

NATIONAL
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China and Our Children

IAN OXNEVAD



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A report by the

NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
of SCHOLARS

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Cover Design by Beck&Stone

Typesetting by Chance Layton

Published July 2024

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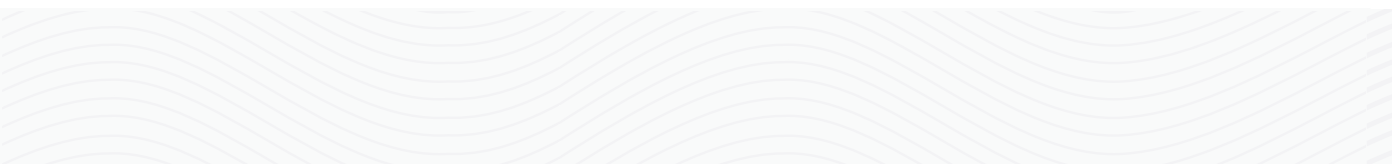
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Executive Summary

Since 2005, the Chinese government has vigorously extended influence over American education. While well-researched in some areas, that influence is merely noted elsewhere. Much of this research is responsible for successfully shifting the public's perception of Confucius Institutes. Once thought of as a benign academic exchange and language program, it is now known to be an influence operation lead by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Most Confucius Institutes (CIs) closed as a response to public and legislative scrutiny of the program. However, CI subsidiaries in the form of Confucius Classrooms remained less explored. Last year, the advocacy group Parents Defending Education (PDE) discovered the presence of Confucius Classrooms around 20 US military bases.¹ Our report takes these findings into account, and independently documented 164 Confucius Classroom (CC) programs of various size across the US. We discovered CCs in the public schools of major metropolitan areas, in rural school districts, elite private schools, and across entire states.

When host schools were categorized by public or private education, 79 percent of these Confucius Classrooms were discovered in public school districts. The exact number of CCs currently in operation is unknown. This is due to the closure and rebranding of Confucius Institutes, a tarnishing of the “Confucius” label for China’s international language program, and the use of nonprofit intermediaries to hide China’s support for Confucius Classrooms.

Research on CCs has largely neglected to contextualize these programs within China’s overall strategy to influence education and other parts of American society. This report demonstrates how CCs fit within China’s efforts to build strategic economic and diplomatic partnerships with local and state officials. In some cases, such as North Carolina and

¹ Parents Defending Education, “Little Red Classrooms: China’s Infiltration of American K-12 Schools,” July 25, 2023, (<https://defendingeducation.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/#:~:text=Parents%20Defending%20Education%20uncovered%20contracts,St.>), accessed Oct. 1, 2023.

Minnesota, governors forged ties with China at the state level. Major cities, such as Chicago, Seattle, and Portland, established similar relationships with China through bilateral programs.

This report fills a gap in previous work by examining the role of Mandarin education in Communist China, how the CCP developed language as a tool of political warfare, and then deployed it to the United States. Confucius Classrooms did not simply expand CIs into K-12 schools; instead, they grew out of China's strategy to influence policymakers and society at the state and local levels.

This report finds that Confucius Classrooms:

- Often formed out of bilateral initiatives at local and state levels within the United States. These bilateral initiatives developed into agreements, partnerships, and memos of understanding between state departments of education, governors, and local mayors.
- Emerged in parallel to US-China business ties at the local level. This report finds that CCs sometimes are in close proximity to significant Chinese investments.
- Sometimes operated as Confucius Institutes.
- Use nonprofit intermediaries to avoid public scrutiny. The role of nonprofit intermediaries has been acknowledged before. However, this report finds that nonprofit organizations act as facilitators and sustainers of some Confucius programs.
- Involved bilateral relationships between American schools and Chinese counterparts. Schools with CCs often have “sister school” partnerships with schools in China.
- Represent a point of interest among high-profile Chinese officials involved with China's United Front Work Department (UFWD).

Confucius Institutes provided one of the support mechanisms for Confucius Classrooms by helping them obtain teachers, funds, and learning materials such as books. Nonprofit organizations similarly helped these programs grow. Nonprofits such as the 100,000 Strong Foundation, Go Global NC, BG Education Management Solutions, IL Texas Global, the Alliance for Education, and the Asia Society played roles in opening American K-12 schools to the Chinese Communist Party. Many of the founders and board members of these nonprofits are high-profile figures from American politics and business.

Methodologically, this report attempts to avoid reexamining previous research on China's Confucius programs. The 164 cases of Confucius Classrooms in this report include those documented by Parents Defending Education; however, this list includes additional cases found via open-source data from the US and China.

In order to counter the durability and persistence of China's Confucius programs in education, we recommend three key policies:

- **Revitalize the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA)** in order to eliminate exemptions in education, business, and scientific pursuits. As this report illustrates, American nonprofit intermediaries are an important tool for China to shape Chinese language education in American schools. State and local policymakers have similarly engaged in high-diplomacy independent of America's Congress and the Executive. Closing the loopholes in the Foreign Agent Registration Act is a critical step to rectifying these dynamics.
- **Develop Foreign Language Curricula Based on the American Narrative.** American students must learn critical languages to compete in the modern economy. Most foreign language programs exclusively focus on incorporating the culture of the target language into the curriculum. It is as critical that American students of Chinese and other critical languages are able to communicate American values and ideas unique to the American experience in a sophisticated manner. Developing a Mandarin curriculum that empowers students to communicate the fundamental ideas of individual liberty, natural rights, and republican governance is necessary for training future leaders.
- **Establish Ratio Funding Restrictions on Universities** to curtail universities from taking foreign funding that competes with the interest of American taxpayers. This can be achieved through ratio funding restrictions. This is achieved by implementing a tax or fine at a dollar-to-dollar basis on all foreign funds a university receives. Such restrictions would change the incentives for universities to engage in contractual relationships with foreign adversaries such as China.

The first chapter of this report discusses the origins and strategy of China's use of Confucius as a label for its soft power efforts to gain influence abroad. The role of language education in China's conduct of political warfare is discussed in the context of how the Chinese Communist Party reformed Mandarin to indoctrinate its population after 1949. This chapter also examines the relationship between Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms, and how Beijing's Confucius programs differ from the foreign language initiatives of other countries.

The second chapter examines CCs in the US, and how they have been founded and sustained by the efforts of nonprofits and policymakers at the state and local level. This chapter also discusses a number of the nonprofits involved in enabling Confucius Classrooms to survive the closure of Confucius Institutes, and how China's use of nonprofits demonstrates Beijing's strategy to use education as a means of influencing other parts of American society.

This chapter also notes how CC programs play a role in building economic ties between the US and Chinese business interests.

The third chapter surveys three surviving Confucius Classrooms discovered by Parents Defending Education last year. This chapter examines Minnetonka Public Schools, Sisters School District, and St. Cloud Area Schools, and shows how these schools demonstrate the macro trends discovered in this report. In both Minnesota and Oregon, economic interests and local policymakers played a role in establishing the CCs located there. The fourth and final chapter offers policy recommendations based on the findings of this report.

Chapter 1



The Chinese Communist Party and Language as Soft Power

Introduction

In 1948, one year before the Communist takeover of mainland China and with the realities of the Holocaust and World War Two still vivid memories, the American philosopher Richard Weaver published a book entitled *Ideas Have Consequences*.² Weaver argued that rather than consist of rhetorical abstraction, language and the ideas it presents have real-world consequences. Language forms worldviews, and worldviews affects action.

Fully understanding this power of language, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has made its promotion of Mandarin a pillar of its soft power strategy to shape the world in its image.

In 2017, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) sounded the alarm over China's Confucius Institutes (CIs), pointing out how they threaten higher education by undermining intellectual freedom, jeopardizing university independence, and by projecting CCP propaganda into the classroom.³ CIs, the turnkey Mandarin language programs established and run through the Chinese government, raised concerns across the political spectrum. In response, many universities rebranded, restructured, or closed their CI programs.⁴ While

² See Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

³ See Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017).

⁴ See Rachelle Peterson and Ian Oxnevad, *After Confucius: China's Enduring Influence on American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022).

China's effort to co-opt American universities is now part of public discourse, a deeper level of CCP influence operates in China's Confucius Classroom (CC) program at the K-12 level.

Originally run through the Office of Chinese Language Council International, a bureaucracy also known as the Hanban housed within Beijing's Ministry of Education, the Chinese government opened CIs and CCs around the globe. Amid growing apprehension over growing Chinese influence in US education, the Hanban was later rebranded and restructured into two new organizations called the Ministry of Education Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation (CLEC), and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF).⁵

At their peak in 2017, China supported CCs at 501 American schools.⁶ CCs in the US accounted for 47 percent of all CCP-backed Mandarin K-12 programs worldwide.⁷ Often, CCs act as subsidiaries of their CI counterparts in higher education. At other times, CCs have been established either through bilateral partnerships between an American school system and Chinese partner schools, or run through nonprofit organizations within the US.

While many CIs formally ceased to exist over the past several years, bilateral ties between universities persisted. A number of constituent CCs similarly survived. Despite the concerns of Federal policymakers, the total number, scope, identity, and location of CCs remained unknown.

A 2023 report conducted by Parents Defending Education (PDE) on Confucius Classrooms notes that the US currently hosts at least 143 active or defunct CCs across 34 states.⁸ PDE's findings offer a snapshot of a widespread funding effort by China to monopolize Mandarin education across a range of K-12 schools. In its investigation, PDE discovered \$17,967,565.12 flowed into CCs between 2009 and 2023.⁹ More alarmingly, PDE discovered that CCs cluster around 20 US military bases, and that some CCs have ties to educational institutions in China that are associated with the People's Liberation Army (PLA).¹⁰ Our investigation discovered at least 164 schools or school systems where CCs were present either now or in the recent past. In the context of Chinese land purchases around military bases,¹¹ China's prominence as a source of deadly fentanyl,¹² spy balloon flights, and the proximity of CIs to US hypersonic missile technology programs, these findings raise questions about how CCs fit within China's broader subversion strategy.¹³

5 Ibid, 4.

6 Rachele Peterson, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 15.

7 Ibid, 24-25.

8 Parents Defending Education, "Little Red Classrooms: China's Infiltration of American K-12 Schools," July 25, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/#:~:text=Parents%20Defending%20Education%20uncovered%20contracts,St.>), accessed Oct. 1, 2023.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Dan De Luce, "Foreign purchase of land near US military bases would require government approval under proposed rule," NBC News, May 5, 2023, (<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/foreign-china-buy-land-us-military-bases-require-government-approval-rcna83152#>), accessed Oct. 1, 2023.

12 "China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China's Role," Congressional Research Service, Sept. 28, 2023, (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10890#:~:text=Sources%20and%20Trafficking%20Pathways,mail%20and%20express%20consignment%20operations.>), accessed Oct. 1, 2023.

13 "Alfred University Closes Confucius Institute as a Result of Select Committee Investigation," The Select Committee on the

The establishment and spread of Confucius Classrooms reveal three key aspects of their role in China's broader subversion strategy. First, CCs are an extension of the CCP's domestic doctrine of advancing political warfare by means of education. Second, China effectively exploits American nonprofits to act as intermediaries in their support for CCs. This reliance on nonprofits has masked the scope of China's influence and allowed CCs to restructure and survive despite removal of Confucius Institutes from universities. Third, CCs form part of a broader Chinese effort to form business and diplomatic ties with state and local policymakers in the United States.

Previous research on CIs and CCs did not examine the role of local business actors and political officials in enabling the growth, transfer, and survival of CCs in the K-12 system. National initiatives such as the 100,000 Strong Initiative, and local diplomacy between China and American governors, school districts, and municipalities went unexplored. The following sections of this report fill these gaps in the understanding of how CCs fit within the CCPs efforts to subvert US institutions, sovereignty, and shape American perceptions of the Chinese government.

Language Education and Propaganda in Communist China

Political warfare is still warfare, and education is one of its battle domains. The ancient Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu (400-320 BC) declared that “subjugating the enemy’s army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence.”¹⁴ As a Communist regime, China has employed education as a pillar of ideological warfare and as a tool for legitimacy since the CCP took power in 1949. Mao Tse-Tung once described “dictatorship” and “democracy” as two pathways to shape the population. In Mao’s thinking, dictatorship was reserved for reactionaries in the form of forced labor and prohibition against political activity. In contrast, Mao reserved “democratic methods” for the education of the general population.¹⁵ Under this logic, propaganda and persuasion is deployed for political power prior to resorting to force.¹⁶

Unlike the classical Western liberal arts education, where the aim is to foster independent thinking, reasoning, and the pursuit of the Good, no distinction exists between education, propaganda, and indoctrination in Communist regimes.¹⁷ In China, both of Mao’s pathways to reshaping the population consisted of a policy called “*Szu Hsiang Kai Tsao*,” or

CCP, US House of Representatives, June 15, 2023, (<https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/media/press-releases/alfred-university-closes-confucius-institute-result-select-committee>), accessed Oct. 1, 2023.

14 Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer, (New York: Fall River Press, 1994), 177.

15 Mao Tse-Tung, “Report to the Party Plenum,” June 6, 1950, cited in Theodore Hsi-En Chen, “Education and Propaganda in Communist China,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 227, (1951), pp. 135-145, 135.

16 *Ibid*, 135.

17 *Ibid*, 136.

“ideological remolding.”¹⁸ While China vividly displayed this form of brainwashing in prison and labor camps, Beijing deployed the same strategy across all major institutions after the CCP took power.¹⁹ In comparison to the Soviet Union, the CCP heavily emphasized the ideological reshaping of the individual. Soviet propaganda efforts never sought the same psychological intimacy with its targets.²⁰ In the 1950s, the psychiatrist Robert Lifton noted that when Westerners were taken prisoner by Communist officials in China, their understanding of Mandarin and Chinese culture was used against them during “reeducation.”²¹

For the general population during the Maoist era, a standardized form of Mandarin comprised the main focus of China’s primary education.²² Political education and indoctrination saturated both elementary and higher education, with a particular emphasis being placed on cultivating loyalty to the CCP and anti-American attitudes among students.²³ China’s Ministry of Education promoted indoctrination alongside “moral education” and an emphasis on the “five loves,” or key values central to loyalty to the CCP. These “five loves” included: “love of the fatherland, love of the people, love of labour, love of science, and care of public property.”²⁴

After taking power, the CCP restricted the availability of private education. Vestiges of classical Chinese education from before the Communist takeover were replaced with a state-driven focus on science and technology to advance industrialization.²⁵ Within the CCP’s post-revolutionary college curriculum, “political education,” science, and technological training formed the core of university instruction.²⁶

Language training, standardization, and indoctrination in China have been completely intertwined since 1949. Language teachers left over from China’s Republican Era were subjected to forced ideological reshaping, which occurred concurrently to the CCP’s formulating a literacy program aimed at advancing the “instruments of the proletarian political dictatorship for educating the people in Communist ideology.”²⁷

The re-training of China’s intellectual elite was one key to solidifying Communism as part of the country’s national identity. Portraying the takeover of the country by the CCP as “inevitable” lay at the center of a national narrative of class struggle.²⁸ Over time, “moral ed-

18 Robert Lifton, “Chinese Communist ‘Thought Reform’: Confession and Re-Education of Western Civilians,” *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, Vol. 33, No. 8, (1957), pp. 626-544, 626.

19 *Ibid.*, 626.

20 Hu Ping, *The Thought Remolding Campaign of the Chinese Communist Party-State*, trans. Philip F. Williams and Yenna Wu, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 18.

21 Lifton, 627.

22 Theodore HE Chen, “Elementary Education in Communist China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 10, (1962): pp.98-122, 99.

23 *Ibid.*, 107.

24 *Ibid.*, 108.

25 Immanuel CY Hsu, “The Reorganisation of Higher Education in Communist China, 1949-61,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 19, (1964): pp. 128-160, 128.

26 *Ibid.*, 143.

27 Susan Biele Alitto, “The Language Issue in Communist Chinese Education,” *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1969): pp. 43-59, 54-55.

28 James P. Harrison, “The Ideological Training of Intellectuals in Communist China,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 10, (1965): pp. 491-502, 491.

ucation,” or the equivalent of a national ethos in Communist China, began to originate from the individual thoughts of the government’s top leadership.²⁹ This top-down promotion of philosophy derived from China’s government elites used education as a conduit for sending propaganda into the broader population.³⁰

Since taking power in 2013, Xi Jinping has continued this tradition with his own promotion of “Xi Jinping Thought,” which includes his personal philosophy of socialism and China’s economic development.³¹ This propaganda has permeated the Chinese government, the country’s state-owned enterprises, and China’s school system.³² Notably, Taiwan experienced the opposite of Beijing’s constructed top-down, ideologically-driven narrative. In Taiwan, democratization in the late 1980s fostered the Tai-yu language movement aimed at nurturing local identity.³³

China’s “Confucius” Influence Strategy

A state-backed language program is useful to project propaganda at home and abroad. The political scientist Joseph Nye coined the term “soft power” to describe a country’s use of culture to obtain its goals.³⁴ Language opens the door to culture, but goes deeper by offering completely new sets of meaning. British political scientist Steven Lukes theorized that power takes different forms, but can include decision-making power, agenda-setting power, and ideological power.³⁵ “Ideological power” is where language offers a government the means to influence the worldviews of others.³⁶ Language is a key benchmark of social identity.

For a government, a common standard language makes the world around it intelligible for the purposes of power projection. For example, a critical step for the formation of the modern Spanish nation-state consisted of Antonio de Nebrija’s publication of a standardized Spanish grammar in 1492. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda’s revival of Hebrew from an ancient liturgical language to a modern one was central to the founding of Israel as a modern Jewish state. Knowledge of Mandarin outside of China offers Beijing communication on its terms in the realms of diplomacy and business. Additionally, Mandarin offers the CCP the means to promote its own ideological worldview. By teaching Mandarin abroad, Beijing can shape the worldviews of those future policymakers and elites most likely to work on China-related issues.

29 See Li Maosen, “Moral Education in the People’s Republic of China,” *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (1990), pp. 159-171.

30 Ibid.

31 Erin Hale, “Why are China’s workers studying ‘Xi Jinping Thought’?”, *Al Jazeera*, Sept. 7, 2023, (<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/9/7/why-are-chinas-workers-studying-xi-jinping>), accessed Oct. 20, 2023.

32 Ibid.

33 See A-Chin Hsaiu, “Language Ideology in Taiwan: The KMT’s Language Policy, the Tai-yu Language Movement, and Ethnic Politics,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (1997), pp. 302-315.

34 See Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

35 See Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1974).

36 Ibid, 24.

After the end of the Cold War, Beijing sought to promote China as a brand. Under Mao, China's information operations centered upon exporting propaganda in support of overseas anti-colonial movements, and through channels of approved journalistic outlets.³⁷ After the Tiananmen Square Massacre, China refurbished its information operations abroad by forming the State Council Information Office (SCIO) in 1991 in order to promote the PRC's image.³⁸ By the early 2000s, the PRC shifted to deploying Chinese culture for soft power and influence. CCs and CIs formed one element of this soft power offensive.

China's use of the philosopher Confucius as the face of a soft power language initiative is ironic. Confucianism was the philosophical basis for the late Qing Dynasty. As a philosophy, it was Confucianism that China's Nationalists and later Communists rebelled against.³⁹ Confucianism and Chinese Legalism emerged as competing theories of statecraft in Ancient China, with the former focused on filial piety and benevolence.⁴⁰ In contrast, the Legalists (c. 500 BC) asserted a logic of state based on the motto of *fuguo qiangbing* ("enrich the state and strengthen the military"), and the pursuit of power for its own sake.⁴¹

China has attempted to use Confucius as a cover for Marx in its soft power initiatives. In 2023, China clumsily attempted to combine Confucianism, Marxism, and Xi Jinping's own brand of nationalism in a television show titled "When Marx Met Confucius."⁴² While unpopular in China, the show illustrates attempts by Xi Jinping to promote Marxism as the "soul" of Chinese culture alongside "Confucianism as its root."⁴³ Notably, the series ominously ends with a warning of Beijing's future retaking of Taiwan.⁴⁴

The CCP uses Confucius abroad to promote its geopolitical agenda by portraying China in a positive light. A report conducted by University College Dublin in 2019 using geospatial targeting discovered that CIs led to a 6 percent improvement in rankings of China's favorability in the surrounding community.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, critics of the CCP note the irony of Beijing's use of Confucius as a brand. In South Korea, Han Min-ho, president of Citizens for Unveiling Confucius Institutes, noted that "despite its title, there are no Confucian ideas whatsoever in the institute."⁴⁶

37 Nicholas J. Cull, Testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission hearing: China's Propaganda and Influence Operations, its Intelligence Activities that Target the United States and its Resulting Impacts on US National Security," April 30, 2009, (https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/4_30_09Cull.pdf), accessed July 31, 2023, page 2. See also Hongying Wang, "National Image-Building and Chinese foreign policy," *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (March 2003), pp. 46-72.

38 Ibid. See also, Ingrid d'Hooghe, "Public Diplomacy in the People's Republic of China," in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. Jan Melissen, (London: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 92, 98-99.

39 Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Random House, 2014), 18-21.

40 Ibid, 20.

41 Ibid, 20-21.

42 "Xi Jinping is trying to fuse the ideologies of Marx and Confucius," *The Economist*, Nov. 2, 2023, (<https://www.economist.com/china/2023/11/02/xi-jinping-is-trying-to-fuse-the-ideologies-of-marx-and-confucius>), accessed Nov. 20, 2023.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Alexander Dukalskis, "Why US universities are shutting down China-funded Confucius Institutes," Jan. 11, 2019, *Washington Post*, (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/01/11/u-s-universities-have-shut-down-confucius-institutes-heres-what-you-need-to-know/>), accessed Sept. 10, 2023.

46 Kang Huyn-kyung, "China's Confucius Institutes facing calls to leave Korea," *Korea Times*, June 8, 2021, (<https://www.koreatimes.com>).

