the government out of CIs.\textsuperscript{113} Taking CIs out of the academic institutions would make them more comparable to Britain, France, or Germany’s language and culture centers, which are housed outside of established colleges or universities. Alternatively, taking the government out of CIs would ease many critics’ concerns of CIs towing the party line; however, since CIs are a Chinese government initiative, taking the government out of the CIs is extremely unlikely. Moreover, Avery Goldstein, the director of the Center for the Study of Contemporary China at the University of Pennsylvania, suggests crafting a “best practices” agreement among colleges and universities that focus on CI issues.\textsuperscript{114} By collaborating, academic institutions could be better able to successfully negotiate with Hanban. Oster and Goldstein’s suggestions could potentially mitigate concerns regarding a lack of academic freedom at CIs, but Hanban would likely have a difficult time accepting these terms since Hanban benefits from negotiating independent agreements with each institution.

While this paper analyzes the key variables that cause widespread CI opposition, it would be interesting to further examine the extent to which CIs are accomplishing their intended goals. The negative reactions to CIs are well understood, but the extent to which the Chinese government benefits from CIs remains unclear. Since China must expect to receive returns on its

\textsuperscript{112} Mahoney, 2015
\textsuperscript{113} Kapp, 2014
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
investments in CIs around the globe, quantifying and qualifying these returns may be a fruitful avenue for additional research.

While the CI website makes it very clear where CIs exist, it has refrain from disclosing where CIs have been refused; this paper provides a rare glimpse into where CIs have failed to take root. According to Hanban, outside institutions apply to host CIs, but Hanban clearly actively courts certain institutions as well.\textsuperscript{115} For example, conversations with faculty at Georgetown University revealed that Hanban wanted to establish a CI within the University, but this proposal was rejected.\textsuperscript{116} This refusal occurred without the fanfare that took place at other academic institutions, and most of the general public were unaware of these conversations. It would therefore be interesting to calculate the rate at which Hanban’s offers were accepted by targeted institutions. Marshall Sahlins has collected data through the public domain or personal communications to create a short list of institutions that have rejected CIs, but a more comprehensive study surveying all of the universities and colleges in the U.S. would provide the necessary information to identify patterns in Hanban’s selection criteria and comprehensively analyze which colleges and universities decide to accept versus reject to host CIs.\textsuperscript{117} As a result, further research would elucidate the intentions and activities of CIs in the U.S.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Although there are many reasons why an academic institution may refuse to host a CI, this paper has shown that widespread CI opposition mainly stems from concerns regarding CIs’

\textsuperscript{115} Paradise, 2009, p.652
\textsuperscript{116} Conversations with Georgetown University Faculty
\textsuperscript{117} Sahlins, 2015, p.60
restrictions of academic freedom. These concerns are consistent among faculty members in both the U.S. and abroad and have even permeated the U.S. government. Chinese students have also felt that their privacy has been compromised while attending schools with CIs. By directly and indirectly censoring academic discourse at academic institutions, CIs have received a lot of backlash in the U.S. and around the world.

There are three other minor factors that have contributed to CI opposition. Concerns over academic rigor have caused Hanban officials to admit that teaching pedagogy must improve. Hanban’s hiring practices have also caused a Canadian CI to close, which echoes similar concerns about limiting academic freedom. Thirdly, xenophobia may play a role in opposition to CIs. However, there remains considerable interest among academic institutions to acquire partnerships with Chinese institutions, which suggests that xenophobia plays a minor role in explaining CI opposition.

Regardless of CIs’ intentions, CIs are widely perceived as violating academic freedom. This not only negatively impacts China’s image but may also compromise the reputation of the U.S. education system. One of the U.S.’s competitive advantages lies with its greatly revered higher education system, but CIs’ reputation of violating academic freedom, along with their increasing numbers across the U.S., may have repercussions on the perceived quality of Chinese language programs—and perhaps institutions of higher education—within the U.S.

In addition, CIs have been known to push foreign policy objectives in Asia, particularly relating to the “Belt and Road” initiative. In the future, it will be important to monitor which foreign policy objectives, if any, China plans to promote within CIs situated in the U.S. This prompts a larger question regarding the value of China’s financial investments in CIs—is China getting the desired returns on its investment in CIs? This question, along with examining where
and under which conditions colleges and universities have refused to open CIs, may be interesting avenues for future research.

In summary, widespread CI opposition among faculty members and government officials may prevent Hanban from achieving its goal of establishing 1,000 CIs around the world by 2020. The rapid formation of CIs since the establishment of the first CI in 2004 is an impressive feat for Hanban and the Chinese government; however, if China wants to continue to expand its global influence, it will need to clean up its act and represent itself as a language and culture institution that values the academic freedoms articulated by many of its host institutions. Until these host institutions are assured that CIs will contractually commit to protecting academic freedom, CIs will continue to encounter opposition to their initiatives.
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