

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Confucius Institutes are teaching and research centers located at colleges and universities, underwritten by the Chinese government. Since 2005, more than 100 Confucius Institutes (CIs) have opened in the United States; 103 remain in operation.

These Institutes, many offering for-credit courses in Chinese language and culture, are largely staffed and funded by an agency of the Chinese government’s Ministry of Education—the Office of Chinese Languages Council International, better known as the Hanban. The Hanban also operates similarly organized Confucius Classrooms (CCs) at 501 primary and secondary schools in the United States. These 604 educational outposts comprise a plurality of China’s 1,579 Confucius Institutes and Classrooms worldwide.

Confucius Institutes frequently attract scrutiny because of their close ties to the Chinese government. A stream of stories indicates that intellectual freedom, merit-based hiring policies, and other foundational principles of American higher education have received short shrift in Confucius Institutes.

The Hanban has shrouded Confucius Institutes in secrecy. At most Institutes, the terms of agreement are hidden. China’s leaders have not assuaged worries that the Institutes may teach political lessons that unduly favor China. In 2009, Li Changchun, then the head of propaganda for the Chinese Communist Party and a member of the party’s Politburo Standing Committee, called Confucius Institutes “an important part of China’s overseas propaganda set-up.”¹

We conducted case studies at twelve Confucius Institutes—two in New Jersey and ten in New York—and asked about hiring policies, funding arrangements, contracts between the Hanban and the university, pressure on affiliated faculty members, and more. This report is the result of that investigation.

We found cause for concern in four areas.

1. **Intellectual freedom.** Official Hanban policy requires Confucius Institutes to adhere to Chinese law, including speech codes. Chinese teachers hired, paid by, and accountable to the Chinese government face pressures to avoid sensitive topics, and American professors report pressure to self-censor.
2. **Transparency.** Contracts between American universities and the Hanban, funding arrangements, and hiring policies for Confucius Institute staff are rarely publicly available. Some universities went to extraordinary efforts to avoid scrutiny, cancelling meetings and forbidding NAS from visiting campus.

1 “A Message From Confucius,” *The Economist*, October 22, 2009. <http://www.economist.com/node/14678507>.

3. **Entanglement.** Confucius Institutes are central nodes in a complex system of relationships with China. Confucius Institutes attract full-tuition-paying Chinese students, fund scholarships for American students to study abroad, and offer other resources. Universities with financial incentives to please China find it more difficult to criticize Chinese policies.
4. **Soft Power.** Confucius Institutes tend to present China in a positive light and to focus on anodyne aspects of Chinese culture. They avoid Chinese political history and human rights abuses, present Taiwan and Tibet as undisputed territories of China, and develop a generation of American students with selective knowledge of a major country.

We recommend that all universities close their Confucius Institutes.

If a college or university refuses to close its Confucius Institute, we recommend faculty members and administrators push for the following reforms.

1. **Provide transparency.** Make available for easy download all memoranda of understanding, contracts, and other agreements between the university and the Hanban, or between the university and the Chinese partner institution. Annually disclose how much funding the university receives from the Hanban or the Chinese partner institution for the Confucius Institute, and disclose how much the host university contributes (separating in-kind contributions from real expenses). Disclose all trips, honors, and awards bestowed on university officials by agencies of the Chinese government.
2. **Ensure that all CI budgets are separate from university budgets, and that all Confucius Institute events are advertised as such.** As much as possible, Confucius Institutes should be distinguished from their host institutions. Confucius Institute events should not be listed on university calendars, promoted on the university website, or used as assignments or count toward extra credit for students. The Hanban considers Confucius Institutes standalone nonprofit organizations, yet houses them in universities and benefits from the status and prestige of the university. Reduce this free-riding.
3. **Cease outsourcing for-credit courses to the Hanban.** Ensure that Chinese language classes are taught by professors or instructors selected and paid by the university.
4. **Renegotiate contracts to remove constraints against “tarnishing the reputation” of the Hanban.** Scholarship should be civil, but it should not be constrained by the fear of punishment for offending Chinese sensitivities.
5. **Formally ask the Hanban if its hiring process complies with American non-discrimination policies.** Does the Hanban prioritize members of the Communist Party? Are members of Falun Gong still excluded? Is the selection based purely on merit? Ask the Hanban for a formal written answer.

6. **Change the wording of all contracts to clarify that legal disputes should be settled only in the jurisdiction of the host institution (in our cases, American courts).** Add language specifying that in all disputes between Chinese and American law, American law takes priority. The Hanban should assume legal liability if it violates American law when operating a Confucius Institute in America.
7. **Require that all Confucius Institutes offer at least one public lecture or class each year on topics that are important to Chinese history but are currently neglected, such as the Tiananmen Square protests or the Dalai Lama's views on Tibet.** Ensure that these programs are fair, balanced, and free of external pressures.
8. **Include in orientation for every Confucius Institute teacher and Chinese director the university's policies on academic freedom.** Ensure that all teachers enjoy the same rights.
9. **Make the Confucius Institute director's position a voluntary service position, with no additional pay,** thereby reducing financial pressures for CI directors to cater to the Hanban's preferences.

We also recommend that state and federal legislative bodies exercise oversight.

1. **Congress should open an investigation of Confucius Institutes and inquire whether American interests are jeopardized by these institutes.** Congress should ask universities to turn over copies of their agreements with the Hanban and their partner Chinese universities.
2. **State legislatures should hold similar investigations on all public universities with a Confucius Institute in their state.**
3. **Congress should also evaluate risks to national security.** It should consider whether Confucius Institutes increase the risks of a foreign government spying or collecting sensitive information.
4. **Congress and state legislatures should also investigate the Chinese government's use of Confucius Institutes to monitor, intimidate, and harass Chinese students.** Congress should evaluate whether Confucius Institutes improperly curtail students' freedom to study.

Our primary recommendation is that all American universities—and school districts—with Confucius Institutes or Classrooms should close these centers and end all contracts with the Hanban. We urge these secondary reforms as intermediary steps to protecting the integrity of American education and intellectual freedom.