On the surface, CIs and CCs comprise little more than benign language programs funded by China for the benefit of colleges and schools abroad. However, leaders both in and out of China acknowledge their role as an instrument of influence. In 2009, Li Changchun, a member of the CCP's Politburo Standing Committee, described CIs as "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set up."⁴⁷ In 2020, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo described CIs as a key aspect of CCP's "propaganda apparatus."⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, Under Secretary for the State Department, Keith Krach, wrote to college and university administrations across the US warning of the propaganda operation hidden within CIs.⁴⁹

Language education is the focus of CIs and CCs; however, the Confucius brand extends beyond education. For example, Beijing created a "Confucius Peace Prize" in 2010 as a response to dissident Liu Xiaobo receiving the Nobel Peace Prize that same year.⁵⁰ Under the auspices of China's Ministry of Culture, and Beijing's propaganda apparatus, the prize was administered by an intermediary front organization in order to "promote world peace from an Eastern perspective."⁵¹ In this context, Beijing's programs carrying a "Confucius" label can be identified as a propaganda operation

In 2017, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) began noting the risks CIs pose to American higher education. CIs were first overseen by China's Ministry of Education through the Office of Chinese Languages Council, otherwise known as the Hanban.⁵² After NAS's efforts brought public scrutiny to CIs, China defended itself by eliminating the tarnished Hanban label and by rebranding the bureaucracies overseeing them. The Hanban became the Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation (CLEC), with a subsidiary agency called the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) tasked to oversee CIs and its related initiatives.⁵³

At the university level, NAS investigations into CIs found the programs to be opaque. Contracts extended Hanban policies onto American college campuses, and were based upon Chinese law. Sensitive topics in the curriculum, such as the status of Taiwan, Tibet, and human rights in China, were muted. Portrayals of the CCP and Chinese government were whitewashed. At the same time, concerns over the risks posed by CIs to American national

[washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/01/11/u-s-universities-have-shut-down-confucius-institutes-heres-what-you-need-to-know/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/01/11/u-s-universities-have-shut-down-confucius-institutes-heres-what-you-need-to-know/), accessed Sept. 1, 2023.

47 "A Message from Confucius," *The Economist*, Oct. 22, 2009, (<http://www.economist.com/node/14678507>), accessed July 31, 2023. See also, Rachele Peterson, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), (https://www.nas.org/reports/outsourced-to-china/full-report#_ftnref1), accessed July 31, 2023.

48 Michael R. Pompeo, "Designation of the Confucius Institute US Center as a Foreign Mission of the PRC," US Department of State, Aug. 13, 2020, (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-confucius-institute-u-s-center-as-a-foreign-mission-of-the-prc/index.html>), accessed July 31, 2023.

49 "Letter From the Under Secretary Keith Krach to the Governing Boards of American Universities," US Department of State official website, Aug. 18, 2020, (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/letter-from-under-secretary-keith-krach-to-the-governing-boards-of-american-universities/index.html>), accessed July 31, 2023.

50 John Dotson, "The Confucian Revival in the Propaganda Narratives of the Chinese Government," US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff and Research Report, July 20, 2011, 16-17.

51 *Ibid.*, 17.

52 Rachele Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 9.

53 Rachele Peterson et al, *After Confucius* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 8.

security were ultimately proven valid. At universities, CIs have been found to offer China proximity to research programs of military importance. For example, New York's Alfred University hosted a now-closed CI and ran a Ceramic Engineering department that develops hypersonic missile technology for the United States military.⁵⁴

From 2005-2017, over 100 CIs established operations at universities across the United States.⁵⁵ Thanks to scrutiny from policymakers and the broader public, nearly all CIs have closed. Nine exceptions to this trend included those that have transferred to new universities, devolved to local nonprofits, or handed off to K-12 schools.⁵⁶ As of 2017 in the K-12 level, approximately 500 CCs were operating in the United States.⁵⁷ Globally at that time, China operated 1,074 CCs across 131 different countries.⁵⁸

Figure 1.1: Confucius Classrooms Around the World (2017)⁵⁹

Country	Confucius Classrooms
United States	501
United Kingdom	148
Australia	67
Italy	39
South Korea	13
Thailand	20
Germany	4
Japan	8
France	3

In the United States, China oversees CIs through the Confucius Institute US Center in Washington, DC (CIUS). College-based CIs have traditionally served as the primary support program for CCs at the K-12 level.⁶⁰ In August 2020, the US Department of State designated CIUS as a foreign mission in the US. The Center must now provide regular updates on the organization's activities.⁶¹ According to the US Department of State, CIUS regularly received funds from the Hanban.⁶² CIUS social media accounts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter)

54 "Alfred University closes Confucius Institute as a Result of Select Committee Investigation," House Select Committee on the CCP, US House of Representatives, June 15, 2023, (<https://selectcommitteeonthecpp.house.gov/media/press-releases/alfred-university-closes-confucius-institute-result-select-committee/>), accessed Nov. 1, 2023.

55 Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 9.

56 See "How Many Confucius Institutes Are in the United States?", National Association of Scholars official website, (https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/how_many_confucius_institutes_are_in_the_united_states), accessed Nov. 1, 2023.

57 Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 15.

58 Ibid, 24.

59 Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 24-25.

60 Ibid, 25.

61 "Confucius Institute US Center" Designated as a Foreign Mission," US Department of State official website, Aug. 13, 2020, (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/confucius-institute-u-s-center-designation-as-a-foreign-mission/>), accessed Oct. 28, 2023.

62 Ibid.

have shown no new activity since the summer of 2021. The official website for CIUS, (<http://www.ciuscenter.org/>), is no longer active as of this writing.

While most CIs have closed, the total number of active CCs remains unknown. Despite this uncertainty, China-linked language programs persist around the country. PDE noted the survival of at least seven separate programs in American K-12 schools.⁶³ China's efforts to influence American children also include the use of China-owned social media platforms such as TikTok and other tech-based approaches to wage cognitive warfare.

Policymakers in the West have debated the TikTok threat, both in terms of data privacy and its role in assisting Chinese propaganda efforts. Last year, the Center for European Policy Analysis noted that TikTok's algorithms are programmed to determine the virility of content posted on the platform and to determine what content gets suppressed or promoted.⁶⁴ Even as Western skepticism over the app's safety led to increased calls to ban it, TikTok remains popular among teenagers, the same age demographic as students targeted by CCs.

CCs cannot be analyzed in isolation but must be viewed alongside the CCP's other methods of influence.⁶⁵ As schools shifted to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Lingo Bus, a subsidiary of the CCP-linked company VIPkid, donated access to its Mandarin language platform to American K-12 schools.⁶⁶ The platform's content includes "military parades," and a promotion of Xi Jinping as an influencer personality.⁶⁷ At Cascade Elementary in Utah, a Mandarin teacher using this app integrated it into her overall course material. Zheng Yamin, a Mandarin teacher at the school, had her students write cards to Xi Jinping to celebrate the Lunar New Year.⁶⁸ Surprisingly, President Xi wrote back with a promise to visit the school.⁶⁹

Beijing's interest in American education extends beyond its mainstream K-12 schools and universities. China has targeted private military academies and elite schools specializing in science and technology. In 2015, a Chinese nonprofit named the Research Center on National Conservation purchased the New York Military Academy for \$15.83 million after outbidding another Chinese rival.⁷⁰ Two years later, Florida Preparatory Academy, which hosts a Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) program for future US Air Force officers,

63 "Little Red Classrooms," Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/>), accessed Sept. 2, 2023.

64 Emanuele Rossi and Giorgio Rutelli, "There is a Chinese Spy Balloon in Our Pockets—TikTok," Center for European Policy Analysis, March 10, 2023, (<https://cepa.org/article/there-is-a-chinese-spy-balloon-in-our-pockets-tiktok/>), accessed April 28, 2023.

65 Colleen McClain, "A declining share of adults, and few teens, support a US TikTok ban," Pew Research, Dec. 11, 2023, (<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/12/11/a-declining-share-of-adults-and-few-teens-support-a-us-tiktok-ban/>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

66 Natalie Winters, "Exclusive: CCP-Linked Firm Targets US Schoolkids With Chinese 'Morality and Values,' Shows CCP Military Parades in Schools," The National Pulse, April 27, 2020, (<https://thenationalpulse.com/archive-post/chinese-utah-schools/>), accessed Oct. 9, 2023.

67 Ibid. See also Julia Pierrpont III and Gao Shan, "US 4th-graders proud to be pen pals with Xi," China Daily, March 5, 2020, (<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/05/WS5e600715a31012821727c5ee.html>), accessed Oct. 9, 2023.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Daniel Bases, "New York Military Academy sold in bidding war to Chinese investors," Reuters, Sept. 30, 2015, (<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL1N1203KZ/>), accessed Oct. 12, 2023.

was bought by a subsidiary of a Chinese company called the Newopen Group.⁷¹ Primavera Capital, a Chinese private equity firm, paid roughly \$500 million to buy the Stratford School, a network of elite private schools in California.⁷² In this latter case, Chinese investors purchased the schools to help profit from Chinese students seeking admissions to American colleges and universities.⁷³

In March of last year, Thomas Jefferson High School, an elite school in Virginia, received over \$1 million from foundations and backers tied to the Chinese government and its United Front Work Department (UFWD).⁷⁴ In 2020, the US Department of Defense noted that Tsinghua University, one of the top universities in China, was replicating Thomas Jefferson's "model" of teaching in the PRC.⁷⁵ Surveying China's investments in US education indicates that Beijing is strategically targeting schools and universities to sway Americans and gain advantage.

The Relationship Between Confucius Classrooms and Confucius Institutes

Structurally, CIs in higher education have been a source of support and guidance for CCs at the K-12 level. American universities would partner with a Chinese counterpart university to form a CI, and that CI would, in turn, empower the creation and operation of CCs in surrounding K-12 schools. For example, China's Capital Normal University formalized a partnership with the University of Buffalo (UB) in 2010 to establish a CI in New York State.⁷⁶ The CI at the University of Buffalo then assisted in securing funding for a CC program at City Honors, a college preparatory school part of the Buffalo Public Schools system.⁷⁷

City Honors, officially known as City Honors School at Fosdick-Masten Park, was named one of the top schools in the Northeast by the *Washington Post* in 2014.⁷⁸ The CI at the University of Buffalo assisted with providing seed money and designating the school's Mandarin program. City Honors received \$25,000 in its first year in the program, with a noted annual

71 Madeleine Hubbard, "Chinese Communist Party-linked companies are purchasing US military academies," *Just the News*, Feb. 1, 2023, (<https://justthenews.com/government/security/chinese-communist-party-linked-companies-are-purchasing-us-military-academies?callback=in&code=NZC3MWMWOWMTMJVLMCOZMGJKLW11NGETYWE2MDMWOWEWM-DIY&state=099680372d0e463c80448cf2f710580a>), accessed Oct. 12, 2023.

72 Andrew R. Arthur, "Chinese Investors Bought K-12 Private Schools in the United States," *Center for Immigration Studies*, May 23, 2020, (<https://cis.org/Arthur/Chinese-Investors-Bought-K12-Private-Schools-United-States>), accessed Oct. 11, 2023.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Josh Christenson, "Elite US high school took more than \$1 million from Chinese state-tied groups," *New York Post*, March 7, 2023, (<https://nypost.com/2023/03/07/elite-us-high-school-took-1-million-from-chinese-entities/>), accessed Nov. 12, 2023.

75 *Ibid.*

76 Confucius Institute, Capital Normal University official website, (<https://eng.cnu.edu.cn/International2/CI/index.htm>), accessed Oct. 12, 2023.

77 "City Honors celebrates Confucius Classroom designation," *WBFO NPR*, Feb. 25, 2016, (<https://www.wbfo.org/education/2016-02-25/city-honors-celebrates-confucius-classroom-designation>), accessed Sept. 14, 2023.

78 America's Most Challenging Schools, *The Washington Post*, 2014, (<https://apps.washingtonpost.com/local/highschool-challenge/>), accessed Sept. 14, 2023.

and renewing stipend of \$10,000.⁷⁹ Dr. Jiyuan Yu, the Executive Director of the University of Buffalo's CI, implied the political nature of the new CC program by stating:

And tomorrow we expect that you to become [sic] American ambassadors to China. To become top scholars in area of China studies to become great specialist [sic] in all areas of US-China relationships [sic] and make contributions to peace.⁸⁰

The CI at the University of Buffalo oversaw the area's CC program and regularly assessed the school's performance.⁸¹ The University of Buffalo shuttered its CI in 2021.⁸² Between UB's CI and its affiliated CCs, over 35,000 students in New York attended Mandarin courses through a Confucius program.⁸³ Additionally, UB's CI brought 42 teachers from China to CCs in the counties of Erie and Niagara.⁸⁴ At City Honors alone, 300 students studied Chinese when the CC opened.⁸⁵

Lew-Port High School, another Confucius Classroom, formalized its pre-existing relationship with a school in China by affiliating with the Confucius Institute at the University of Buffalo. When it opened in 2014, Lew-Port High School Principal Paul Casseri explained that the school's CC designation was built upon a pre-existing partnership with Tianjin No. 2 High School in China.⁸⁶ Rather than forge a new connection with China, Lew-Port's CC status simply augmented what was already in place. UB's CI director, Yu Yuan, noted that the CI would assist in securing textbooks and "computer equipment" for Lew-Port's Chinese program.⁸⁷

In the case of New York's CCs, demand for Mandarin courses is likely due to organic appetite for the language at the K-12 level. Stephen Dunnett, Vice-President for International Education at UB, explained to the NAS in 2017 that a lack of funding from the state of New York was the primary motivation for the Buffalo school district to seek funding from China. Dunnett stated:

79 "City Honors celebrates Confucius Classroom designation," WBFO NPR, Feb. 25, 2016, (<https://www.wbfo.org/education/2016-02-25/city-honors-celebrates-confucius-classroom-designation>), accessed Sept. 14, 2023.

80 Ibid.

81 Renewal Agreement, University of Buffalo, Article 6. Cited in Rachele Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017).

82 Jay Rey, "UB to close Confucius Institute," UBNOW, May 14, 2021, (<https://www.buffalo.edu/ubnow/stories/2021/05/confucius-institute-closing.html>), accessed Sept. 14, 2023.

83 "UB Confucius Institute celebrates 12 years of impactful programming," UBNOW, Jan. 4, 2022, (<https://www.buffalo.edu/ubnow/stories/2022/01/confucius-institute-farewell.html>), accessed Oct. 4, 2023.

84 Ibid.

85 "Buffalo public school designated Confucius Classroom School," KSL.com, Feb. 12, 2016, (<https://www.ksl.com/article/38475322/buffalo-public-school-designated-confucius-classroom-school>), accessed Oct. 4, 2023.

86 Timothy Chipp, "'Confucius Classroom' opened at Lew-Port High," Niagara Gazette, Feb. 9, 2014, (https://www.niagara-gazette.com/news/local_news/confucius-classroom-opened-at-lew-port-high/article_e664d074-4ce0-560a-855c-5ce5223fe5f2.html), accessed Oct. 12, 2023.

87 Timothy Chipp, "'Confucius Classroom' opened at Lew-Port High," Niagara Gazette, Feb. 9, 2014, (https://www.niagara-gazette.com/news/local_news/confucius-classroom-opened-at-lew-port-high/article_e664d074-4ce0-560a-855c-5ce5223fe5f2.html), accessed Oct. 12, 2023.

It's shameful that the only way we can offer Chinese in the Buffalo school district—which is almost bankrupt—is that we have to ask the Chinese. It's sad. Did we beg from France? Thanks to the Chinese taxpayers, 3,000 school children are learning Chinese. There is no way for them to learn Chinese if not for this program.⁸⁸

Dunnett's observations highlight why China's Confucius Classrooms have been popular.

Several studies highlight the paltry state of foreign language enrollment across the American K-12 system. A 2017 study by the nonprofit Atlantic Council discovered only 20 percent of American K-12 students were enrolled in a foreign language course.⁸⁹ Nationwide, only 11 states were found to have foreign language graduation requirements.⁹⁰ A 2021 report from the Modern Language Association (MLA) found that foreign language enrollment in higher education fell from 2016 through 2021, with only American Sign Language, Biblical Hebrew, and Korean showing moderate increases in enrollment over that period.⁹¹

A lack of prominent, well-funded K-12 foreign language programs left the door open for China's entry into the US education system. In 2015, US President Barack Obama announced the launch of a program called the "1 Million Strong Initiative" to encourage the study of Mandarin.⁹² This initiative, a program under the auspices of a nonprofit called the 100,000 Strong Foundation, was designed to increase the number of American students learning Chinese to 1 million by the year 2020.⁹³ According to 2021 estimations by the Chinese language learning platform LingoAce, approximately 420,000 children in the US are studying Chinese.⁹⁴ Using data from the American Councils for International Education, the US-China Institute at the University of Southern California (USC) found that just over 227,000 US K-12 students were enrolled in Chinese courses as of 2017.⁹⁵ Chinese is not a popular foreign language choice among US students, frequently ranking below Spanish, French, and German while ranking slightly higher than Latin.⁹⁶

88 Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 70.

89 "The National K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report," Atlantic Councils, (2017), (<https://www.americancouncils.org/sites/default/files/FILE-report-June17.pdf>), accessed, Oct. 12, 2023, 6-7.

90 *Ibid*, 6-7.

91 Natalia Lusin et al, "Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in US Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2021," Modern Language Association, (2023), (<https://www.mla.org/content/download/191324/file/Enrollments-in-Languages-Other-Than-English-in-US-Institutions-of-Higher-Education-Fall-2021.pdf>), accessed Nov. 2, 2023.

92 Jennifer Walker, "Following a period of intense growth, Chinese language programs are poised to develop in new ways as more students enter universities with some knowledge of the language," NAFSA official website, July/Aug. 2016, (<https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/publications/new-era-chinese-language#:~:text=An%20increasing%20Demand%20for%20Advanced%20Chinese%20Classes&text=There%20are%20already%20347%20Confucius,more%20upper%20level%20Chinese%20courses.>), accessed Oct. 15, 2023.

93 *Ibid*.

94 "The State of Chinese Language Learning in the US," LingoAce official website, Jan. 5, 2023, (<https://www.lingoace.com/blog/the-state-of-chinese-language-learning-in-the-us/>), accessed Oct. 20, 2023.

95 "Studying Chinese in America," USC US-China Institute official website, Dec. 9, 2021, (<https://china.usc.edu/studying-chinese-america>), accessed Dec. 1, 2023.

96 "Studying Chinese in America," USC US-China Institute official website, Dec. 9, 2021, (<https://china.usc.edu/studying-chinese-america>), accessed Dec. 1, 2023.

Confucius Classrooms Compared to Other State-Backed Foreign Language Programs

Nations sponsor language programs abroad to exert cultural influence, soft power, and citizen diplomacy. Programs such as France's Alliance Française, the United Kingdom's British Council, Spain's Instituto Cervantes, and Italy's Societa Dante Alighieri all promote language learning abroad as a form of cultural diplomacy. What differentiates CCs from their counterparts is the direct and invasive involvement of the Chinese government.

NAS observed in 2017 that Confucius Institutes are embedded within universities, a clear distinction from European-sponsored language programs. One anonymous British professor noted that CIs offer Beijing a direct "platform to function in the university."⁹⁷ What separates China's Confucius programs from other language initiatives is the top-down, contractual imposition of Chinese policy into the classroom.

Prior to the massive wave of CI closures across the US, American partner colleges were subject to upholding China's interests. This was a contractual "obligation to uphold and defend the reputation and image of the Confucius Institutes," under the threat of legal action.⁹⁸ Contracts between China and their host universities enabled the Hanban to "sue directors or teachers in Confucius Institutes who develop lessons or lectures without clearing them with the Hanban first."⁹⁹ No such equivalent model of foreign government intrusion or assertion is known to occur with other foreign language programs.

Unlike China's language programs, France's Alliance Française and Germany's Goethe Institutes constitute independent nonprofit organizations based within civil society. While these European programs do reflect their respective countries' interests, they nonetheless remain distinct private actors. The disparity between China's Confucius programs and language programs elsewhere is a product of China's single-party dictatorship. Spain, France, and Italy are all democracies and promote their respective languages predominantly through independent networks of nonprofits.

In 2010, China's minister of propaganda, Liu Yunshan, asserted the need for language programs to assist in fulfilling Beijing's ideological missions abroad. In a 2010 *People's Daily* article, Yunshan stated:

With regard to key issues that influence our sovereignty and safety, we should actively carry out propaganda battles against issuers such as Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan,

97 Interview with Rachelle Peterson and anonymous professor at a UK university hosting a Confucius Institute, cited in Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 77.

98 Chapter 7: Rights and Obligations," *Constitution and By-Laws*, cited in Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 77-78.

99 Chapter 7: Rights and Obligations," *Constitution and By-Laws*, cited in Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 77-78.

human rights, and Falun Gong...We should do well in establishing and operating overseas cultural centers and Confucius Institutes.¹⁰⁰

The Hanban and its later incarnations as the CLEC and CIEF are extensions of the CCP. On the surface, the Hanban, known also as the Office of Chinese Language Council International, operated as a nonprofit.¹⁰¹ However, the Hanban was overseen by Chinese government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Press and Publishing Association, and the CCP's propaganda agency.¹⁰² In 2019, China's Vice-Premier, Sun Chunlan, offered the keynote address at a CLEC conference in Changsha about the need for Chinese language instruction before an audience of over 1,000 representatives from CIs based in 160 different countries.¹⁰³ During her tenure promoting China's Confucius programs, Sun Chunlan also served as the chair of China's United Front Work Department (UFWD).¹⁰⁴

The UFWD emerged out the CCP's struggle for control of China in the 1930s and 1940s against the Japanese and nationalist Koumintang. Formalized in 1946 in the midst of the Chinese Civil War, the UFWD coordinates activities abroad to assist in furthering Beijing's national interests.¹⁰⁵ The UFWD is overseen by the CCP's Central Committee and conducts influence operations both within China and abroad.¹⁰⁶ Liu Yandong, the head of the UFWD at the time China launched the Confucius language programs in 2004, also served as the head of the Hanban in 2018.¹⁰⁷ China's Confucius programs are an extension of China's state education system and are a clear tool used to achieve national aims in the United States. The next chapter outlines China's strategy of using Confucius Classrooms to build ties with policymakers at the state and local levels.

100 Ethan Epstein, "How China Infiltrated US Classrooms," Politico, Jan. 16, 2018, (<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/16/how-china-infiltrated-us-classrooms-216327/>), accessed Oct. 12, 2023.

101 Ethan Epstein, "How China Infiltrated US Classrooms," Politico, Jan. 16, 2018, (<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/16/how-china-infiltrated-us-classrooms-216327/>), accessed Oct. 20, 2023.

102 Ibid.

103 "China supports intl Chinese language education programs: vice-premier," State Council of the People's Republic of China official website, Dec. 10, 2019, (http://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/sunchunlan/201912/10/content_WS5deed-00fc6d0bcf8c4c1895c.html), accessed Oct. 22, 2023.

104 Peter Mattis, "China's Growing Influence in Asia and the United States," testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation, US Congress, May 8, 2019, (<https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/109458/witnesses/HHRG-116-FA05-Wstate-MattisP-20190508.pdf>), accessed Oct. 22, 2023.

105 See Lian Yi-Zheng, "China Has a Vast Influence Machine, and You Don't Even Know It," The New York Times, May 22, 2018, (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/21/opinion/china-overseas-intelligence-yang.html>), accessed Oct. 22, 2023.

106 See Alexander Bowe, "China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States," US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Aug. 24, 2018, (https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China%27s%20Overseas%20United%20Front%20Work%20-%20Background%20and%20Implications%20for%20US_final_0.pdf), accessed Oct. 22, 2023, 4.

107 Ibid, 12.

Chapter 2



Confucius Classrooms in the United States

Confucius Institutes opened American universities to Beijing's influence and policy. In turn, Confucius Institutes provided much of the structural support for the establishment of Confucius Classrooms in K-12 schools across the country. A staff report to the United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations stated that Beijing aggressively pursued the establishment of Confucius Classrooms, resulting in their exponential growth from 2009 into the 2010s.¹⁰⁸ Rather than grow as an ancillary program to China's better-known CIs, CCs are part of a broader strategy to influence American society and policymakers at the state and local levels.

In 2008, Xu Lin, then-counselor of the State Council of China, tasked US CIs with forming more CCs across the country.¹⁰⁹ In a "Dear Colleague" letter to American CIs, the Hanban sought to collect information about the status of Mandarin language programs in the K-12 system.¹¹⁰ The Hanban sought information about state-level policies promoting Mandarin, the accreditation of "Chinese teacher's certificates," and the number of public and private schools incorporating Chinese into their foreign language curricula.¹¹¹ Minutes from a 2011 CC conference in San Francisco acknowledge the attendance of "200 representatives from 150 operating Confucius Classrooms and 30 Confucius Institutes."¹¹²

In that 2011 meeting, Beijing stated its goal of obtaining a central position within the US school system across multiple states with the blessing of state governments. Minutes from

108 "China's Impact on the US Education System," Rob Portman and Tom Carper, US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, (2017), (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China's%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf>), accessed Nov. 12, 2023, 60.

109 Ibid, 60-61.

110 Ibid, 62.

111 Ibid, 62.

112 Ibid, 62.

the CI conference, obtained by the US Senate, detail Beijing's strategic objectives for targeting the American education system. The minutes state:

First, seek the top-down policy support from the state government, legislative and educational institutions, with a particular emphasis on access to the support from the school district superintendents and principals [sic]; second, to seek the recognition and support from parents and local community, as well as to inspire local demand and enthusiasm for Chinese language and culture learning, through various cultural activities and display of achievements of classroom instruction; third, to integrate the instruction of Chinese language and culture into curriculum [sic] of major subjects teaching taught in US K-12 schools, such as the 'world culture' and other courses, fourth, to create an effective communication mechanism with the local teach unions [sic] and the education administrators, as to create good [sic] environment for the living, cultural orientation and professional development for both the guest and local Chinese teachers, as well as promote the sustainable development of the Confucius Classrooms.¹¹³

The minutes demonstrate that the establishment of CCs forms one part of a broad Chinese effort to co-opt and leverage American institutions at the state and local levels. The Hanban's stated goal of influencing education began with state governments and embraced teachers' unions, school boards, administrators, and parents at the grassroots level. This indicates a "whole of society" approach to utilizing US institutions for its own purposes. In this light, CCs are a means for China to secure influence beyond education alone.

In 2017, China reiterated the role that CIs and CCs play in giving Beijing greater influence. In its annual report that year, the Hanban stated that CIs and CCs function as mechanisms to access broader segments of society in its host countries, and support Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative.¹¹⁴ The Hanban also explained that Mandarin instruction was ultimately aimed at accessing other subjects such as science and technology.¹¹⁵ The Hanban elaborated that CIs and CCs operate to build bilateral ties with state and local leaders beyond the domain of education. The Hanban stated that:

The Confucius Institutes all over the world actively offer Chinese and indigenous enterprises, social organizations and government sectors with language and professional training and actively take part in the cooperation between sister universities and sister states of both sides, and cooperation in economic and trade contact as well as people-to-people and cultural exchanges.¹¹⁶

113 Ibid, 62.

114 Confucius Institute Annual Development Report, Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), 2017.

115 Ibid, 16.

116 Ibid, 16.

China's efforts to access local elites and businesses by leveraging CIs are not unique to the US. In Europe, China established Confucius programs intertwined with Beijing's business interests. For example, former UFWD head Liu Yandong signed an agreement with France's foreign minister to establish a "European Business Confucius Institute," out of a partnership between the Hanban and Paris Ile-de-France Chamber of Commerce and Industry.¹¹⁷

Despite the closure or restructuring of most CIs in the US, relationships between US schools and the Chinese government not only continue but coincide with Beijing's efforts to reinforce its use of education to strengthen the CCP's reach. Often, these relationships grow from travel to China by American educators sponsored by Confucius programs. In October of last year, seven New York City K-12 principals traveled to East China Normal University on a taxpayer-funded trip facilitated by the China Institute.¹¹⁸

The China Institute, a New York nonprofit tied to East China Normal University, remains one of the holdout CIs in the US.¹¹⁹ This trip by New York educators coincided with the passing of a Chinese law designed to "enhance patriotic education."¹²⁰ Adopted on October 24, 2023, Beijing's new education law mandates that teachers in the country "adhere to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party," and instill in their students a "love for the country, love for the Party, and the love of socialism."¹²¹ For China, education secures both political and economic influence.

At the China Institute, the influence of ideology and business interests is evident in its language programs. The Institute's "We All Live in the Forbidden City" program offers workshops for various grade levels throughout the 2023-2024 school year for Title I schools.¹²² Additionally, the Institute's Chinese K-12 programs are partly supported by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, demonstrating Beijing's interest in securing ties with state and local governments.¹²³

Beyond language courses for K-12 students, the China Institute also offers courses and workshops for adults. The Institute similarly hosts lectures and networking events for business professionals. In October 2023, the Institute's Executive Summit featured over 200 attendees to discuss US-China economic relations in light of growing geopolitical tensions.¹²⁴

117 Ibid, 56.

118 Deirdre Bardolf and Susan Edelman, "NYC principals study in China on taxpayer, communist group's dime," *New York Post*, Oct. 28, 2023, (<https://nypost.com/2023/10/28/metro/nyc-principals-study-in-china-on-taxpayer-communist-groups-dime/>), accessed Jan. 1, 2024.

119 Rachele Peterson, *Outsourced to China*, (New York: NAS, 2017), 26.

120 "Legislating Love for the Ruling Party," China Media Project, June 30, 2023, (<https://chinamediaproject.org/2023/06/30/legislating-love-for-the-ruling-party/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

121 "Legislating Love for the Ruling Party," China Media Project, June 30, 2023, (<https://chinamediaproject.org/2023/06/30/legislating-love-for-the-ruling-party/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024. See also Patriotism Education Law of the People's Republic of China, China State Council official website, (https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202310/content_6911481.htm), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

122 "China Institute @ Your School," China Institute official website, (<https://chinainstitute.org/school/for-k-12-schools/china-institute-at-your-school/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

123 Ibid.

124 Executive Summit 2023, China Institute official website, (<https://chinainstitute.org/events/executive-summit-2023/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

Last spring, the China Institute held a lecture titled “Mao and Markets: The Communist Roots of Chinese Enterprise,” which focused on the positive impacts of “Maoist ideology” on China’s economic growth.¹²⁵

The China Institute’s friends also include private Chinese companies following the CCP’s “whole of society” influence campaign. Wanxiang America, a Chinese company, was one of many featured speakers at the China Institute’s Executive Summit.¹²⁶ The company had previously offered financial assistance to the Confucius Classroom program in Chicago’s Public Schools. Chicago accepted the offer. Wanxiang America’s president Pin Ni signed an agreement with the then-Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel to support the city’s K-12 Chinese study abroad program.¹²⁷ This plan, which covered students from 2017-2019, included a \$225,000 grant in addition to subsidizing all of the costs for the participating students.¹²⁸

As an auto parts manufacturer, Wanxiang has invested heavily in mid-western states by purchasing distressed assets from American automotive companies.¹²⁹ The company’s reach extends to multiple states where it has promoted Chinese language programs. In 2015, then-Delaware governor Jack Markell signed an agreement with the Wanxiang Group to send students to study at the company’s Hangzhou plant as part of an intensive language program with professional development.¹³⁰

The State of Delaware and Wanxiang penned a memorandum of understanding stipulating that partnership programs would center on language skills, science, “environmental protection and clean energy solutions.”¹³¹ These examples of Chinese non-profits and businesses hawking language instruction fall alongside China’s promotion of Confucius Classrooms to court economic benefits and politicians.

The exact number of Confucius Classrooms is unknown, and estimates vary. Many past estimations placed the number of CCs at 500.¹³² A 2023 study released by Parents Defending Education numbered CCs at a total of 143 “active and inactive” across 34 states and the

125 Mao and Markets: The Communist Roots of Chinese Enterprise, China Institute official website, (<https://chinainstitute.org/events/mao-and-markets-the-communist-roots-of-chinese-enterprise/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

126 Executive Summit 2023, China Institute official website, (<https://chinainstitute.org/events/executive-summit-2023/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

127 “New agreement signed to extend “study abroad program in China” for another three years,” Chicago Chinese Language Center official website, (<https://www.chicagochineselanguagecenter.com/news/new-agreement-signed-extend-%E2%80%9Cstudy-abroad-program-china%E2%80%9D-another-three-years-0>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

128 Ibid.

129 Peter Wonacott, “China Investing in Rust-Belt Companies,” Wanxiang America Corporation official website, (<https://www.wanxiang.com/wallstreet.html>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

130 Governor Announces China Study Abroad Program for DE High School Students, Office of the Governor for the State of Delaware, Jan. 7, 2015, (<https://news.delaware.gov/2015/01/07/governor-announces-china-study-abroad-program-for-de-high-school-students/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

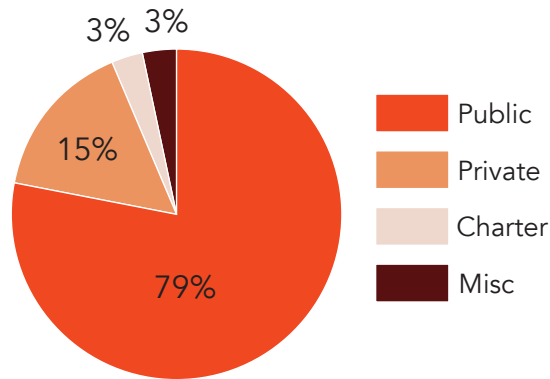
131 Ibid.

132 Letter from Senator Josh Hawley to Alexander N. Cartwright at the University of Missouri at Columbia, July 24, 2019, (<https://www.hawley.senate.gov/following-discussion-fbi-director-wray-senator-hawley-asks-missouri-universities-re-consider-their>), accessed Nov. 23, 2023. See also Lee Edwards, “Confucius Institutes: China’s Trojan Horse,” Commentary on Homeland Security, Heritage Foundation, May 27, 2021, (<https://www.heritage.org/homeland-security/commentary/confucius-institutes-chinas-trojan-horse>), accessed Nov. 21, 2023. See Lauren Baldwin, “Alabama leads nation in eliminating Chinese Communist Party Influence in higher education,” Alabama Today, May 24, 2021, (<https://altoday.com/archives/40382-alabama-leads-nation-in-eliminating-chinese-communist-party-influence-in-higher-education>), accessed Nov. 21, 2023. See also Dan Currell and Mick Zais, “The Confucius Classroom Conundrum,” Newsweek, March 22, 2021, (<https://www.newsweek.com/confucius-classroom-conundrum-opinion-1577492>), accessed Nov. 21, 2023.

District of Columbia.¹³³ Our study found a total of 164 Confucius Classrooms not previously listed. This dataset was obtained from publicly available media reports and from other open sources in the United States and China. Our investigation discovered CCs at schools of various types. CCs were found across a spectrum of institutions that includes public school districts, single private schools, charter schools, and specialized community schools. The student population of these host schools also varies considerably.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), which houses a CC in the form of its Chicago Chinese Language Center, is home to 330,000 students across 646 separate individual schools.¹³⁴ In contrast, Wisconsin’s Verona Area International School is a public charter school with a small student body of only 120 students.¹³⁵ While the 2023 report from Parents Defending Education highlights the proximity of CCs to US military bases, this report discovered that CCs follow a layered, “whole of society” targeting effort.

Figure 2.1: Confucius Classroom Host Schools
Confucius Classrooms by School Type



133 “Little Red Classrooms: China’s Infiltration of American K-12 Schools,” Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/>), accessed Nov. 21, 2023.

134 Chicago Public Schools, US News, (<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/illinois/districts/city-of-chicago-sd-299-110570#:~:text=Overview%20of%20Chicago%20Public%20Schools,of%20students%20are%20economically%20disadvantaged.>), accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

135 Verona Area International School, US News, (<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/wisconsin/verona-area-international-school-248834#:~:text=The%20student%20population%20of%20Verona,the%20school%20serves%20K%2D5.>), accessed Dec. 14, 2023.

Figure 2.2: List of Known Confucius Classroom Programs

#	Name	City or County	State	School Type
1	Alexander Dawson School	Las Vegas	NV	Private
2	Anderson High School	Anderson	IN	Public
3	Anderson High School	Austin	TX	Public
4	Andover Public Schools	Andover	MA	Public
5	Arizona City Elementary	Arizona City	AZ	Public
6	Arlington Memorial High School/Battenkill Valley Supervisory Union	Arlington	VT	Community
7	Atlanta Public Schools	Atlanta	GA	Public
8	Bangor Chinese School	Bangor Maine	ME	Misc.
9	Barnard Mandarin Chinese Magnet School	Point Loma	CA	Public
10	Beechwood Independent School District	Fort Mitchell	KY	Public
11	Bentonville High School	Bentonville	AR	Public
12	Booker T, Washington High School	Tulsa	OK	Public
13	Boston College High School	Boston	MA	Private
14	Boston Latin Academy	Boston	MA	Public Exam School
15	Boston Renaissance Public Charter School	Hyde Park	MA	Charter Elementary
16	Boulder Creek High School	Anthem	AZ	Public
17	Brockton High School	Brockton	MA	Public Option
18	Broward County Public Schools	Fort Lauderdale	FL	Public
19	Brownsburg Community School Corporation	Brownsburg	IN	Public
20	Buffalo City Schools	Buffalo	NY	Public
21	Buncombe County Schools	Buncombe County	NC	Public
22	Canyons School District	Multiple	UT	Public
23	Carroll County Schools	Carrollton	KY	Public
24	Cascade Heights Public Charter School	Clackamas	OR	Public Charter
25	Castaic Union School District	Valencia	CA	Public
26	Cedarlane Middle School	Hacienda Heights	CA	Public
27	Chagrin Falls Exempted High School	Chagrin Falls	OH	Public
28	Charlotte County Public Schools	Charlotte County	FL	Public
29	Chicago Public Schools	Chicago	IL	Public
30	Clark County School District	Clark County	NV	Public
31	Cloverport Independent School District	Cloverport	KY	Misc.
32	Collegiate School	Richmond	VA	Private
33	Concord High School	Concord	NC	Public
34	Concordia Language Villages	Moorhead	MN	Misc.
35	Confucius Classroom at Central Carolina Community College	Sanford	NC	Community College/ Public

36	Confucius Classroom at Chagrin Falls Exempted Village School	Chagrin Falls	OH	Public
37	Confucius Classroom at Columbus School for Girls	Columbus	OH	Private
38	Confucius Classroom at Dalton School	New York	NY	Private
39	Confucius Classroom at Germantown Academy	Fort Washington	PA	Private
40	Confucius Classroom at Hotchkiss School	Lakeville	CT	Private, Preparatory
41	Confucius Classroom at Lafayette School Corporation	Lafayette	IN	Public
42	Confucius Classroom at Paint Branch Elementary School	College Park	MD	Public
43	Confucius Classroom at the Academy of International Studies at Rosemont	Norfolk	VA	Public
44	Confucius Classroom at Washington Yuying Public Charter School	Washington	DC	Public Charter
45	Confucius Institute of Western Kentucky	Multiple locations	KY	Multiple
46	Consolidated School District 158	Huntley	IL	Public
47	Culver Academies	Culver	IN	Private
48	Denver Confucius Classroom	Denver	CO	Community College/ Public
49	District 742: St. Cloud, Minnesota Area	St. Cloud	MN	Public
50	East-West School of International Studies	Queens	NY	Public
51	Eastwood Knolls International	El Paso	TX	Public
52	Edward Bleeker JHS 185	Queens	NY	Public
53	Enloe High School	Raleigh	NC	Public
54	Fairfax County Public Schools	Fairfax Co.	VA	Public
55	Falls Church City Public Schools	Falls Church	VA	Public
56	Fayette County Public School	Lexington	KY	Public
57	Fergus Falls High School	Fergus Falls	MN	Public
58	Fleming County Schools	Fleming Co.	KY	Public
59	Forest Hill Public Schools	Ada Township, Cascade Township, Grand Rapids Township	MI	Public
60	Francis Parker School of Louisville	Louisville	KY	Private
61	Gahanna-Jefferson School District	Gahanna	OH	Public
62	Garrison Forest School	Owings Mills	MD	Private, All-Girls School
63	Gavilan Peak School	Anthem	AZ	Public
64	Glastonbury Public School District	Glastonbury	CT	Public
65	Global Village Collaborative	Thornton	CO	Language Immersion Charter School
66	Greenwich High School	Greenwich	CT	Public
67	Grosse-Pointe Public School System	Grosse-Pointe	MI	Public
68	Hardin County Public Schools	Hardin Co.	KY	Public
69	Harrison County School District	Harrison Co.	WV	Public

70	Hazel Green school district	Hazel Green	WI	Public
71	Henderson County Public Schools	Henderson Co.	KY	Public
72	Heritage Hall School	Oklahoma City	OK	Private
74	Herricks Public Schools	Hyde Park	NY	Public
74	Highland Park Independent School District	Dallas	TX	Public
75	Hilltop High School	Chula Vista	CA	Public
76	Hopkins Public Schools/XinXing Chinese Immersion Program	Hopkins	MN	Public
77	Horseshoe Trails	Phoenix	AZ	Public
78	Houston Academy for International Studies	Houston	TX	Public
79	Huntley Community School District 158	Algonquin	IL	Public
80	International High School at Sharpstown	Houston	TX	Public Magnet School
81	International School of Indiana	Indianapolis	IN	Private
82	International School of Portland Oregon	Portland	OR	Private
83	International School of the Americas	San Antonio	Texas	Public Magnet School
84	International School of Tucson	Tucson	AZ	Private
85	Jefferson County Public Schools	Jefferson Co.	KY	Public
86	Jonas Clark Middle School	Lexington	MA	Public
87	Kennedy High School	Cedar Rapids	IA	Public
88	Kettle Moraine High School	Wales	WI	Public
89	Kolter Elementary	Houston	TX	Public
90	Lake Forest High School District 115	Lake Forest	IL	Public
91	Lawrence High School	Lawrence Township	NJ	Public
92	Lone Mountain Elementary School	Cave Creek	AZ	Public
93	Louisville Collegiate School	Louisville	KY	Private
94	LREI (Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School)	New York	NY	Independent
95	Medfield Public Schools	Medfield	MA	Public
96	Medger Evers College Preparatory School	Brooklyn	NY	Public
97	Minnetonka Public Schools	Minnetonka	MI	Public
98	Monongalia County Schools	Monongalia Co.	WV	Public
99	Montgomery County Schools	Mount Sterling	KY	Public
100	Natrona County High School	Natrona County	WY	Public
101	New Prairie Schools	New Carlisle	IN	Public
102	Norfolk Public Schools	Norfolk	VA	Public
103	North Attleboro High School	North Attleborough	MA	Public
104	North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics	Durham	NC	Public
105	Old Bridge School District Confucius Classroom New Jersey	Old Bridge Township	NJ	Public
106	Oldham County Schools	Crestwood	KY	Public
107	Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES	New Hartford	NY	Public

108	Orange Unified School District	Orange County	CA	Public
109	Oxford Community Schools	Oxford	MI	Public
110	Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School	Oxford County	ME	Public
111	PA Sewickley Academy	Sewickley	PA	Private
112	Peddie School	Hightown	NJ	Private
113	Philadelphia Girls High School	Philadelphia	PA	Public Preparatory
114	Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School	Hadley	MA	Public Charter
115	Piscataway High School	Piscataway	NJ	Public
116	Point Loma High School	San Diego	CA	Public
117	Prairie du Chien School District	Prairie du Chien	WI	Public
118	Renaissance Academy	Lehi	UT	Charter
119	Rhodes Junior High School	Mesa	AZ	Public
120	Riverview Elementary School and International Academy	Lakeside	CA	Public
121	Safety Harbor Middle School	Safety Harbor	FL	Public
122	Sammamish High School	Sammamish	WA	Public
123	San Diego Unified School District	San Diego	CA	Public
124	Sandwich High School	East Sandwich	MA	Public
125	Saylesville Elementary School	Lincoln	RI	Public
126	Seattle Public Schools	Seattle	WA	Public
127	Semillas Community School	Los Angeles	CA	Charter
128	Shaker Heights High School	Shaker Heights	OH	Public
129	Simpson County Schools	Franklin	KY	Public
130	Sisters School District	Sisters	OR	Public
131	Simsbury Public Schools	Simsbury	CT	Public
132	Snowden International School	Boston	MA	Public
133	South Kingstown Schools	South Kingstown	RI	Public
134	South Redford School District	Redford	MI	Public
135	St. Cloud Area School District	Waite Park	MN	Public
136	St. Louis University High School	St. Louis	MO	Private School
137	St. Mary Central High School	Neenah	WI	Private
138	St. Mary School, (Medford, Oregon)	Medford	OR	Private
139	Sumner County Schools	Sumner Co.	TN	Public
140	Sunrise Drive Elementary School/Catalina Foothills School District Chinese	Tucson	AZ	Public
141	Sunset Ridge Elementary Academy for Arts and World Languages	East Hartford	CT	Public Magnet
142	Syracuse Junior High School	North Syracuse	NY	Public
143	Tailwood High School	Virginia Beach	VA	Public
144	The Hill School	Pottstown	PA	Private
145	The Pingry School	Bernards Township	NJ	Private

146	The Roeper School	Bloomfield Hills	MI	Private
147	Thea Bowman Leadership Academy	Gary	IN	Charter
148	Tulsa Public Schools	Tulsa	OK	Public
149	Tyee Middle School	Bellevue	WA	Public
150	Verona Area International School	Verona	WI	Public Charter
151	Wake Technical Community College	Raleigh	NC	Public
152	Wardlaw-Hartridge School	Edison	NJ	Private
153	Washington Yu Ying Public Charter Elementary School	Washington	DC	Public Charter
154	Wayzata High School	Hennepin County	MN	Public
155	West Hartford public Schools	West Hartford	CT	Public
156	West Orange Public Schools	West Orange	NJ	Public
157	Westerly Public Schools	Westerly	RI	Public
158	William Winsor Elementary School	Greenville	RI	Public
159	Wilmar High School	Willmar	MN	Public
160	Winton Woods School District	Cincinnati	OH	Public
161	Winston-Salem Forsyth Schools	Forsyth County	NC	Public
162	YES Prep Brays Oaks	Houston	TX	Public Charter
163	Yinghua Academy	Minneapolis	MN	Public Charter
164	West Virginia Dept. of Ed.	Multiple	WV	Public

Structurally, CCs have often relied on a supporting institution in the form of a CI or independent nonprofit for funds and teachers. CI support for CCs blurs the line between the two due to the flow of resources that the K-12 schools have received. In a 2019 statement, Ohio Senator Rob Portman noted that in two separate audits of CIs, investigators from the US Department of State discovered over 30 instances of visa abuse in which Chinese teachers meant to be working at university-based CIs were actually found working in CCs.¹³⁶ In these instances, the Department of State also discovered that CCs and CIs deliberately evaded investigators.¹³⁷ Perhaps more concerning than visa fraud is the fact that the Federal government discovered that roughly 70 percent of programs that were investigated in this instance failed to disclose foreign financial aid that surpassed the mandatory reporting threshold of \$250,000.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Senator Rob Portman, "China's Impact on the US Education System," Feb. 28, 2019, (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/2019-02-28%20Portman%20Confucius%20Opening%20Statement%20FINAL.pdf>), accessed Nov. 21, 2023.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 4.

Confucius Classroom Facilitators

Confucius Classrooms proliferated alongside Confucius Institutes, which have served as a main conduit of support and resources from the Chinese government. However, CCs have also relied upon a broader coalition of institutions and initiatives in the form of nonprofits, sister-city partnerships, and assistance from local policymakers and business communities. China's Confucius programs demonstrate a multilayered approach to penetrate various layers of American education while also influencing the rest of society. The support for CCs derives from a number of actors and officials beyond the schools directly involved. Below is an examination of how these different actors have played a role in establishing and growing CCs across the United States.

Confucius Institutes

Confucius Institutes form the traditional backer for Confucius Classrooms. While the majority of CIs have closed, been transferred, or rebranded at their host universities, the relationships with the CCs under their tutelage warrant further examination in order to highlight how funds, personnel, and curricula have flowed from CIs to the K-12 system. Financially, CIs have typically supported CCs in the form of funds amounting to \$10,000 per program, with the additional support of \$20,000 in the form of learning materials.¹³⁹

Operationally, CIs have managed many of the business and administrative aspects of the CCs at their affiliated schools. A Senate report by the Committee on Homeland Security Affairs discovered that budgetary oversight and accounting responsibilities for CCs often fell under the auspices of a supervisory CI.¹⁴⁰ Within the school where the CC is hosted, oversight typically rests with the school's principal or vice-principal with varying degrees of contractual autonomy.¹⁴¹ As CIs closed and shifted to new hosts, some constituent CCs have survived through a similar transfer to nearby school districts. Unfortunately, the investigation by the Committee on Homeland Security Affairs found that the Department of Education "does not conduct regular oversight of US schools' compliance with required foreign gift reporting."¹⁴²

In the United States, CIs first emerged in the early 2000s. The first American partnership started between the University of Maryland and China's Nankai University.¹⁴³ In

139 China's Impact on the US Education System, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, US Senate, (2019), (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China's%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf>), 19. Accessed Dec. 29, 2023.

140 Rob Portman and Tom Caprer, "China's Impact on the US Education System," Staff Report for the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, US Senate, (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China's%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf>), 64.

141 Ibid, 64.

142 Rob Portman and Tom Caprer, "China's Impact on the US Education System," Staff Report for the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, US Senate, (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China's%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf>), 7.

143 Jenny Abamu, "University of Maryland Faces Questions Over Chinese Government's Role in Program," WAMU 88.5, Aug. 22, 2019, (<https://wamu.org/story/19/08/22/university-of-maryland-faces-questions-over-chinese-governments-role-in-program/>), accessed Dec. 5, 2023.

exchange for hosting the CI, the University of Maryland accepted teachers from Nankai and ceded approval over the CI's actions to the Chinese government.¹⁴⁴ The amount of Chinese funds for the University of Maryland was substantial, and it was included in a 2015 agreement in which the university agreed to dedicate an official university building to the program in exchange for \$900,000.¹⁴⁵ After the University of Maryland announced its withdrawal from China's Confucius program, it returned all funding to Beijing.¹⁴⁶ Paint Branch Elementary, a high-performing elementary school in College Park, Maryland, partnered with the University of Maryland's CI in an effort to internationalize its curriculum.¹⁴⁷

In 2010, Paint Branch Elementary principal Jay B. Teston noted that one of the goals of the school was to build "international education" and "go deeper into our projects involving Chinese language and culture."¹⁴⁸ Teston's motivations echoed those of Maryland's CI director, Alan Chung, who stated that mastery of Mandarin was helpful for students "in a global society."¹⁴⁹ It is critical to note that the partnership between Paint Branch Elementary and China was not restricted to the CI at the University of Maryland. Paint Branch also had a partnership with Nankai University's own elementary school in Tianjin.¹⁵⁰ This bilateral K-12 partnership included opportunities for student travel to China.¹⁵¹

The prominence of the CC at Paint Branch quickly grew after its founding. By 2012, the school boasted a Chinese immersion program under the auspices of its partnership with the CI at the University of Maryland.¹⁵² That year, 15 students from the school traveled to China, while students from its own Nankai partner school visited Paint Branch Elementary.¹⁵³ The immersion program at the school began with kindergartners, and included the parallel teaching of other subjects *within* both Mandarin and English through the sixth grade.¹⁵⁴ Notably, the school's language lab was also a recipient of \$25,000 in the form of a state grant for teaching Mandarin.¹⁵⁵ In media coverage of the Paint Branch program, the *Washington*

144 Ibid.

145 Rachele Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence on American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 66-67.

146 66-67.

147 Michelle J. Nealy, "Meet the Principals of College Park," Patch, Aug. 24, 2010, (<https://patch.com/maryland/collegepark/meet-the-principals-of-college-park>), accessed Nov. 3, 2023.

148 Michelle J. Nealy, "Meet the Principals of College Park," Patch, Aug. 24, 2010, (<https://patch.com/maryland/collegepark/meet-the-principals-of-college-park>), accessed Nov. 3, 2023.

149 "Local school learns Chinese culture," Medium, Dec. 25, 2009, (<https://medium.com/umdplex/local-school-learns-chinese-culture-4b000c0a299>), accessed Nov. 3, 2023.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid.

152 Ovetta Williams, "Prince George's adds Chinese immersion at elementary school," The Washington Post, Feb. 9, 2012, (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/prince-georges-adds-chinese-immersion-at-elementary-school/2012/02/02/gIQA824L1Q_story.html), accessed Nov. 5, 2023.

153 Ovetta Williams, "Prince George's adds Chinese immersion at elementary school," The Washington Post, Feb. 9, 2012, (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/prince-georges-adds-chinese-immersion-at-elementary-school/2012/02/02/gIQA824L1Q_story.html), accessed Nov. 5, 2023.

154 Ovetta Williams, "Prince George's adds Chinese immersion at elementary school," The Washington Post, Feb. 9, 2012, (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/prince-georges-adds-chinese-immersion-at-elementary-school/2012/02/02/gIQA824L1Q_story.html), accessed Nov. 5, 2023.

155 Ovetta Williams, "Prince George's adds Chinese immersion at elementary school," The Washington Post, Feb. 9, 2012, (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/prince-georges-adds-chinese-immersion-at-elementary-school/2012/02/02/gIQA824L1Q_story.html), accessed Nov. 5, 2023.

Post noted the prominence of PRC flags within the classroom. As national criticism of CIs grew, so did criticism of CCs. At Paint Branch, one critic noted her concern over the travel component of the program, and young students being exposed to a “collectivist view as opposed to an individualist view” at such a young age.¹⁵⁶

Partnerships between K-12 schools and China sometimes grew independently but concurrently with established CIs. Atlanta Public Schools (APS) began its CC initiative alongside the founding of the CI at Emory University through its partnership with Nanjing University.¹⁵⁷ The Emory-APS partnership (also known as the Confucius Institute in Atlanta) was designed to be a Georgia-wide “regional Center for Chinese teacher training and Chinese instruction” to “pool together China specialists in universities in the Atlanta area.”¹⁵⁸

At its opening, the CI in Atlanta foreshadowed the 2011 plan outlined by China to normalize Confucius programs across the United States. The Confucius Institute in Atlanta stated its intent to expand beyond the confines of academic institutions in order to offer its language courses to the broader public. It sought to act as a model for Mandarin programs across Georgia, and to offer “classes in language and culture geared toward Atlanta’s business community, teachers, parents, and the public.”¹⁵⁹ The Emory-led partnership ended in 2021.¹⁶⁰

Major metropolitan areas with large school systems are attractive targets for China’s influence operations. As of 2023, APS had a student body of roughly 50,000 students across 59 “neighborhood schools,” “5 partner schools,” and 19 charter schools.¹⁶¹ Chicago Public Schools (CPS) dwarfs APS with its student population of roughly 330,000 students across 646 separate schools.¹⁶² The CC at CPS is still in operation following the replacement of its host CI program in 2020 and was rebranded as the Chicago Chinese Language Center.¹⁶³ CPS opened its CC through a partnership with the Hanban and Shanghai East China Normal University in 2006. It also has the distinction of being the first CI “housed in a K-12 environment.”¹⁶⁴ In other words, the CI and CC in Chicago schools have been the same program.

156 “Local school learns Chinese culture,” Medium, Dec. 25, 2009, (<https://medium.com/umduplex/local-school-learns-chinese-culture-4b000c0a299>), accessed Nov. 3, 2023.

157 “The Confucius Institute in Atlanta to Officially Open,” China Research Center, Nov. 4, 2008, (<https://www.chinacenter.net/news/the-confucius-institute-in-atlanta-to-officially-open/>), accessed Nov. 8, 2023.

158 Fred A. Toomer Elementary School, Atlanta Public Schools official website, (<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/Page/7632>), accessed Nov. 10, 2023.

159 Atlantic Public Schools press release, March 19, 2008, (<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/cms/lib/ga01000924/centricity/domain/1655/031808confucius.pdf>), accessed Nov. 12, 2023.

160 “Emory will end agreement with Confucius Institute in 2021,” press release, Emory University official website, Aug. 18, 2020, (https://news.emory.edu/stories/2020/08/upress_confucius_institute/index.html), accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

161 About Our Schools, Atlanta Public Schools official website, (<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/Page/37053>), accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

162 Chicago Public Schools, US News, (<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/illinois/districts/city-of-chicago-sd-299-110570#:~:text=Overview%20of%20Chicago%20Public%20Schools,of%20students%20are%20economically%20disadvantaged.>), accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

163 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China’s Enduring Influence in Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 161.

164 “Chicago Public Schools Chinese World Language Program,” Asia Society, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/chicago-public-schools-chinese-world-language-program>), accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

The CC at CPS emerged out of a pre-existing Chinese language program that was first formed in 1999 with a small cohort of 3 schools.¹⁶⁵ Over time, this Chinese language program grew to encompass 13,000 students learning Chinese from elementary to high school.¹⁶⁶ Chinese is now among the top three foreign languages studied across Chicago schools.¹⁶⁷ The prominence of the CC at CPS is demonstrated by its inclusion in a network of collaboration that includes such organizations such as the Asia Society, Chicago Sister Cities International, the Chicago mayor's office, the College Board, the State Illinois China Office in Shanghai, the US-China Strong Foundation, and the US Department of State.¹⁶⁸ In this light, Chicago's CCs offer an example of China's Confucius strategy in action due to its inclusion of state and local policymakers, nonprofits, and a prominent position among the Chicago public.

At least some of the Mandarin teachers in the CPS program are home-grown and come from within the district. CPS sought out Chinese speakers already working within local schools and assisted them with obtaining the certifications they needed to instruct language courses.¹⁶⁹ Lacking a deep enough bench of Mandarin speakers to meet demand, CPS reached out to colleges and universities to assist with teacher training and certification.¹⁷⁰ Students from the CC have also traveled to China for month-long intensive programs under the auspices of the "100,000 Strong Initiative," which began in 2009 with the help of the Obama administration.¹⁷¹ Under its new name, Chicago Chinese Language Center, Chicago's CCs remain in operation.¹⁷²

Some CCs began as CIs handed off to local schools as they closed. The CI at Western Kentucky University (WKU) shuttered in 2019, only to be transferred to nearby schools at the Simpson County School District.¹⁷³ The Simpson County Schools CC demonstrates not only the relationships between university-based CIs and their K-12 offshoots but also how the survival of Confucius programs is facilitated by actors from private businesses and nonprofits.

WKU's CI was formed in 2010 out of partnerships with the Hanban, North China Electric Power University (NCEPU), and Sichuan International Studies University.¹⁷⁴ Article 11 of the agreement penned between WKU and its Chinese partners notes Beijing's authority over "textbooks, pedagogy and academic research."¹⁷⁵ The founding of the CI at WKU is closely

165 Ibid.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

168 "Chicago Public Schools Chinese World Language Program," Asia Society, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/chicago-public-schools-chinese-world-language-program>), accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

169 "Meeting the Challenge: Preparing Chinese Language Teachers for American Schools, Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning, (<https://asiasociety.org/files/chinese-teacherprep.pdf>), accessed Dec. 12, 2023, 20-21.

170 Ibid, 20-21.

171 Ibid.

172 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence in Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 161.

173 "WKU transfers Confucius Institute program to Simpson County Schools," Western Kentucky University official website, July 1, 2019, (<https://www.wku.edu/news/articles/index.php?view=article&articleid=7814>), accessed Nov. 16, 2023.

174 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence in Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 111.

175 Article 11. Responsibilities of NCEPU, "Implementation Agreement Between Western Kentucky University and North China Electric Power University for the Development of the Confucius Institute at Western Kentucky University," March 25,

connected to the creation of CCs across the state of Kentucky. Amy Eckhardt, the CI's US co-director at the time, noted that the institute would serve K-12 schools in Warren County as well as the university.¹⁷⁶ Eckhardt's description of WKU's CI reflects the goals stated by Beijing in 2011 in its effort to use them to influence different levels of American society.

In describing the founding of the CI at WKU, Eckhardt noted that the institute:

Engages in outreach to local educational institutions, businesses, government and community members, building partnerships with educational and community organizations to offer cultural programming, language education and K-12 summer programs and partnering with local businesses to offer cultural and language training.¹⁷⁷

WKU's CI proved so successful in its outreach that it won awards in 2013 and 2015 for having the most "Advanced Confucius Institute of the Year."¹⁷⁸

The outreach of WKU's CI into Kentucky's K-12 system pre-dated its formal handoff and transformation into a CC. Wei-Ping Pan, the WKU's CI director in 2011, outlined a number of goals for the program's growth. Pan's goals for the program included achieving a yearly 10 percent increase in Chinese language enrollment.¹⁷⁹ WKU's CI obtained a recreational vehicle to serve as a "modular unit" that it could use to hold events at local schools, host workshops, and engage communities beyond the confines of its university campus.¹⁸⁰ In the 2012-2013 school year, 17 of the 33 Chinese teachers at the WKU CI who came from the Hanban secured licenses to teach from the Kentucky Educational Standards Board.¹⁸¹ The following year, another 10 Hanban teachers obtained K-12 teaching credentials.¹⁸²

Elsewhere in the state, the University of Kentucky's CI worked to meet the state's demands for Chinese teachers in school systems. Called the "K-12 Chinese Language, Culture Development and Enhancement Program," the CI at the University of Kentucky allowed the state's schools to obtain teachers from the Hanban for periods of up to three years.¹⁸³ The

2011.

176 "WKU Signs Agreement to Become First Kentucky Home of Confucius Institute," WKU News, March 4, 2010, (<https://wku-news.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/confucius-institute/>), accessed Nov. 10, 2023.

177 "WKU Signs Agreement to Become First Kentucky Home of Confucius Institute," WKU News, March 4, 2010, (<https://wku-news.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/confucius-institute/>), accessed Nov. 10, 2023.

178 NCEPU Confucius Institute in Western Kentucky University was Awarded "Advanced Confucius Institute of the Year" in 2013," Dec. 18, 2013, North China Electric Power University, (<https://english.ncepu.edu.cn/hddt/hddttw/29645.html>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024. See also "Confucius Institute at WKU Honored at Global Conference," WKU News, Dec. 8, 2015, (<https://wkunews.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/ci-award-2015/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

179 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius: China's Enduring Influence on American Higher Education* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 112.

180 *Ibid.*, 113.

181 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius: China's Enduring Influence on American Higher Education* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 113.

182 *Ibid.*, 113.

183 Huajing Maske and Carrie Wheeler, "UK Confucius Institute offers K-12 schools support for global readiness," *Kentucky Teacher*, March 2, 2017, (<https://www.kentuckyteacher.org/subjects/global-competency-world-languages/2017/03/uk-confucius-institute-offers-k-12-schools-support-for-global-readiness/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

Hanban was responsible for the recruitment of the teachers, as well as for their yearly salaries.¹⁸⁴ One principal in Kentucky's Woodford County stated that the program "builds ownership for our Chinese teachers and that spills over to enhanced instructional experiences for our students."¹⁸⁵

In the case of WKU's CI, its outreach into surrounding schools proved essential to its survival, as it laid the groundwork for quick rebranding without major interruption. WKU withdrew from its agreement with China in April 2019. Three months later, Simpson County Schools had signed an agreement with the Hanban. Simpson County Schools then announced its intention to expand the Hanban-linked program to teach 22,000 students across the state.¹⁸⁶ Bureaucratically, this initiative included 47 separate K-12 schools, and involved a "transfer of assets" from the CI to the new CC in the form of "vehicles, furniture, instructional materials," and a sum of \$192,714.25.¹⁸⁷

Funds and learning materials were not the only aspects of WKU's CI that made their way to Simpson County Schools. The leadership of both the CI and its CC offshoot transferred to the other. This transfer included a new contract agreement overseen by a consulting firm called BG Education Management Solutions, which was run by the former CI director.¹⁸⁸ Terrill Martin, the CEO of BG Education Management Solutions, served as WKU's CI director prior to its closure.¹⁸⁹ BG Education Management Solutions describes itself as a nonprofit "designed to recruit foreign language teachers who work in local K-12 schools," and works to bring teachers from abroad to the US.¹⁹⁰ NAS noted in its 2022 report on CIs that BG Education Management Solutions registered a "Doing Business As" entity in the State of Kentucky to operate as the Confucius Institute at Western Kentucky (CIWK).¹⁹¹ Because of the nonprofit's involvement, China retained its regional presence in western Kentucky.

In 2021, CIWK declared that it desired to "increase its footprint of Chinese language" through outreach to "private schools, independent school districts, and some districts the institute has lost."¹⁹² For the 2021-2022 school year, CIWK obtained 15 teachers from China who came from WKU's old CI partner at NCEPU.¹⁹³ Even two years after WKU's CI closure, NCEPU was the main source of teachers that connected CIEF to Kentucky schools via BG Education

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

186 Rachele Peterson et al, *After Confucius: China's Enduring Influence on American Higher Education* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 120.

187 Lisa Autry, "Education Votes to Reopen Confucius Institute," WKU FM, July 1, 2019, (<https://www.wkyufm.org/education/2019-07-01/simpson-county-board-of-education-votes-to-reopen-confucius-institute>), accessed Nov. 20, 2023.

188 Ibid. See also "Mr. Terrill D. Martin," BG Education Management Solutions, (https://www.bgeducationms.org/dt_team/mr-terrill-d-martin/), accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

189 Ibid.

190 About: BG Education Management Solutions, Inc. (<https://www.bgeducationms.org/about/>), accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

191 Rachele Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence in Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 76-77. See also BG Education Management Solutions Inc, Kentucky Secretary of State official website, (<https://web.sos.ky.gov/BusSearchNProfile/Profile?ctr=998101>), accessed Nov. 21, 2023.

192 April 2021 Report, Confucius Institute of Western Kentucky, BG Education Management Solutions, 3, (https://defending-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/6_I_ConfuciusReportApril_0.pdf), accessed Nov. 20, 2024.

193 Ibid.

Management.¹⁹⁴ Financially, the amount of funds Kentucky schools have received from China have been considerable. By its own accounts, BG Education Management Solutions received \$948,462 from CIEF in 2020.¹⁹⁵

In 2021, the Department of Education for the State of Kentucky abruptly shifted away from Beijing and partnered with Taiwan to meet the state's demand for Mandarin language courses. Partnering with Taipei's Ministry of Education, the replacement for the state's CIs allows Taiwanese teachers to teach in the state on an annual basis in exchange for Kentucky teachers offering English instruction in Taiwan.¹⁹⁶ When asked about Kentucky's shift toward Taiwan, BG Education Management Solutions CEO Terrill Martin replied, "No comment."¹⁹⁷

Some CIs retain CC clusters in nearby K-12 schools in the form of adjacent organizations. Pacific Lutheran University's CI, the Confucius Institute of Washington (CIWA), remains in operation in order to "respond to the local needs from a wide array of constituencies of the State of Washington for Chinese language education and Chinese cultural understanding through international cooperation and educational exchange."¹⁹⁸ CIWA at Pacific Lutheran University operates alongside the CIWA Education Center (CIWA-EC), based in the Seattle Public School System (SPS).¹⁹⁹ As described by CIWA, the Seattle area Confucius initiative operates as a cohesive system:

All CIWA-supported programs are entirely designed and/or supervised by directors at PLU and SPS in coordination with colleges or universities, K-12 educational institutions, community groups or individual partners across Washington state.²⁰⁰

CIWA's CCs function within a cluster of organizations that include Chinese partners such as Sichuan University, Chongqing Jiaotong University, and the American nonprofit Alliance for Education.²⁰¹

While CIs have been the traditional means China has used to access the K-12 system, cases such as the CCs at Simpson County Schools, Chicago Public Schools, and Paint Branch Elementary, and Seattle Public Schools demonstrate that CCs do not operate as simple spokes from a central hub. Clearly, CCs do not need an overseeing CI housed in a university to be successful. CCs have been adaptive and flexible. CCs have formed direct bilateral ties with

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Aaron Mudd, "Kentucky partners with Taiwan to boost K-12 Chinese language education," Kentucky Today, Nov. 24, 2021, (https://www.kentuckytoday.com/news/kentucky-partners-with-taiwan-to-boost-k-12-chinese-language-education/article_8460e47c-4d5b-11ec-9337-4f515d94a3b2.html), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Confucius Institute of the State of Washington official website, (<https://www.plu.edu/confucius-institute/>), accessed Nov. 16, 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Chinese partners and were sometimes formed as “CIs” in their own right. When CIs closed, some CCs survived due to their relationships with multiple organizations beyond the school system.

School Boards and Local Policymakers

Beijing has used state-sponsored trips to China as one way to foster relationships with state and local policymakers and build its influence strategy. Elsewhere, a 2021 report released by the French Ministry for the Armed Forces notes that China uses state-sponsored travel to target and “seduce” policymakers in Canada.²⁰² Rather than national-level policymakers, the French discovered that China targets local politicians and other key figures with influence operations.²⁰³ In the case of Canadian CCs, the French discovered that students were shown Chinese propaganda films and that discussions about Tiananmen Square and Taiwan were censored.²⁰⁴ In the United States, a 2019 report by the Senate on Chinese influence in education noted that Beijing uses sponsored travel to help broker and establish new Confucius programs.²⁰⁵ Unfortunately, no nationwide data exists on how many local and state officials have accepted China’s hand.

In late 2009, a group of San Diego Unified School District board members and employees traveled to China, sponsored by a “nonprofit affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education.”²⁰⁶ The district’s attorney, Mark Bresee, noted that the all-expenses-paid trip to China was exempt from normal Fair Political Practices Commission restrictions on donated travel due to the funds’ origin—a “foreign government or nonprofit.”²⁰⁷ Ostensibly, the trip was to visit Chinese schools.²⁰⁸

In 2013, Joseph Chang, a school board member for Hacienda La Puente School District in California was censured by fellow school board members for accepting paid-for trips to China while simultaneously pressuring the school to accept unqualified students from the country.²⁰⁹ In Chang’s case, his trips were subsidized by a private company called Bela Education,

202 Paul Charon and Jean-Baptiste Jeangene Vilmer, *Chinese Influence Operations: A Machiavellian Moment*, Institute for Strategic Research of the French Ministry for the Armed Forces, (2021), 558.

203 *Ibid.*, 558.

204 *Ibid.*, 572.

205 *China’s Impact on the US Education System*, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, US Senate, (2019), (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China's%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf>), 19, 62-63.

206 “School Employees Off to China Again,” *Voice of San Diego*, Nov. 6, 2009, (<https://voiceofsandiego.org/2009/11/06/school-employees-off-to-china-again/>), accessed Nov. 27, 2023.

207 *Ibid.*

208 *Ibid.*

209 Cindy Chang, “Hacienda La Puente school board member censured by colleagues,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 27, 2013, (<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-xpm-2013-sep-27-la-me-ln-hacienda-school-board-censure-20130927-story.html>), accessed Nov. 12, 2023.

which sought to “recruit” students from China to study in the Hacienda La Puente district.²¹⁰ Both San Diego schools and Hacienda La Puente have hosted Confucius Classrooms.²¹¹

In early 2010, the Hacienda La Puente Unified School Board voted in favor of forming a CC program. The CC would bring Mandarin teachers and learning materials to the district, in addition to offering summer and winter travel to China for secondary school students.²¹² The school district voted to partner with China’s Yunnan Normal University, which would not only provide resources but also assist in overseeing the program. Under the plan for the program, Yunnan Normal University would “decide the themes of the academic reports and the implementation of plans through discussion with the Board of Advisors.”²¹³ Yunnan Normal University is listed by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute as carrying “medium risk” to national security due to its ongoing “research on ethnic minorities,” its programs “relevant for communist party cadre training,” and its “School of Marxism” (马克思主义学院).²¹⁴

Cedarlane Academy, the designated Confucius Classroom at Hacienda La Puente, opened despite community opposition. At the time of its approval, former school board member John Kramer and Rudy Chavarria, the only then-board member to vote against the measure, expressed fears about Chinese propaganda in the classroom.²¹⁵ Joseph Chang, the board member who voted in favor of the partnership, dismissed concerns over communism. Chang stated:

If you say because of the previous history and Communism that you’re going to cut an opportunity for educating our kids, then that means you’re cutting the opportunity for growth in the future. This is the 21st century, and there’s a global economy.²¹⁶

A scandal emerged in 2012 when the school district learned of an unannounced and unauthorized visit by a group of Chinese government officials to the Cedarland campus Confucius Classroom.²¹⁷

210 Cindy Chang, “Hacienda La Puente school board member criticized over China trips,” Los Angeles Times, Sept. 25, 2013, (<https://www.latimes.com/local/la-xpm-2013-sep-25-la-me-ff-hacienda-chinese-students-20130926-story.html>), accessed Nov. 12, 2023.

211 See Agreement Between the San Diego Unified School District and Confucius Institute at San Diego State University, Dec. 18, 2018, (https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/PS19-0677-08_Agreement_with_SDSU_Confucius_.pdf), accessed Nov. 13, 2023. See also “Hacienda La Puente Unified School Board Votes to Implement ‘Confucius Classroom,’” Redlands Daily Facts, Feb. 2, 2010, (<https://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/2010/02/02/hacienda-la-puente-unified-school-board-votes-to-implement-confucius-classroom/>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

212 “Hacienda La Puente Unified School Board Votes to Implement ‘Confucius Classroom,’” Redlands Daily Facts, Feb. 2, 2010, (<https://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/2010/02/02/hacienda-la-puente-unified-school-board-votes-to-implement-confucius-classroom/>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023. See also Meeting Minutes: Aug. 26 2010 Regular Board of Education Meeting, (<https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/hlpsud/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=8AAK434BD351>), accessed Nov. 20, 2023.

213 Meeting Minutes: Aug. 26 2010 Regular Board of Education Meeting, (<https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/hlpsud/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=8AAK434BD351>), accessed Nov. 20, 2023.

214 Yunnan Normal University, China Defence Universities Tracker, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, (<https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/universities/yunnan-normal-university/>), accessed Dec. 3, 2023.

215 “Hacienda La Puente Unified School Board Votes to Implement ‘Confucius Classroom,’” Redlands Daily Facts, Feb. 2, 2010, (<https://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/2010/02/02/hacienda-la-puente-unified-school-board-votes-to-implement-confucius-classroom/>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

216 Ibid.

217 Ben Baeder, “Confucius classroom meets confused classroom in Hacienda Heights,” San Gabriel Valley Tribune, Feb. 17,

In 2017, then-Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey opened investigations into Chang and another board member over illegal travel to China.²¹⁸ The sponsor of Chang's travel, Bela Education, was alleged to have charged students from China to attend high school in the district.²¹⁹ When queried about the alleged poor living conditions of the Chinese students under its care, Bela Education's CEO, Norman Hsu, simply declared "I can do anything I want, as long as it is legal."²²⁰

At South Redford Schools, a district in Michigan, the relationship with China grew alongside bilateral trips between the district and a Chinese partner school. In 2008, South Redford formed a partnership with TongShengHu International School.²²¹ In 2016, TongShengHu International School sponsored a delegation from South Redford to visit Hunan Province by covering the travel costs for the district's superintendent, Brian Galdes, school principals, and school board members.²²² One of South Redford's school board members, Elizabeth Kangas, was also the Confucius Classroom Director for the program Fisher K-12.²²³

In California, the CC at Castaic Union School District was cultivated by the CI at California State University Long Beach (CSULB).²²⁴ In 2016 and 2017, officials and administrators from across the district traveled to China to tour the country's schools.²²⁵ After meeting with educators in Jinzhou, one administrator noted that the trip gave her "new ideas to implement in her school."²²⁶

In West Virginia, Dr. Stephen Paine, the then-superintendent of West Virginia Schools in 2006, journeyed to China with the "Chinese Bridge Delegation," on a trip sponsored by the College Board and the Hanban.²²⁷ After Paine's return, three West Virginia counties applied to host guest Mandarin teachers.²²⁸ China's influence in West Virginia expanded in 2015 with the opening of the Confucius Institute for Business, and its sponsored travel to China for

2012, (<https://www.sgytribune.com/2012/02/17/confucius-classroom-meets-confused-classroom-in-hacienda-heights/>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

218 Steve Scaulzillo, "District Attorney investigating two Hacienda La Puente board members," San Gabriel Valley Tribune, Sept. 25, 2013, (<https://www.sgytribune.com/2013/09/25/district-attorney-investigating-two-hacienda-la-puente-board-members/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

219 Steve Scaulzillo, "District Attorney investigating two Hacienda La Puente board members," San Gabriel Valley Tribune, Sept. 25, 2013, (<https://www.sgytribune.com/2013/09/25/district-attorney-investigating-two-hacienda-la-puente-board-members/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

220 Ibid.

221 Scott R. Daniel, "South Redford officials head to China," Sept. 20, 2016, (<https://www.hometownlife.com/story/news/local/redford/2016/09/20/south-redford-officials-head-to-china/90745234/>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

222 Ibid.

223 Ibid.

224 The Confucius Institute at California State University, Long Beach, USA, International Exchange Center of Hebei Vocational College of Foreign Economics and Trade official website, (<https://www.hbiibe.edu.cn/kongzixueyuan/col/1481869823612/index.html>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

225 Christina Cox, "Castaic District continues partnerships with Chinese schools," The Signal, Oct. 23, 2017, (<https://signalscv.com/2017/10/castaic-district-continues-partnerships-chinese-schools/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

226 Ibid.

227 "West Virginia Department of Education," Education, Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/china-learning-initiatives/west-virginia-department-education>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

228 Ibid.

K-12 administrators from across the state.²²⁹ Some of the West Virginia schools later independently sought bilateral “sister school” programs with Chinese schools.²³⁰

West Virginia engaged in international diplomacy with China, and later with Taiwan to replace some of its Confucius programs. In early 2023, West Virginia Superintendent of Schools David Roach met with Taiwanese Ambassador Bi-khim Hsiao to sign a memorandum to establish mutual teacher exchanges.²³¹ Like in other jurisdictions, the business community played a role in setting up the Chinese curriculum for the area’s schools. In this instance, the agreement with Taiwan emerged under the auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office.²³²

School boards and local policymakers form one element of the supporting constellation of actors that allow CCs to form and function. Like their counterparts at the university level, K-12 administrators face similar incentives to pursue funding and international prestige. However, a key difference exists between international “citizen diplomacy” between local and state policymakers in education and their Chinese counterparts. Higher education is inherently an international domain, as scholars collaborate in research across disciplines and borders. Setting aside sensitive research relevant to dual-use purposes, this is normal and often benign.

In contrast, K-12 level administrators and policymakers at the state and local levels do not have the same practical incentives to broker ties across borders, let alone with great power rivals that harbor values antithetical to American interests. State and local policymakers are a primary target of Chinese influence. In 2011, Beijing outlined these subnational levels of governance as marks for its strategy to build CCs across the United States.²³³

The 100,000 Strong Foundation and the One Million Strong Initiative

Confucius Classrooms proliferated across America from 2008 to 2016 during the Obama administration. The United States was home to 31 CIs in 2007; however, this number ballooned to 109 by 2015.²³⁴ Three China-focused initiatives were designed during this period to increase Mandarin instruction in the United States. These initiatives included the “100,000 Strong Initiative,” the “100,000 Strong Foundation,” and the “One Million Strong

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ “West Virginia Department of Education enters agreement with Taiwan to strengthen Chinese language instruction,” WVNews, Feb. 28, 2023, (https://www.wvnews.com/news/wvnews/west-virginia-department-of-education-enters-agreement-with-taiwan-to-strengthen-chinese-language-instruction/article_3a50be68-b7ac-11ed-b74c-cfbbb78a1df9.html), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ China’s Impact on the US Education System,” Rob Portman and Tom Carper, US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, (2017), (<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China’s%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf>), accessed Nov. 12, 2023, 60.

²³⁴ Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China’s Enduring Influence on American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 30.

initiative.”²³⁵ Combined, these initiatives used policy to help drive the creation of CIs and CCs across the country.

While on a diplomatic tour of China in 2009, President Barack Obama stopped to speak with students at the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum. After the visit, Obama called for increasing “youth exchanges” with Beijing by increasing the number of American students studying in China to 100,000.²³⁶ Obama declared the importance of language acquisition and “people-to-people connections” in building citizen diplomacy.²³⁷ Obama stated:

And I believe strongly that cooperation must go beyond our government. It must be rooted in our people—in the studies we share, the businesses we do, the knowledge that we gain, and even in the sports that we play. And these bridges must be built by young men and women just like you and your counterparts in America. That’s why I’m pleased to announce that the United States will dramatically expand the number of our students who study in China to 100,000. And these exchanges mark a clear commitment to build ties among our people, as surely as you will help determine the destiny of the 21st century.²³⁸

After the announcement, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launched the 100,000 Strong Initiative in May of 2010.²³⁹ China supported the move, committing to the creation of “10,000 “Bridge Scholarships” to assist in bringing American students to China.²⁴⁰ Federal initiatives culminated in the 2013 creation of the nonprofit organization titled the 100,000 Strong Foundation.²⁴¹

At the official announcement of the creation of the 100,000 Strong Foundation, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted the role of the US Department of State in its creation:

So, I’m thrilled we’re announcing this foundation. I thank everyone here at the State Department and all of our partners who are making this possible. And I’m also very

235 See Di Wu, “100,000 Strong: Networks and Partnerships Within US-China Public Diplomacy,” USC Center on Public Diplomacy official website, 2014, (https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin_monitor_article/100000-strong-networks-and-partnerships-within-us-china-public-diplomacy#_edn2), accessed Jan. 2, 2024. See also Tom Michael, “Confucius Institutes Bring China, US Closer Together,” *The Washington Diplomat*, July 6, 2018, (<https://washdiplomat.com/confucius-institutes-bring-china-us-closer-together/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

236 “Obama says US to increase its students in China to 100,000,” *China Daily*, Nov. 16, 2009, (https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/obamavisitchina/2009-11/16/content_8979514.htm), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

237 Jeff Wang, “Human Capital in US-China Relations,” Nov. 25, 2009, (<https://asiasociety.org/china-learning-initiatives/human-capital-us-china-relations>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

238 US President Barack Obama At Shanghai Town Hall Meeting With Students, November 15, 2009, USC US-China Institute, (<https://china.usc.edu/us-president-barack-obama-shanghai-town-hall-meeting-students-november-15-2009>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

239 “100,000 Strong Education Exchange Initiatives,” US Department of State official website, (<https://2009-2017.state.gov/100k/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

240 *Ibid.*

241 Di Wu, “100,000 Strong: Networks and Partnerships Withing US-China Public Diplomacy,” USC Center on Public Policy official website, (https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin_monitor_article/100000-strong-networks-and-partnerships-within-us-china-public-diplomacy#_edn2), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

excited because this is a perfect example of a public-private partnership, and nobody does it better than the United States. We are really good at this because we have a long tradition of understanding that we have to have both government action and government involvement, but where most of life takes place in our country is not there; it's outside of government. It's in these other institutions—colleges and universities, foundations and philanthropies, individual efforts of all kind. So, we are deeply grateful that you have understood our vision for 100,000 Strong and are making it a reality.²⁴²

The 100,000 Strong Initiative and its manifestation in the form of the 100,000 Strong Foundation helped grow the CIs and CCs around the country. In 2012, Beijing announced that its Ministry of Education was assisting the initiative by “helping establish contracts between the American and Chinese universities.”²⁴³

The 100,000 Strong Foundation acted as a brokering organization to build ties between multiple organizations in the US and China. After conducting a network analysis of the Foundation, Di Wu, a graduate student at the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy in 2014, described the organization as a “network switcher, or broker” that connected US business groups and nonprofits with Chinese counterparts.²⁴⁴ Wu noted that the private sector was the primary source of the Foundation’s revenue. Major American companies such as Coca-Cola, Deloitte, Microsoft, and Citigroup were among the Foundation’s corporate partners.²⁴⁵

The 100,000 Strong Foundation also helped establish relationships between American business elites and China. For example, billionaire Steve Schwarzman, the head of investment firm Blackstone, backed the creation of the Schwarzman Scholars program at Tsinghua University through a partnership with the Foundation.²⁴⁶ The Foundation’s “founding supporters” and advisory council also included a number of policy elites with government backgrounds. Wu’s network analysis uncovered the strategy outlined by the Hanban in 2011 unfolding in action. Policymakers, business leaders, local officials, and educators comprised Beijing’s desired partners.

242 Hillary Clinton, Remarks at Launch of the 100,000 Strong Foundation, Washington DC, Jan. 24, 2013, (<https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2013/01/203250.htm>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

243 “China-US people-people exchanges to be advanced,” press release, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, Feb. 12, 2012, (http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zmgxss/201202/t20120214_4367601.htm), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

244 Di Wu, “100,000 Strong: Networks and Partnerships Withing US-China Public Diplomacy,” USC Center on Public Policy official website, (https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin_monitor_article/100000-strong-networks-and-partnerships-with-in-us-china-public-diplomacy#_edn2), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

245 Ibid.

246 Ibid.

Fig. 2.3: 100,000 Strong Foundation Founders, Advisory Council, and Board²⁴⁷

Name	Affiliation at Time of Founding	Position
Florence Fang	Florence Fang Family Foundation	Founding Supporter
Jon Huntsman	Former US ambassador to China	Founding Supporter
Luis Ubinas	President, Ford Foundation	Founding Supporter
Kris Balderston	Senior Partner and Washington Director: Fleishman-Hillard	Advisory Council
Doug Becker	CEO of Laureate Intl. Universities	Advisory Council
Kurt Campbell	Former US Asst. Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs	Advisory Council
Jim Clifton	Chair and CEO of Gallup	Advisory Council
Johnetta B. Cole	Director of National Museum of African Art, the Smithsonian	Advisory Council
Rahm Emanuel	Mayor of Chicago	Advisory Council
Peter Emerson		Advisory Council
James Goldgeier	Dean, School of Intl. Studies, American University	Advisory Council
Vincent Gray	Mayor, Washington DC	Advisory Council
Carla Hills	Hills & Company	Advisory Council
Lewis B. Kaden	Vice Chairman, Citigroup	Advisory Council
Muhtar Kent	CEO, Coca-Cola	Advisory Council
Edward Lee	Mayor, San Francisco	Advisory Council
George Lee	Exec. Vice-Chair, CEO and President of MetroCorp Bancshares Inc.	Advisory Council
Deborah Lehr	Vice-Chair, the Paulson Institute	Advisory Council
Reta Jo Lewis	Former Special Rep. for Global Intergovernmental Affairs, State Dept.	Advisory Council
Jonathan Mantz	Principal, BGR Group	Advisory Council
Michael McGinn	Mayor, Seattle	Advisory Council
Dominic Ng	CEO, EastWest Bank	Advisory Council
Jeff Nuechterlein	Managing Director, Isis Capital	Advisory Council
Pin Ni	CEO, Wanxiang North America	Advisory Council
Doug Oberhelman	CEO, Caterpillar	Advisory Council
Robert Roche	CEO, Acorn International	Advisory Council
Ed Rogers	Founder, BGR Group	Advisory Council
Steve Schwarzman	Chair, CEO, and Co-Founder of Blackstone	Advisory Council
John Sexton	Pres. New York University	Advisory Council
Henry Tang	Co-Founder, Committee of 100	Advisory Council
Johnny C. Taylor Jr.	Pres. Thurgood Marshall College Fund	Advisory Council
Antonio Villaraigosa	Former Mayor, Los Angeles	Advisory Council
Will.i.am	Entertainer	Advisory Council
Chris Cooper	Partner at Deloitte and Touche LLP	Board Member
Ted Dean	Chairman of Board of Governors for American Chamber of Commerce in China	Board Member

247 About Us, 100 Thousand Strong Foundation official website, (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130725015856/http://100k-strong.org/about-us/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

Leanne Dunsmore	Assoc. Dean for Program Development and Enrollment Management at American University's School of International Service	Board Member
Florence Fang	Former Pres. of Young China Daily and China World News, former honorable trustee at Peking University	Board Member and Founder
Kassie Freeman	Dir. of Strategic Innovation at Alcorn State University	Board Member
Eugene J. Huang	VP of Strategy and Planning for Enterprise Growth Group at American Express	Board Member
Raji Jagadeesan	Assoc. Dean for China Initiatives at NYU Stern School of Business	Board Member
Carola McGiffert	Former Senior Advisor to Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs	Board Member and President
Daniel B. Wright	Founder, President and CEO of GreenPoint Group	Board Member

The 100,000 Strong Foundation helped CCs and CIs grow both in number and reach by connecting schools with China. The Asia Society, one of the foremost promoters of CCs in American K-12 education, was one of the Foundation's main partners.²⁴⁸ In 2017, NAS noted that the China Institute, a non-university CI affiliated with East China Normal University and based in New York City, serves predominantly community members beyond a university setting. The China Institute states that it was "selected as an Inaugural Signature Partner of the 100,000 Strong Foundation."²⁴⁹ Despite its independent status and place outside of higher education, the China Institute offers Mandarin for students from kindergarten through the 6th grade.²⁵⁰

In Louisiana, Xavier University not only housed the first CI at a historically black college but also hosted the first Confucius program in the state.²⁵¹ Once established, Xavier's CI expanded into seven different K-12 schools around New Orleans.²⁵² The 100,000 Strong Foundation designated Xavier as the "lead institution" for the "Advance Louisiana" initiative, which aims to increase Mandarin language offerings at historically black institutions, local businesses, and the New Orleans K-12 system.²⁵³ Xavier's CI director applauded the designation from the Foundation, noting it would bring "new prominence to the Confucius Institute."²⁵⁴

Dr. Yu Jiang, the director of Xavier University's CI, highlighted the economic aspect of placing CCs in the New Orleans area. Jiang stated that creating new CCs:

248 Di Wu, "100,000 Strong: Networks and Partnerships Withing US-China Public Diplomacy," USC Center on Public Policy official website, (https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin_monitor_article/100000-strong-networks-and-partnerships-with-in-us-china-public-diplomacy#_edn2), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

249 China Institute in America's Historical Timeline, China Institute official website, (<https://chinainstitute.org/about-us/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

250 "China Institute @ Your School," China Institute official website, (<https://chinainstitute.org/school/for-k-12-schools/china-institute-at-your-school/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

251 Ronald Roach, "Xavier University to Lead Chinese Language Study in La. Schools," *Diverse Education*, Nov. 5, 2014, (<https://www.diverseeducation.com/demographics/african-american/article/15095552/xavier-university-to-lead-chinese-language-study-in-la-schools>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.

254 Ibid.

Reflects the recognition that citizens in the state of Louisiana have had toward the ever-rising important role that China plays on word [sic] economy—let alone the fact that China is the No. 1 market for Louisiana merchandise exports. It also demonstrates our need to learn the language and culture of China in order to engage with this global power more effectively.²⁵⁵

In the Pacific Northwest, the CI for the State of Washington (CIWA) also worked within the framework of the 100,000 Strong Initiative to expand the reach of China's Confucius programs in K-12 schools. CIWA opened in 2009 as a unique consortium of organizations that included the University of Washington, Sichuan University, Seattle Public Schools, and the Chongqing Municipal Education Commission. CIWA strengthened existing ties between the City of Seattle and the Chongqing Municipal Education Commission.²⁵⁶

The mayor of Seattle at the time, Mike McGinn, traveled to Chongqing to establish bilateral ties and to “promote more partner schools between the two cities, and work through the Confucius Institute as a platform to enhance exchanges of culture, faculty, and research.”²⁵⁷ McGinn was also a member of the Advisory Council of the 100,000 Strong Foundation.²⁵⁸ One of the Foundation's initiatives consisted of the “Mayor's Circle,” which sought to expand Chinese language instruction at the K-12 level in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, DC.²⁵⁹

In 2016, CIWA announced the opening of three new CC programs at Chief Seattle International School, Happy Valley Elementary, and Skyline High School.²⁶⁰ These CCs were in addition to those Seattle-area programs sponsored by the Asia Society.²⁶¹ CIWA seeks to build its network of CCs with the Chongqing Municipal Education Commission as its “partner organization,” and highlights the effect of the 100,000 Strong Initiative on assisting in the growth of CCs across the country.²⁶²

Another subsidiary initiative of the 100,000 Strong Foundation called “Project Pengyou” sought to create a “broad network of students, academic institutions and study abroad programs in the United States and China.”²⁶³ Project Pengyou hosted a platform to “build a

255 “Xavier University, Confucius Classrooms Sign Agreement,” Biz New Orleans, Oct. 26, 2015, (<https://www.bizneworleans.com/xavier-university-confucius-classrooms-sign-agreement/>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

256 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius: China's Enduring Influence on America's Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 87, 94.

257 Bo Deng, “The Confucius Institute of the State of Washington: An Introduction,” *Comparative Literature: East & West*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 179-182, 181.

258 About Us, 100 Thousand Strong Foundation official website, (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130725015856/http://100k-strong.org/about-us/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

259 Initiatives, 100 Thousand Strong Foundation official website, (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130420052442/http://100k-strong.org/initiatives/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

260 Confucius Classrooms of the State of Washington, Pacific Lutheran University official website, (<https://www.plu.edu/confucius-institute/past-programs/confucius-classrooms/>), accessed Jan. 4, 2024.

261 *Ibid.*

262 *Ibid.*

263 Initiatives, 100 Thousand Strong Foundation official website, (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130420052442/http://100k-strong.org/initiatives/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

network of community chapters across the United States to catalyze a new generation of US-China bridge-builders.”²⁶⁴ Cis, such as those at Emory University, Purdue, the University of Kentucky, and even the Hanban itself, were listed as member organizations in its network.²⁶⁵

Florence Fang, one of the 100,000 Strong Foundation’s founders and a member of the group’s advisory board, was “honorary president of the Northern California Association for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China.”²⁶⁶ Fang has worked closely with UFWO organizations, such as former premier Hu Jintao’s “Youth League Clique,” and with former Communist Youth League leader Liu Yandong.²⁶⁷ In 2014, under her Chinese name, Fang Li Bangqin, Fang described community college students as a premier group of “grassroots youth” receptive to ideological targeting.²⁶⁸ Fang’s description of community college students was overtly political, calling them the “real grassroots class,” and noting that students are “grassroots voters who participate in voting.”²⁶⁹

In 2015, the 100,000 Strong Initiative expanded into the One Million Strong Initiative, seeking to increase the number of American students learning Mandarin to one million.²⁷⁰ Unlike the 100,000 Strong Initiative and its drive to increase the number of students studying abroad in China, the new One Million Strong initiative aimed to increase the number of “stateside” Mandarin learners to one million by 2020.²⁷¹ This new initiative sought to build a “standardized national Chinese curriculum” that local school districts could adopt and adapt and that would be rigorous enough to meet AP standards.²⁷² Reflecting this new goal, the 100,000 Strong Foundation rebranded as the US-China Strong Foundation in 2016.²⁷³ Florence Fang financially supported the new initiative and served on the group’s board.²⁷⁴

The US-China Strong Foundation appears defunct as of August 2020; however, individuals involved with it remain involved in China affairs. President Joe Biden’s nominee for

264 About Us, Project Pengyou official website, (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160318081851/http://projectpengyou.org/about/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

265 Ibid.

266 Mark C. Eades, “Florence Fang’s “100,000 Strong Foundation”: Education or Indoctrination?,” Foreign Policy Association, May 27, 2016, (<https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2016/05/27/florence-fangs-foundation-china-education-indoctrination/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

267 Ibid.

268 Ibid. See also “Fang Li Bangqin: Send American “grassroots” you to China-Overseas Chinese News Network,” Florence Fang Family Foundation official website, Aug. 8, 2014, (https://web.archive.org/web/20190819192805/http://florencefangfamilyfoundation.org/t3cn_english/index.php/2014-08-15-02-17-11/2014-08-15-02-18-08/4-2014-08-08-00-49-46), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

269 “Fang Li Bangqin: Send American “grassroots” you to China-Overseas Chinese News Network,” Florence Fang Family Foundation official website, Aug. 8, 2014, (https://web.archive.org/web/20190819192805/http://florencefangfamilyfoundation.org/t3cn_english/index.php/2014-08-15-02-17-11/2014-08-15-02-18-08/4-2014-08-08-00-49-46), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

270 Tom Michael, “Confucius Institutes Bring China, US Closer Together,” The Washington Diplomat, July 6, 2018, (<https://washdiplomat.com/confucius-institutes-bring-china-us-closer-together/>), accessed Dec. 29, 2023.

271 Bethany Allen-Ebrahman, “Can 1 Million American Students Learn Mandarin?,” Foreign Policy, Sept. 25, 2015, (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/25/china-us-obamas-one-million-students-chinese-language-mandarin/>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

272 Ibid.

273 “US-China 100,000 Strong Foundation rebrands,” The PIE News, June 8, 2016, (<https://thepienews.com/news/us-china-100000-strong-foundation-rebrands/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

274 Alana Goodman, “Biden’s Asia Policy Czar Helped Found Group ‘Heavily Influenced by the CCP’,” Washington Free Beacon, Jan. 27, 2021, (<https://freebeacon.com/biden-administration/bidens-asia-policy-czar-helped-found-group-heavily-influenced-by-the-ccp/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

Deputy Secretary of State, Kurt Campbell, served on both the advisory council for the 100,000 Strong Foundation and later as the Vice-Chairman for the US-China Strong Foundation.²⁷⁵ This organization also worked with the Confucius Institute US Center.²⁷⁶ In 2020, then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo designated the Confucius Institute US Center as an official Chinese foreign mission for “advancing Beijing’s global propaganda and malign influence campaign on US campuses and K-12 classrooms.”²⁷⁷

As policy initiatives, these programs failed. Both the 100,000 Strong Initiative and One Million Strong Initiative failed to meet their stated goals. The One Million Strong Initiative never reached the desired benchmark of one million students studying Mandarin. As of 2017, approximately 227,000 students in the US were studying Chinese. At the same time, the number of students studying the language fell from 2016 to 2020 by 21 percent.²⁷⁸ This drop in Mandarin learning occurred in conjunction with rising antipathy toward China that began prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a Pew Research study released in 2022, a plurality of Americans have held a negative view of China since 2012.²⁷⁹ From 2017 from to 2020, this negative favorability increased from 47 percent to 66 percent.²⁸⁰

Nonprofit Facilitators and Sister Cities

China needed intermediaries to grow and sustain its Confucius programs. Nonprofits—with their work often requiring contacts with different levels of government, business, and civil society—are uniquely suited to China’s strategy to influence Americans. Organizations such as BG Education Management Solutions, IL Texas Global, the Asia Society, the Alliance for Education, Go Global NC, and the College Board have all served as nonprofit intermediaries for China to access K-12 education.

Local and state policymakers helped CCs spread by brokering “sister-city” partnerships between American municipalities and Chinese counterparts. Not only are sister-city partnerships present in many jurisdictions where CCs are found, but similar partnerships helped establish Confucius programs. In some instances, such as in North Carolina, the entire state has had a bilateral relationship with China’s Jiangsu Province. In Seattle, both the city and state of Washington have friendship agreements with the city of Chongqing and

275 Ibid. See also “President Biden Announces Kurt Campbell as Nominee for Deputy Secretary of State,” White House press release, Nov. 1, 2023, (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-confucius-institute-u-s-center-as-a-foreign-mission-of-the-prc/index.html>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

276 Ibid.

277 Press statement by Michael Pompeo, “Designation of the Confucius Institute US Center as a Foreign Mission of the PRC,” US Department of State, Aug. 13, 2020, (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-confucius-institute-u-s-center-as-a-foreign-mission-of-the-prc/index.html>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

278 “Studying Chinese in America,” USC US-China Institute official website, Dec. 9, 2021, (<https://china.usc.edu/studying-chinese-america>), accessed Dec. 1, 2023.

279 Laura Silver, Christine Huang and Laura Clancy, “How Global Public Opinion of China Has Shifted in the Xi Era,” Pew Research, Sept. 28, 2022, (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/09/28/how-global-public-opinion-of-china-has-shifted-in-the-xi-era/>), accessed Jan. 3, 2024.

280 Ibid.

Sichuan Province. In the context of these agreements, the placement of CCs demonstrates education's role within a broader Chinese strategy.

IL Texas Global

Parents Defending Education identified Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) as one of the seven remaining CCs still in operation.²⁸¹ PDE noted that TPS formalized an agreement with China through a nonprofit intermediary called International Leadership of Texas Global (IL Texas Global).²⁸² The CC agreement included funding from the CIEF at “no cost to the district.”²⁸³ According to meeting minutes for the Tulsa Board of Education, the district entered into a contract with IL Texas Global and its “Confucius Classroom Coordination Offices” in July 2022.²⁸⁴

A year after TPS signed its contract with IL Texas Global, Oklahoma State Superintendent Ryan Walters alerted congressional lawmakers about Beijing's influence in the state's K-12 system.²⁸⁵ Walters' concern centered on the rekindled partnerships between China and TPS after the closure of the CI at the University of Oklahoma.²⁸⁶ Similar to how Western Kentucky University's CI survived by being transferred via a nonprofit transfer to Simpson County Schools, TPS maintained ties with China and the CIEF via its relationship with IL Texas Global.²⁸⁷

Based in Richardson, Texas, IL Texas Global describes itself as a 501(c)(3) operating the IL Texas Private High School “to support and facilitate cross-cultural educational models and methods.”²⁸⁸ On the surface, the school appears to be a benign Texas private school offering top-quality K-12 education. The school offers a college preparatory track for its students, trilingual learning in English, Chinese, and Spanish, and a “community of friendship between local and international students” as a “public-private partnership” institution.²⁸⁹

The schools IL Texas Global runs are indeed international, as it runs a combination of schools in the United States and China. Included in its portfolio of schools is a boarding

281 “Little Red Classrooms: China's Infiltration of American K-12 Schools,” Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/#:~:text=Parents%20Defending%20Education%20uncovered%20contracts,St.>), accessed Jan. 7, 2024.

282 Ibid.

283 Ibid.

284 Tulsa Public Schools meeting minutes, July 11, 2022, (<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1657318861/tulsaschool-sorg/kkbgoyeag2imp9m30hw8/71122FinalAgenda.pdf>), accessed Jan. 5, 2024.

285 “Supt. Walters sends dossier on Chinese ‘involvement in our schools’ to select Republicans,” Oklahoma News 4, Sept. 22, 2023, (<https://kfor.com/news/local/supt-walters-sends-dossier-on-chinese-involvement-in-our-schools-to-select-republicans/>), accessed Nov. 24, 2023.

286 “Supt. Walters sends dossier on Chinese ‘involvement in our schools’ to select Republicans,” Oklahoma News 4, Sept. 22, 2023, (<https://kfor.com/news/local/supt-walters-sends-dossier-on-chinese-involvement-in-our-schools-to-select-republicans/>), accessed Nov. 24, 2023. See also “CCP Involvement in our schools,” Letter from Ryan Walters to Members of the Oklahoma State Legislature, Sept. 21, 2023.

287 Ibid.

288 About ILTexas Global, IL Texas Global official website, (<https://www.iltexasglobal.org/about-iltexas-global>), accessed Jan. 4, 2024.

289 Campus overview, IL Texas Global official website, (<https://www.iltexasglobal.org/operations/campuses>), accessed Jan. 4, 2024.

school in Garland, Texas, and high schools at multiple locations in Garland, Arlington-Grand Prairie, Fort Worth (Keller-Saginaw), Richmond (Katy-Westpark), and Guangzhou, China.²⁹⁰ IL Texas Global declares its China branch to be a private high school. This declaration is at odds with the trajectory of private education within China, where private education is increasingly coopted by the Chinese government.

China has allowed some private education; however, reforms during the Xi Jinping era have steadily restricted private schools in the PRC to give the CCP greater control.²⁹¹ China's Ministry of Education declared in 2021 that private schools would be eradicated by August 2023.²⁹² China's State Council moved to outlaw private schools to promote "fairness in education," and transfer such schools to the State through mandatory buyouts or asset transfers.²⁹³ The evaporation of China's private education raises questions regarding the ownership status of all K-12 programs operating simultaneously in the PRC and abroad.

IL Texas Global's Guangzhou branch is noteworthy due to the school's declared affiliation with South China Normal University.²⁹⁴ South China Normal University states that students there undergo compulsory military training.²⁹⁵ IL Texas Global-Guangzhou follows the motto "Embrace China, Embrace the World" by combining aspects of Chinese and American education.²⁹⁶ According to an email between IL Texas Global's Director of Chinese, Xiaoyan Wang, and Sara Vroman of the Legacy Charter Academy, IL Texas Global and the Hanban entered into a partnership beginning in 2019 to "serve as the bridge" between the Hanban and local Confucius Classrooms.²⁹⁷

State Superintendent of Public Instruction noted in a letter to the Oklahoma State Legislature last September that an internal investigation uncovered "an intentional obfuscation by the Chinese Communist Party to hide their involvement" in the state's K-12 schools and universities.²⁹⁸ Walters' office obtained the agreements between the CC Coordination Office at IL Texas Global and TPS, which stipulated that the nonprofit administered the program. The agreements noted that "management of the Confucius Classroom," the development of "annual work plans, budget proposals, and accounting reports" all fell under the auspices of IL Texas Global.²⁹⁹ Tellingly, the contract between the nonprofit and TPS highlights the role of CIEF, belying the nonprofit's role as an intermediary between the Chinese government and Tulsa schools.

290 Qiao Long, "China nationalizes private schools in ongoing reform of education sector," Radio Free Asia, June 16, 2022, (<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/education-06162022135753.html>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

291 Ibid.

292 Ibid.

293 Iori Kawate, "China pushes private schools to turn public in 'fairness' lesson," Nikkei Asia, Nov. 27, 2021, (<https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Education/China-pushes-private-schools-to-turn-public-in-fairness-lesson>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

294 School Instruction and Accreditation, IL Texas Guangzhou official website, (<http://en.flslit.cn>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

295 Showcasing military training at SCNU, South China Normal University official website, Sept. 9, 27, 2021, (<http://english.scnu.edu.cn/a/20210927/612.html>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

296 School Instruction and Accreditation, IL Texas Guangzhou official website, (<http://en.flslit.cn>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

297 Email between Xiaoyan Wang and Sandy Vroman, Tues. Nov. 19, 2019, (<https://texasscorecard.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/xiaoyan-wang-email-november-19-2019.pdf>), accessed Dec. 26, 2023.

298 Letter from Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters to the Oklahoma State Legislature, Sept. 9, 2023, 1.

299 Ibid.

The contract notes that while assisting TPS, IL Texas Global “shall submit the plans, proposal, and reports” to the CIEF, in addition to providing reports “concerning the operation of the Confucius Classroom.”³⁰⁰ In practical terms, the nonprofit contractually acts as a pass-through facilitator for China’s management of the CC. IL Texas Global acts as an extension of China, as it must seek CIEF’s approval to grant a school CC status and rely on China for learning materials, operational funding, and teachers.³⁰¹ TPS withdrew from the agreement on August 25, 2023 amid a standoff with the Oklahoma State Board of Education over foreign funding and the use of gender pronouns in the classroom.³⁰²

Asia Society

As one of the member organizations within the 100,000 Strong Foundation, the Asia Society is one of the premier nonprofits that helped establish CCs nationwide.³⁰³ When PDE released its exposé on Confucius Classrooms, it noted the role that the Asia Society played as an intermediary between the Hanban and CCs nationwide. The Asia Society’s actions illustrate the trajectory of China’s involvement in education and how Beijing took advantage of the growing appetite for foreign language offerings at K-12 schools.

Unlike other organizations involved with founding and spreading China’s Confucius programs, the Asia Society maintained a broader focus. Founded in the mid-1950s by John D. Rockefeller III, the Asia Society seeks to “promote greater knowledge of Asia in the United States” and to “address a range of issues and pressing concerns in Asia.”³⁰⁴ The Asia Society has a global presence and offices across the globe.³⁰⁵ As an elite nonprofit, the Asia Society has also enjoyed access to heads of government in the US and abroad. Asian heads of state, such as India’s Manmohan Singh, Japan’s Shinzo Abe, Ban Ki-Moon, and Hu Jintao have all expressed praise for the organization.³⁰⁶

Asia Society launched its Confucius Classrooms Network in 2010 with an initial cohort of 20 schools that grew to at least “100 schools in 27 states and the District of Columbia.”³⁰⁷ Structurally, Asia Society sought to bilaterally pair each CC with a “sister school in China to

300 Article 3, Management and Operation, Agreement Between Confucius Classroom Coordination Office at IL Texas Global and Independent School District No. 1 of Tulsa County, Oklahoma; AKA Tulsa Public Schools for Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma on the Establishment of the Confucius Classroom at Booker T. Washington High School, (<file:///Users/jan01/Downloads/Walters-letter-to-OKGOP-leaders.pdf>), accessed Jan. 7, 2024.

301 Ibid, Article 4, Obligations.

302 Ibid, Article 7. See also Beth Wallis, “Tulsa Public Schools will keep local control, accreditation after Oklahoma Board of Education meeting,” KOSU, Aug. 24, 2023, (<https://www.kosu.org/education/2023-08-24/tulsa-public-schools-to-keep-local-control-accreditation-after-august-state-board-of-education-meet>), accessed Feb. 2, 2024.

303 Di Wu, “100,000 Strong: Networks and Partnerships Withing US-China Public Diplomacy,” USC Center on Public Policy official website, (https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin_monitor_article/100000-strong-networks-and-partnerships-with-in-us-china-public-diplomacy#_edn2), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

304 Background and History, Asia Society Official Website, (<https://asiasociety.org/about/background-history>), accessed Dec. 2, 2023.

305 Ibid.

306 Ibid.

307 Confucius Classrooms, Partnership for Global Learning, Asia Society official website, (http://sites.asiasociety.org/confuciusclassroom/?page_id=3), accessed Dec. 2, 2023.

form an international partnership.”³⁰⁸ The Asia Society also established an adjunct system of “online communities” for the professional development of teachers.³⁰⁹

In 2011, CC students from kindergarten to high school compiled class projects into a book to present to then-Chinese premier Hu Jintao as a gift during a diplomatic trip to the US.³¹⁰ The Asia Society jointly compiled the “gift” to Hu in conjunction with the State Department and the White House.³¹¹ As a diplomatic gesture, the students’ gift resulted in a reciprocated invitation for CC students to visit China. Beijing later welcomed a group of students from Walter Payton School, an “anchor” in the Asia Society’s CC network, to personally visit Hu Jintao and the seat of the Chinese government.³¹² Liu Yandong, head of the UFDW, also met with the students during the trip.³¹³

Liu Yandong had a long career in combining education with Communist ideology. After joining the CCP in 1964, Liu served as the head of the Chinese Communist Youth League before shifting to a career in the UFDW.³¹⁴ After nearly a decade working in influence operations, Liu later became a State Councilor.³¹⁵ In 2015, the Asia Society hosted an official banquet for Liu at its Houston location that was sponsored by major corporations such as ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Sinopec, United Airlines, and East-West Bank.³¹⁶

At the Asia Society’s 10th National Chinese Language Conference (NCLC) organized with the College Board, Liu congratulated the Confucius program, calling it a “highly regarded brand for China-US public interactions and people-to-people exchange.”³¹⁷

As an intermediary between China and the CCs in its network, the Asia Society also cultivated CCs under the auspices of the NCLC. The Asia Society’s NCLC is the “largest annual gathering of K-12 practitioners, policymakers, and school leaders with an interest in Chinese language instruction in the United States.”³¹⁸

Numerous schools within Asia Society’s CC network entered into contracts that explicitly declare the tripartite connection between their schools, China, and the Asia Society. A 2015 agreement between Tallwood High School of Virginia Beach and the Asia Society

308 School Partnerships, Confucius Classrooms, Partnership for Global Learning, Asia Society official website, (https://sites.asiasociety.org/confuciusclassroom/?page_id=5), accessed Dec. 2, 2023.

309 “Meeting the Challenge: Preparing Chinese Language Teachers for American Schools,” Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning, 29, (<https://asiasociety.org/files/chinese-teacherprep.pdf>), accessed Dec. 12, 2023.

310 “Hu’s Gift book slideshow,” Center for Global Education, May 26, 2011, (<https://vimeo.com/24277120>), accessed Dec. 2, 2023.

311 Ibid.

312 “American Students Meet with Chinese President,” Asia Society official website, July 19, 2011, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/american-students-meet-chinese-president>), accessed Dec. 2, 2023.

313 Ibid.

314 “The China Rising Leaders Project, Part 1: The Chinese Communist Party and Its Emerging Next-Generation Leaders,” US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Research Report, March 23, (2012), 34.

315 Ibid, 34.

316 “Official Welcome to China’s Vice Premier,” June. 20, 2015, Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/texas/events/official-welcome-chinas-vice-premier>), accessed Dec. 2, 2023.

317 Letter from Madam Liu Yandong, Vice Premier of the People’s Republic of China, Chair of the Council of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, April 3, 2017.

318 “Boston Hosts 6th National Chinese Language Conference: Engage the Future,” Newsroom, College Board, April 10, 2013, (<https://newsroom.collegeboard.org/boston-hosts-6th-national-chinese-language-conference-engage-future>), accessed Dec. 12, 2023.

openly states that the “Asia Society Confucius Classrooms Network is an international partnership between Hanban and Asia Society dedicated to building the field of Chinese language teaching and language in American Schools.”³¹⁹ The Asia Society offered a financial subsidy of \$10,000 in general support for the program, in addition to providing respective stipends of \$2,000 and \$1,000 for “cultural activities” and travel to the NCLC conference.³²⁰ The contract also mandated the creation of a bilateral partnership between Tallwood and a school in China.³²¹

Multiple schools entered into partnerships with the Asia Society where divisions between China and the Society appear to be poorly understood by the schools involved. Board meeting agendas for Ohio’s Gahanna-Jefferson School District indicate that at least some schools viewed the Asia Society’s CCs as an extension of the Hanban itself. In meetings in 2016 and 2017, Gahanna-Jefferson applied for grants “through Hanban Asia Society” to “continue a partnership with schools in China.”³²² When Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School in Massachusetts received a three-year grant through the Asia Society, it repeatedly referred to the “Hanban-Asia Society Confucius Classrooms Network.”³²³

Asia Society seems to have been aware of the risk posed by the Chinese government’s march into American education. In its *China File*, a publication offered through its Center on US-China Relations, the Asia Society published multiple articles on the threat of China’s Confucius programs to American interests and educational norms.³²⁴ Ultimately, the Asia Society chose to distance itself from China’s Confucius programs amid growing public skepticism from policymakers and the broader public.

In 2021, Neelam Chowdhary, the Asia Society’s Acting Vice President at its Center for Global Education, announced it had “discontinued” its collaboration with China’s Confucius programs and the Chinese Language Partner Network.³²⁵ Part of this termination included a cessation of funding for the CCs under its umbrella.³²⁶ The Asia Society declared in its announcement that it “has no affiliation with any government.”³²⁷ Nonetheless, the Society’s National Chinese Language Conference the following year featured state-owned Chinese companies such as the Bank of China and China Southern Airlines among its “Diamond Sponsors.”³²⁸ Despite repeated attempts to interview Asia Society’s leadership about Confucius Classrooms, no calls or emails were returned.

319 Agreement between Asia Society and Tallwood High School, Jan. 7, 2015.

320 Ibid.

321 Ibid.

322 See Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools Board of Education Meeting Agenda, Jan. 14, 2016. See also Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools Board of Education Meeting Agenda, Feb. 9, 2017.

323 “On February 8, 2010, Hanban-Asia Society awarded PVCICS a 3-year Confucius Classroom Network grant,” Press release, Feb. 8, 2020, PVCICS official website, <https://pvcics.org/news-1/2019/9/26/on-february-8-2010-hanban-asia-society-awarded-pvcics-a-3-year-confucius-classroom-network-grant>, accessed Dec. 3, 2023.

324 See China File, search term “Confucius classroom,” project of the Asia Society, (<https://www.chinafile.com/search/results/Confucius%20classroom>), accessed Dec. 14, 2023.

325 “Update on Asia Society’s Chinese Language Program,” Asia Society official website, Jan. 13, 2022, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/update-asia-societys-chinese-language-program>), accessed Dec. 3, 2023.

326 Ibid.

327 Ibid.

328 National Chinese Language Conference 2023, Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/national-chinese-language-conference-2023>), accessed Dec. 3, 2023.

Alliance for Education

Established in 1995, the Seattle nonprofit Alliance for Education has fulfilled a structurally significant role as a conduit for funds between China, the CIWA, and the Seattle Public School system. Alliance for Education describes itself as an “independent, local education fund that works in partnership with Seattle Public Schools to address big challenges, like racial equity and educational justice,” and as a “convener, connector and collaborator, stewarding philanthropic funding and expertise” in local schools.³²⁹ The Alliance for Education does not directly work with students, but rather works to “fund programs that shape a public school system that equitably supports all students, especially those furthest from educational justice.”³³⁰

When Pacific Lutheran University took the role of hosting CIWA in 2020, the NAS noted that formalized agreements with Seattle Public Schools listed the Alliance for Education as CIWA’s “fiscal agent.”³³¹ The desire for PLU to work with SPS at the K-12 level helped it secure its new relationship with China’s Confucius programs.³³² Similar to the roles played by Asia Society, IL Texas Global, and BG Education Management, Alliance for Education acts as a third-party broker for China’s influence and funding.

As a pass-through entity between China and K-12 schools in Seattle, the Alliance for Education obfuscated the connections between China and Seattle Public Schools beginning in 2009. That year, Alliance for Education penned a memorandum of understanding with the University of Washington to act in its special status as a “fiscal agent” intermediary for the Confucius Institute of Washington.³³³ Under this agreement, the group was designated to “receive all funds” from the Hanban (“Headquarters”) and disburse those funds “in accordance with the directions” of China.³³⁴

Financially, the Alliance for Education received a seven percent fee for all funds given to CIWA.³³⁵ In 2009, CIWA included Seattle Public Schools in a “statewide Confucius Institute” consortium that included the Hanban, the University of Washington, Sichuan University, and the Chongqing Municipal Education Commission.³³⁶ For its part, the Hanban

329 About the Alliance, Alliance for Education official website, (<https://www.alliance4ed.org/our-story/>), accessed Dec. 8, 2023.

330 Ibid.

331 Rachele Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China’s Enduring Influence on American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 107.

332 Ibid, 107.

333 Ibid, 77.

334 Ibid, 78. See also Agreement between Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), the University of Washington and the Seattle Public Schools on the Establishment of the Confucius Institute of the State of Washington and the Confucius Institute Education Center in the State of Washington, Nov. 12, 2009.

335 Ibid, 87. See also the Agreement between the Seattle Public Schools, the University of Washington, and the Alliance for Education For the Operation of Confucius Institute of the State of Washington and Confucius Institute Education Center in the State of Washington, July 1, 2019.

336 Agreements, Confucius Institute of the State of Washington, Pacific Lutheran University official website, (<https://www.plu.edu/confucius-institute/about/agreements/>), accessed Dec. 28, 2024.

provided \$150,000 in startup funds, which was reciprocated by another \$150,000 from local partners.³³⁷

Administratively, Seattle’s K-12 schools were involved at the CI’s outset by housing some of the institute’s offices.³³⁸ Xu Lin, the then-director general of the Hanban, attended the opening ceremony at Denny International Middle School, even kissing one student on the head while declaring that the students would be “pioneers between China and the United States.”³³⁹ Maria Goodloe-Johnson, the superintendent of SPS, also attended and signed the agreement.³⁴⁰ Goodloe-Johnson’s involvement was brief, as she was unanimously fired by the Seattle School Board over financial irregularities in 2011.³⁴¹ Agreements with CIWA and SPS were renewed in 2014 and 2019.³⁴²

Pacific Lutheran University formally became the host of CIWA after receiving approval from the Hanban’s later incarnation as the CIEF, and its president, Yang Wei.³⁴³ Valid through May 21, 2025, CIEF’s “Certificate of Authorization” acknowledges both SPS and Pacific Lutheran University as signatories, and states that the American parties “shall submit an annual report to the Foundation and shall be subject to the quality valuation by the Foundation.”³⁴⁴ Contractually, the agreement states that the Chinese-language version of the agreement “will prevail in case of inconsistency.”³⁴⁵

Called the “Hanban Agreement,” the 2020 agreement between Pacific Lutheran, SPS, and the Alliance for Education states that both the university and SPS “will collaboratively submit an annual funding proposal to Hanban...either singly or collaboratively.”³⁴⁶ The contract implies that Alliance for Education acts as a go-between for China, its CI, and CCs in the Seattle area. Section 3 of the contract also notes that the Alliance for Education “could receive funds directly from Hanban,” and acts as its “Fiscal Agent with respect of funds provided by Hanban for the benefit of SPS’s Education Center and PLU’s Institute.”³⁴⁷ Section 3.2 describes the intricacies of the role played by the Alliance for Education:

337 Linda Shaw, “Celebrating new Chinese institute,” *Seattle Times*, April 26, 2010, (<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/celebrating-new-chinese-institute/>), accessed Dec. 18, 2023.

338 Ibid.

339 Ibid.

340 Ibid.

341 Scott Gutierrez, “Goodloe-Johnson ousted as Seattle schools chief,” *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, March 1, 2011, (<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattlenews/article/goodloe-johnson-ousted-as-seattle-schools-chief-1039336.php>), accessed Dec. 18, 2023.

342 Agreements, Confucius Institute for the State of Washington, Pacific Lutheran University official website, (<https://www.plu.edu/confucius-institute/about/agreements/>), accessed Dec. 18, 2023.

343 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China’s Enduring Influence on American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 102.

344 Certificate of Authorization No. CI2020277, Chinese International Education Foundation, (<https://www.plu.edu/confucius-institute/wp-content/uploads/sites/587/2021/04/1-certificate-of-authorization转隶授权书.pdf>), accessed Dec. 18, 2023.

345 Ibid.

346 Agreement Between The Seattle Public Schools, Pacific Lutheran University and The Alliance for Education for the Operation of Confucius Institute of the State of Washington and Confucius Institute Education Center In the State of Washington, Signed by SPS Superintendent Denise Juneau May 22, 2020 and by Alliance for Education CEO Lisa Chick June 17, 2020.

347 Ibid, Section 3.1

AFE will disburse or subcontract funds received from Hanban promptly upon receipt of such funds in a manner consistent with the directions set forth in the relevant funding document; *provided that* if AFE concludes that the directions set forth in the relevant funding document are not clear, AFE shall have no obligation to distribute funds until UW and/or SPS obtain necessary clarification from Hanban.³⁴⁸

The Alliance for Education also states that it “shall retain a portion of all funds received from Hanban” and that it will distribute funds “directly to PLU, SPS or other entities that are sponsored by CIWA, such as CIWA-sponsored Confucius Classrooms.”³⁴⁹ As a whole, China’s Confucius programs in Washington are funneled and managed using a nonprofit intermediary.

The College Board

Ties between the College Board and China’s influence in education are well-documented. In 2020, the National Association of Scholars noted in *Corrupting the College Board: Confucius Institutes and K-12 Education* that the organization began working with the CCP in 2003 to build Mandarin programs in the United States. The report noted that the College Board assisted China in a range of roles, which included crafting an Advanced Placement Chinese Language and Culture course, acting to recruit for Chinese government programs, assisting in constructing teacher training, and helping launch the National Chinese Language Conference.³⁵⁰ On its own, the College Board helped plant at least 20 CIs and CCs around the country while organizing Hanban-sponsored trips to China.³⁵¹ For example, the Hanban and College Board collaborated to sponsor the then-West Virginia of Schools Superintendent Stephen Paine to travel to China to assist in brokering bilateral ties with the state in 2006.³⁵²

The College Board worked in conjunction with the Asia Society and Hanban to promote Mandarin in K-12 schools.³⁵³ One element of this promotion involved working with the Hanban to increase the number of Chinese “guest teachers” in US classrooms.³⁵⁴ This initiative succeeded in bringing 173 teachers to roughly 32,000 students across 263 separate schools by 2011.³⁵⁵

348 Ibid, 3.2.

349 Ibid, 3.3.

350 College Board Corrupted by Chinese Government Funding, Report Finds, press release, National Association of Scholars, Sept. 10, 2020, (https://www.nas.org/blogs/press_release/college-board-corrupted-by-chinese-government-funding-report-finds), accessed Dec. 28, 2023.

351 Rachele Peterson, *Corrupting the College Board*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2020), 16.

352 West Virginia Department of Education, Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/west-virginia-department-education>), accessed Dec. 26, 2023.

353 Chinese in 2009: An Expanding Field, Asia Society and the College Board, April 2008, 3.

354 Ibid, 5.

355 “Tens of Thousands of US Students Learn Chinese Language and Culture Through the College Board’s Chinese Guest Teacher Program,” PR Newswire, Jan. 18, 2011, (<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/tens-of-thousands-of-us-students-learn-chinese-language-and-culture-through-the-college-boards-chinese-guest-teacher-program-114146374>).

Maine's Department of Education describes the College Board's collaborative program with the Hanban as the "largest K-12 Chinese guest teacher program in the US."³⁵⁶ Under the program, guest teachers teach for a period ranging from one to three years, with their travel and salaries at least partially "subsidized by Hanban."³⁵⁷ In Kentucky's Carroll County Schools, the contract for guest teachers for the 2011-2012 school year notes that the Hanban offered \$13,000 annually to teachers, while the host school offered housing options and pay "commensurate with the compensation paid to a US teacher with similar responsibilities and education."³⁵⁸ The Asia Society still lists the College Board among its supporters.³⁵⁹

In its role as a facilitator for import teachers through its Guest Teachers Program, the College Board worked with universities to expand China's reach at the K-12 level. Indiana's Purdue University worked with the College Board to bring Chinese teachers to West Lafayette schools prior to the university even opening its own CI.³⁶⁰ At the CIWA, the College Board works in parallel to the CI's guest teacher program, which it runs with the Chongqing Municipal Education Commission.³⁶¹

In 2014, then-College Board CEO David Coleman described China in glowing terms, declaring that the "Hanban is just like the sun. It lights the path to develop Chinese teaching in the US. The College Board is like the moon."³⁶² Indeed, the College Board did reflect the "light" of the Chinese government in the development of some of its Mandarin language programming. For example, the College Board's AP Chinese preparation required students to learn the simplified Chinese characters in vogue during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution.³⁶³ Rather than learning a traditional form of written Mandarin to access literature from China's pre-Communist era, the College Board's AP Chinese focus centered on the PRC's re-invention of the language.³⁶⁴

This promotion of the simplified Chinese script preferred by Beijing is not apolitical. Today, the traditional script of China's pre-Communist past remains in use in Taiwan. In contrast, the new simplified script standard in the PRC is a derivative of the CCP's ideological thinking. The simplified script of Communist China was introduced in the mid-1950s as

html), Dec. 29, 2023.

356 Visiting Teacher Programs, World Languages Programs and Initiatives, Maine Department of Education official website, (<https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/content/worldlanguages/programs>), accessed Dec. 19, 2023.

357 Ibid.

358 Chinese Guest Teacher Program 2011-2012 Program Terms and Conditions, signed by Carroll County Superintendent Lisa James, June 22, 2011, Teacher Compensation, (<https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Chinese-Guest-Teacher-Agreement-Carroll-County-Schools-KY-June-22-2011.pdf>), accessed Dec. 19, 2023.

359 Our Supporters, Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/our-supporters>), accessed Jan. 2, 2024.

360 "New institute at Purdue will make China more accessible to Indiana," Purdue University News, May 14, 2007, (<https://www.purdue.edu/uns/x/2007a/070515HongInstitute.html>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023. See also Rachele Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence on American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Restaurant, 2022), 145.

361 Chinese Guest Teacher Program, Confucius Institute of Washington official website, Pacific Lutheran University, (<https://www.plu.edu/confucius-institute/past-programs/chinese-guest-teacher-program/>), accessed Dec. 22, 2023.

362 Rachele Peterson, *Corrupting the College Board*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2020), 16.

363 Ibid, 18.

364 Ibid, 18.

part of an effort to transform society.³⁶⁵ The Soviet Union even helped subsidize this linguistic transformation.³⁶⁶ This simplified script is now taught by CCP-linked programs and even inhibits its learners from accessing Chinese media from outside of the PRC.³⁶⁷

Sister Cities

One of the most serious findings in this report is the role played by state and local policymakers in brokering CC programs. Far from simple symbolic agreements, sister-city ties assist China in expanding its influence into local schools and different parts of the American economy. A 2018 study by AidData at William and Mary College, which had a CI from 2011 to 2021 as part of a partnership with Beijing Normal University, noted that sister cities form an integral part of China's soft power diplomacy.³⁶⁸

Since 1973, China has formed at least 2,500 sister-city partnerships worldwide.³⁶⁹ From the vantage point of China's soft power strategy, these sister-city arrangements target critical economic hubs and figures in crucial regions and urban areas.³⁷⁰ The primary aim of these subnational relationships is to allow Beijing to foster partners "that adopt China's norms and values in the political, social, economic, and foreign policy spheres."³⁷¹ China's Confucius programs essentially act as a corollary to Beijing's overall sister-city strategy.³⁷²

In the case of CIWA, the State of Washington and the City of Seattle have had formal respective relationships with China's Sichuan Province and the municipality of Chongqing dating to the early 1980s.³⁷³ This form of partnership is not unique. Japan's sister-city partnership between the cities of Kobe and Tianjin in China laid the needed economic groundwork for bilateral investment. In China, Kobe assisted Tianjin with the construction of ports and medical facilities.³⁷⁴ In 2008, China established a CC in the Kobe Toyo Medical School to teach Chinese medicine.³⁷⁵ Multiple American cities have partnerships with municipal-

365 Agnes Lam, *Language Education in China: Policy and Experience from 1949*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 8-9.

366 See Ian Buruma, "How the Chinese Language Got Modernized," *New Yorker*, Jan. 10, 2022, (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/01/17/how-the-chinese-language-got-modernized>), accessed Dec. 29, 2023. See also Jing Tsu, *Kingdom of Characters: The Language Revolution that Made Modern China*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2022).

367 Peng Xiaoming, "Simplification of Chinese Characters by the Chinese Communist Party," *The Epoch Times*, Dec. 27, 2006, (<https://www.theepochtimes.com/article/simplification-of-chinese-characters-by-the-chinese-communist-party-1728959?welcomeuser=1>), accessed Dec. 30, 2023.

368 Samantha Custer et al, "Ties That Bind: Quantifying China's public diplomacy and its "good neighbor" effect, AidData at William and Mary, (2018), 12.

369 Ibid, 12.

370 Ibid, 12.

371 Ibid, 12. See also F. Hartig, "How China understands public diplomacy: The importance of national images for national interests," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (2021), pp. 655-680.

372 See Noela A. Haughton, "Internationalisation through a Confucius sister city partnership: examining a 10-year sister city and university bi-lateral partnership," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 52, (2022), pp. 1277-1295.

373 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence on Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 87.

374 Yang Cheng, "Tianjin, Kobe celebrate 50 years of being sister cities," *China Daily*, July 7, 2023, (http://subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/tianjin/2023-07/06/c_900514.htm), accessed Dec. 15, 2023.

375 Yang Cheng, "Tianjin, Kobe celebrate 50 years of being sister cities," *China Daily*, July 7, 2023, (http://subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/tianjin/2023-07/06/c_900514.htm), accessed Dec. 15, 2023.

ities in China. In 2021, US senators raised concerns over China's influence through its 157 sister-city partnerships across the country.³⁷⁶

Concerns about China manipulating sister-city partnerships for geopolitical motives are valid. China oversees its sister-city partnerships via the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), which is a component of the CCP's UFWD.³⁷⁷ Forging positive cultural images that are sanitized for the CCP in K-12 schools and forming ties with local policymakers allows China to build a pipeline of future national officials, policymakers, and business elites favorable to Beijing's interests. A synergy exists between CCs and China's economic and political priorities.

European researchers note a varied strategy across CIs and CCs depending on location.³⁷⁸ In Africa and Asia, Confucius programs support high diplomatic relations.³⁷⁹ In contrast, Western CIs are aimed to "counterbalance" negative public views of Beijing and shape debates and perceptions among the broader public.³⁸⁰ Across all regions, CCP narratives and aspects of Chinese culture that preference ethnic Han Chinese identity are promoted over other aspects of Chinese life.³⁸¹ As US-China tensions increased since the COVID-19 pandemic and over the status of Taiwan, multiple cities in the US and abroad have ended their sister-city agreements with the PRC.³⁸²

In the case of Chicago Public Schools, which operated as a CI until 2020 when it rebranded as the Chicago Chinese Language Center, Chicago's sister-city partnership with Shanghai laid the foundation for Beijing's entrance into the city's schools.³⁸³ Chicago brokered its "Friendship City Agreement" with Shanghai back in 1985.³⁸⁴ In 2004, then-Chicago Mayor Bill Daley traveled to China to promote "Chicago Days" at Shanghai's World Expo.³⁸⁵ Two years later, Daley advocated the creation of the Confucius Institute of Chicago as an outgrowth of cooperation between CPS, the Hanban, and East China Normal University.³⁸⁶ By 2011, CPS was the largest CI in the world despite being housed in the K-12 level. Beijing subsidized the

376 Adam Kredo, "How the CCP Is Embedding Itself in American Cities," Washington Free Beacon, April 19, 2023, (<https://freebeacon.com/national-security/how-the-ccp-is-embedding-itself-in-american-cities/>), accessed Dec. 15, 2023. See also Audrey Conklin, "Republican lawmakers warn China using 'sister cities' to spy, gain influence," Fox Business, March 11, 2021, (<https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/blackburn-china-us-sister-cities-spy-gain-influence>), accessed Dec. 15, 2023.

377 Flora Yan, "CCP Stealth War 133; Feature: China's Sister-City Relationships in Focus," Jamestown Foundation, May 12, 2023, (<https://jamestown.org/program/sw-133-feature-chinas-sister-city-relationships-in-focus/>), accessed Dec. 16, 2023.

378 Marcin Przychođniak, "Confucius Institutes: A Tool for Promoting China's Interests," China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe, May 8, 2019, <https://chinaobservers.eu/confucius-institutes-as-a-tool-for-promoting-chinas-interests/>, accessed Dec. 13, 2023.

379 Ibid.

380 Ibid.

381 Ibid.

382 Ibid.

383 Rachele Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence on Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2022), 161. See also History of Exchange, Chicago Sister Cities International, (<http://www.chicagosistercities.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/China-2017.pdf>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

384 See History of Exchange, Chicago Sister Cities International, (<http://www.chicagosistercities.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/China-2017.pdf>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

385 "China Meets Chicago-Most China-Friendly US City," Global Sherpa, Jan. 25, 2011, (<http://globalsherpa.org/chicago-china-city/>), accessed Dec. 14, 2023.

386 Ibid.

program by offering \$1.6 million in funding over five years.³⁸⁷ It is not coincidental that East China Normal University is located in Chicago's sister city of Shanghai.

Before closing in 2021, Emory University's CI served as a link between Atlanta Public Schools (APS) and Nanjing University.³⁸⁸ In 2008, Emory, along with Nanjing University and APS, formed the "Confucius Institute in Atlanta."³⁸⁹ Atlanta's CC operated as a public-private partnership in that it was the only CC in the country to be "administered by a private university and in a public school system."³⁹⁰ Like other schools, the CCs at APS were funded with a "renewable, three-year grant" from the Hanban.³⁹¹ Both Nanjing and Atlanta are "friendship cities."³⁹² Unlike the more formalized agreements brokered at the mayoral level, friendship cities operate more informally, and are based on municipal traditions and policy.³⁹³

Figure 2.4 Sister-City and Province Partnerships

US Jurisdiction	Chinese Partner	Non-profit passthrough	School District CCs
Chicago	Shanghai	None: CPS partnered with East China Normal University ³⁹⁴	Chicago Public Schools (now Chicago Chinese Language Center)
Seattle/Washington	Chongqing/Sichuan	Alliance for Education	Seattle Public Schools
North Carolina	Jaingsu Province	Go Global NC	Multiple
Atlanta	Nanjing	None: APS partnered with Nanjing University via Emory's CI	Atlanta Public Schools

Closer ties with China offer local policymakers and educators the same incentives.

Even at the city level, international agreements offer prestige, investment opportunities, and funding with the potential to bring job growth or cultural enrichment. By targeting major metropolitan areas with sister-city agreements and placing CCs within those sister cities, Beijing can shape the perceptions of those most likely to shape later policy.

387 Evan Osnos, "Why Is Hu Jintao Going to Chicago?" *The New Yorker*, Jan. 19, 2011, (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/evan-osnos/why-is-hu-jintao-going-to-chicago>), accessed Dec. 14, 2023.

388 "Emory will end agreement with Confucius Institute in 2021," Emory News Center, Emory University official website, Aug. 18, 2020, (https://news.emory.edu/stories/2020/08/upress_confucius_institute/index.html#:~:text=Emory%20will%20end%20agreement%20with%20Confucius%20Institute%20in%202021,-Aug.&text=Over%20the%20past%2013%20years,programming%20in%20this%20critical%20area.), accessed Dec. 19, 2023. See also Elaine Justice, "Emory, Atlanta Public Schools Inaugurate Confucius Institute," Emory Report, March 24, 2008, (https://www.emory.edu/EMORY_REPORT/erarchive/2008/March/March24/ConfuciusInstitute.htm), accessed Dec. 19, 2023.

389 Elaine Justice, "Emory, Atlanta Public Schools Inaugurate Confucius Institute," Emory Report, March 24, 2008, (https://www.emory.edu/EMORY_REPORT/erarchive/2008/March/March24/ConfuciusInstitute.htm), accessed Dec. 19, 2023.

390 Ibid.

391 Ibid.

392 Annual Impact Report for 2018, Sister Cities International, 50, (<https://sistercities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-SCI-Impact-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>), accessed Dec. 19, 2023.

393 Ibid., 40.

394 Chicago Public Schools Chinese World Program, Asia Society, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/chicago-public-schools-chinese-world-language-program#:~:text=In%202006%2C%20in%20partnership%20with,Chinese%20language%20and%20cultural%20education.>), accessed Dec. 23, 2023.

Go Global NC

Relationships between sister cities allow China to influence public perception in major population centers; however, sister-city arrangements must not overshadow the role played by ties between US states and Chinese provinces that perform the same purpose. In the case of North Carolina, the North Carolina State Board of Education has a memorandum of understanding with China's Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education (JPDE).³⁹⁵

The investigation conducted by PDE found that the nonprofit Go Global NC played a significant role in bringing China to North Carolina schools.³⁹⁶ PDE discovered that Go Global NC founded the “nation's first statewide network of Confucius Classrooms.”³⁹⁷ Founded in 1979, Go Global NC describes the mission of its founding by then-governor James B. Hunt Jr. to foster “people-to-people diplomacy.”³⁹⁸ China features prominently, though not exclusively, in the organization's program portfolio. Go Global NC claims that Chinese is the fastest-growing language in the state in part due to its “Go Global NC Chinese Classroom Collaborative.”³⁹⁹ As of 2020, Go Global NC helped establish 34 separate Chinese-language programs.⁴⁰⁰

In 2008, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and the state's Board of Education collaboratively organized the “US-China Education Summit.”⁴⁰¹ Beginning as a celebration of the memorandum between North Carolina and Jiangsu Province, and repeatable every two years, the conference demonstrates China's “whole of society” strategy.⁴⁰² The memorandum of understanding states that the agreement actually expands beyond education. The agreement centers on the themes of:

Confucius Classrooms construction, math and science education, language education, culture and arts education, lesson planning and research, business climate, and education as a tool for economic development.⁴⁰³

395 Memorandum of Understanding between Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education, The North Carolina State Board of Education, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, signed April 6, 2017, (<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/nc-jiangsuprovince-china-mou-2016-2021/open>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

396 Little Red Classrooms, Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/#:~:text=Parents%20Defending%20Education%20uncovers%20contracts,St.>), accessed Dec. 21, 2023.

397 Ibid.

398 Expanding Reach to Education and Policy Leaders, Go Global NC official website, (<https://globalnc.org/about-us/>), accessed Dec. 21, 2023.

399 China Programs, Go Global NC official website, (<https://globalnc.org/our-work/china-programs/>), accessed Dec. 21, 2023.

400 Little Red Classrooms, Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/#:~:text=Parents%20Defending%20Education%20uncovers%20contracts,St.>), accessed Dec. 12, 2023.

401 See North Carolina Public Schools, Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/north-carolina-public-schools>), accessed Dec. 21, 2023.

402 Ibid.

403 Memorandum of Understanding between Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education, The North Carolina State Board of Education, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, signed April 6, 2017, (<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/nc-jiangsuprovince-china-mou-2016-2021/open>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

In this case, CCs are about far more than simply offering language education. Similar to a treaty, the memorandum states that North Carolina and Jiangsu Province would “serve as coordinating agencies for their respective governments.”⁴⁰⁴ Go Global NC “maintains a Memorandum of Understanding with the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education (JPDE) to support North Carolina-China partnerships and exchanges.”⁴⁰⁵

In addition to its cooperation with the Jiangsu Province Department of Education, the broker role of Go Global NC is evident. In its operations at Winston-Salem Forsyth Schools, Go Global NC distributed “funding provided by Hanban” at rates of \$10,000 per year.⁴⁰⁶ Contracts between Go Global NC and CCs at Konnoak Elementary and Philo Magnet Academy Middle School describe that each CC should request “1,000 volumes of books,” and Mandarin instructors whose salaries and airfare would be covered by China.⁴⁰⁷ In both contracts, Go Global NC is named the Center for International Understanding.⁴⁰⁸

The makeup of Go Global NC’s board highlights the role that CCs play in opening various sectors of American society to China’s influence operations. Currently, its board includes a notable list of influential figures in the state’s political arena and business community.⁴⁰⁹ Geoff Coltrane, the Senior Education Advisor for current Democratic North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, is among its current board members.⁴¹⁰

China’s relationship with North Carolina stands out due to its position as a top destination for overseas Chinese investment. For example, the Chinese computer giant Lenovo was reported in 2016 to have its “joint world headquarters” in the city of Morrisville.⁴¹¹ Wake County and Guilford County are home to both CCs and Lenovo facilities.⁴¹² Indeed, Lenovo alone contributed \$1.5 billion to North Carolina’s economy in 2014.⁴¹³ In 2020 it was revealed that Lenovo sold compromised computer equipment to state governments that gave Beijing access to sensitive data.⁴¹⁴ China’s strategy to simultaneously penetrate layers of American society beyond education has proven successful.

404 Ibid.

405 Jiangsu Province Department of Education Relationship, Go Global NC official website, (<https://globalnc.org/our-work/china-programs/>), accessed Dec. 14, 2023.

406 Confucius Classroom Grant Program in WS/FCS, (<https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Summary-of-Confucius-Classrooms-Winston-Salem-Forsyth-County-Schools-NC.pdf>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

407 See Article 4 Obligations, Agreement Between the Center for International Understanding and Philo Magnet Academy Middle School on the Establishment of the Confucius Classroom at Philo Magnet Elementary School, signed Nov. 7, 2014, (<https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Philo-contract.pdf>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023. See also Agreement Between the Center for International Understanding and Konnoak Elementary School on the Establishment of the Confucius Classroom at Konnoak Elementary School, Signed Nov. 7, 2014, (<https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Konnoak-Contract.pdf>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

408 Confucius Classroom Grant Program in WS/FCS, (<https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Summary-of-Confucius-Classrooms-Winston-Salem-Forsyth-County-Schools-NC.pdf>), accessed Dec. 20, 2023.

409 Our Board, Go Global NC official website, (<https://globalnc.org/about-us/our-board/>), accessed Dec. 28, 2023.

410 Geoff Coltrane, Go Global NC official website, (<https://globalnc.org/about-us/our-board/geoff-coltrane/>), accessed Dec. 26, 2023.

411 Edward Martin, “China’s NC love affair,” *Business North Carolina*, Dec. 2, 2016, (<https://businessnc.com/chinas-n-c-love-affair/>), accessed Dec. 26, 2023.

412 Edward Martin, “China’s NC love affair,” *Business North Carolina*, Dec. 2, 2016, (<https://businessnc.com/chinas-n-c-love-affair/>), accessed Dec. 26, 2023. See also “Little Red Classrooms: China’s Infiltration of American K-12 Schools,” *Parents Defending Education*, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/>), accessed Dec. 26, 2023.

413 Edward Martin, “China’s NC love affair,” *Business North Carolina*, Dec. 2, 2016, (<https://businessnc.com/chinas-n-c-love-affair/>), accessed Dec. 26, 2023.

414 Bill Gertz, “Lexmark, Lenovo tech funnels data to Chinese intelligence services,” *Washington Times*, Feb. 24, 2020, (<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/feb/24/lexmark-lenovo-tech-funnels-data-china-intelligenc/>), accessed Feb. 11, 2024.

Conclusion

Intermediary nonprofit organizations and bilateral relationships between US states and cities have helped CCs form and grow. Initially, CCs were considered extensions in the K-12 system from CIs hosted in universities. While some CCs fit this model, many of the largest CC programs were formed or survived CI closures due to the work of nonprofit intermediaries.

In some cases, such as at CPS, the K-12 system operated as a CI independently with a partnership with East China Normal University.

While some of these revelations are unsurprising in light of past work conducted by NAS and PDE, the role played by state and local officials to broker agreements with China is more revealing. In the CCs at CPS, CIWA, North Carolina, and Atlanta, each city or state had a “sister” jurisdiction in China. These findings also reveal the place of CCs within China’s broader strategy. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher Wray stated in 2020 that “China is engaged in a whole-of-state effort to become the world’s only superpower by any means necessary.”⁴¹⁵ Wray noted that countering this challenge requires a “whole-of-society response.”⁴¹⁶ As demonstrated by China’s use of sister provinces, cities, US nonprofit agents, its universities, and its Ministry of Education, China is clearly following a “whole-of-state” strategy and is succeeding. The cooperation and complicity of American jurisdictions in seeking deeper ties with China implies that Wray’s prescription has fallen on deaf ears.

415 “The Threat Posed by the Chinese Government and the Chinese Communist Party to the Economic and National Security of the United States,” Statements by FBI Director Christopher Wray to the Hudson Institute, July 7, 2020, (<https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/the-threat-posed-by-the-chinese-government-and-the-chinese-communist-party-to-the-economic-and-national-security-of-the-united-states>), accessed Dec. 13, 2023.

416 Ibid.

Chapter 3



Survey of Surviving Confucius Classrooms

In its report on Confucius Classrooms last year, Parents Defending Education listed seven schools where CCs appear to remain in operation. These schools include: Cloverport Independent School District (KY), Minnetonka Public Schools (MN), St. Cloud Area School District (MN), Tulsa Public Schools (OK), Sisters School District (OR), Highland Park Independent School District (TX), and Seattle Public Schools (WA).⁴¹⁷ The cases of Tulsa, Texas, SPS, and Kentucky are heavily explored elsewhere in this report. The cases of Minnetonka, Sisters School District, and St. Cloud Area Schools are examined here.

In all three cases, either state and local policymakers helped foster ties with China to build the CC program or Chinese investment was found nearby. Additionally, each case began with the support of a CI. The state of Minnesota's efforts to offer Mandarin in its schools began with overtures to China in the early 2000s. Minnetonka's programs survived the demise of its supporting CI in part due to the bilateral ties it forged with schools and China. In the case of Sisters School District, the schools' Chinese language offerings are promoted by local business interests for economic reasons. In the case of St Cloud Area Schools, Chinese immersion operates in parallel to similar programs in Spanish and Somali. In sum, all three cases illustrate the broker role played by businesses and local policymakers.

417 Little Red Classrooms: China's Infiltration of American K-12 Schools, Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

Minnetonka Public Schools, Minnesota

The CC at Minnetonka Public Schools (MPS) is a vestige of the CI at the University of Minnesota (CIUMN).⁴¹⁸ In 2005, then-Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty traveled to China to broker stronger economic ties between the state and Beijing.⁴¹⁹ Pawlenty met with China's then-ambassador Zhou Wenzhong after declaring that he desired to "realign resources in Minnesota to put a particular emphasis on our relationship and dealings with China."⁴²⁰ Pawlenty also stated that he desired to make Mandarin learning a priority in the state's schools.⁴²¹ This new drive, part of the governor's "Minnesota-China Partnership," was prompted by stronger Chinese interest in the state's steel industry.⁴²²

To reorient toward China, Minnesota passed legislation to subsidize its Department of Education to study implementing Mandarin instruction in public schools.⁴²³ The Chinese government looked favorably at the move, as CIUMN opened in 2008.⁴²⁴ One year later, China contributed \$500,000 to a dozen schools across the state.⁴²⁵ These dozen K-12 institutions included Minnetonka, which today has a student population of 10,900 students.⁴²⁶ While these schools received funding for Mandarin in 2009, not all could be independently verified to form full CC programs.

Figure 3.1 Minnesota Schools that Received Chinese Funding (2009)⁴²⁷

Battle Lake Public School	Rochester Public Schools
Centennial School District	St. Johns Preparatory School
Concordia Language Villages	South Washington County Public Schools
Fergus Falls High School	Willmar High School
Minneapolis Public Schools	Xin Xing Academy at Hopkins Public Schools
Minnetonka Public Schools	Yinghua Academy

CIUMN administered its CCs while fostering business ties with China. Article 2 of the 2013 agreement between CIUMN and the Hanban states that the CI's duties included "promoting and expanding Chinese language instruction in Minnesota" and facilitating

418 Little Red Classrooms: China's Infiltration of American K-12 Schools, Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023. See also "Minnetonka Public Schools," Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/minnetonka-public-schools-minnesota>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

419 "MN Gov. Tim Pawlenty pushes for more trade with China," Minnesota Lawyer, May 23, 2005, (<https://minnlawyer.com/2005/05/23/mn-gov-tim-pawlenty-pushes-for-more-trade-with-china/>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

420 Ibid.

421 Susan Jean Koehn, "Mandarin Immersion School: A Case Study," Hamline University, 2015, 4.

422 Ibid.

423 Ibid, 4.

424 "The University of Minnesota and China: a lengthy history," Star Tribune, Jan. 25, 2020, (<https://www.startribune.com/the-university-of-minnesota-and-china-a-lengthy-history/567274811/?refresh=true>), accessed Nov. 12, 2023.

425 Ibid, 4.

426 About Minnetonka Schools, Minnetonka Public Schools official website, ([https://www.minnetonkaschools.org/district/about#:~:text=Our%20schools,\(grades%209%2D12\)](https://www.minnetonkaschools.org/district/about#:~:text=Our%20schools,(grades%209%2D12),)), accessed Nov. 15, 2023.

427 "12 Minnesota schools get \$500,000 to teach Chinese," MPR News, Dec. 9, 2009, (<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2009/12/09/chinese-grant>), accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

“business exchanges.”⁴²⁸ At the K-12 level, Article 4 stated that the CIUMN was obligated to “promote regular visits to China by educators and academic administrators from K-12 schools in Minnesota to improve their understanding of China and Chinese language instruction.”⁴²⁹ For its part, the Hanban would act as a resource by providing K-12 learning materials, books, and funds for Chinese teachers in the form of airfare, housing, and salaries.⁴³⁰ When the CIUMN closed in 2019, it notably attempted to retain ties to its Chinese partner university at Capital Normal University.⁴³¹ Today, these ties continue through the University of Minnesota’s Exchange Program.⁴³²

Minnetonka’s CC survived, at minimum in the form of its Chinese Immersion program. This immersion program exclusively teaches in Mandarin until the third grade.⁴³³ The district also retains “sister-school” partnerships and exchanges with schools in Hangzhou and Beijing.⁴³⁴ Among the reasons Minnetonka lists for learning Mandarin is that “China holds the largest portion of American debt and is quickly becoming one of the world’s economic superpowers.”⁴³⁵

Minnetonka’s commitment to Mandarin has not gone unnoticed by the Chinese government. In September 2022, Chinese Consul General Zhao Jian visited the district and its five constituent schools that offer Chinese immersion.⁴³⁶ Visiting a range of classes, including science and math, Zhao stated that “Chinese language teaching has provided a key for the younger generation in the United States to increase their understanding of China.”⁴³⁷ When I contacted the chair of the district’s language program, she turned me down after learning of my affiliation with NAS.

Sisters School District, Oregon

As a small school district with roughly 1,300 students, Sisters School District seems an unlikely location for a language program with ties to the Chinese government.⁴³⁸ The CC program at Sisters School District in northcentral Oregon began with Mandarin language

428 Article 2, Agreement of Cooperation Between The Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) and Regents of the University of Minnesota (UMN), signed July 1, 2013.

429 Ibid, Article 4.

430 Article 6, Agreement of Cooperation Between The Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) and Regents of the University of Minnesota (UMN), signed July 1, 2013.

431 Rachelle Peterson et al, *After Confucius Institutes*, (New York : National Association of Scholars, 2022), 179.

432 Capital Normal University Exchange, University of Minnesota at Morris official website, (<https://morris.umn.edu/academic-center-enrichment/study-abroad/find-program/capital-normal-university-exchange>), accessed Oct. 28, 2023.

433 Chinese Immersion, Minnetonka Public Schools official website, (<https://www.minnetonkaschools.org/academics/specialty-programs/immersion/chinese>), accessed Oct. 29, 2023.

434 Ibid.

435 Ibid.

436 “Chinese Consul General Zhao Jian visits the Minnetonka School District,” Minnetonka Public Schools official website, Oct. 4, 2022, (<https://www.minnetonkaschools.org/news-details/~board/feature-news-stories/post/chinese-consul-general-zhao-jian-visits-the-minnetonka-school-district>), accessed Oct. 29, 2023.

437 Ibid.

438 “Sisters School District Mandarin Chinese Language Program Prepares Students for International Business,” Cascade Business News, Oct. 20, 2015, (<https://cascadebusnews.com/sisters-school-district-mandarin-chinese-language-program-prepares-students-for-international-business/>), Nov. 16, 2023.

courses at the Sister High School before expanding to include Sisters Middle School.⁴³⁹ Backed by the CI at Portland State University (CIPSU), Sisters School District is the only program of its kind in its part of the state and was one of at least 25 across Oregon.⁴⁴⁰ Portland State's CI began in 2007 through a partnership with Soochow University, which grew out of a pre-existing sister-city relationship between Portland and Soochow (alternatively spelled Suzhou) in 1988.⁴⁴¹ Portland's relationship with Soochow is evident in the evolution of CIPSU and China's extension into the Oregonian school system.

In April 2008, Lincoln High School, in conjunction with Portland-Suzhou Sister City Association Board Director Peyton Chapman, penned a memorandum of understanding with a high school in Suzhou.⁴⁴² That same month, the Portland mayor's office sent a delegation to Suzhou Middle School No. 10, which holds ties with Portland's own Jackson Middle School.⁴⁴³ Concurrently, Portland's sister city program brokered a partnership between Hosford Middle School and Suzhou No. 12 Middle School in China.⁴⁴⁴ In 2011, then-Portland Mayor Sam Adams and Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber greeted former UFWD director Liu Yandong while visiting CIPSU.⁴⁴⁵ CIPSU remains on the library page of Portland State University's website, declaring that the Hanban provides teachers and other Mandarin language materials from "Portland's sister city, Suzhou China."⁴⁴⁶

In 2017 and 2022, NAS noted that CIPSU sanitized its course material to cast China in a good light. Then-CIPSU director Meiru Liu stated that the CI sponsored lectures on Tibet "with an emphasis on the beautiful scenery, customs, and tourist interest." At the same time, topics related to the CCP's abuse of minorities and dissidents were avoided.⁴⁴⁷ For years, the university faculty expressed concerns over Beijing's control of the CI's curriculum on the grounds of objecting to China's human rights abuses.⁴⁴⁸ When CIPSU opted to close in 2021, Portland State nonetheless stated its intention to retain ties to Soochow University. Portland State mentioned it would broker a replacement of the CI "with a variety of other programs and resources."⁴⁴⁹

439 "Chinese teachers arrive in Sisters," *The Nugget*, Nov. 12, 2013, (<https://www.nuggetnews.com/story/2013/11/12/news/chinese-teachers-arrive-in-sisters/22997.html>), accessed Nov. 15, 2023.

440 "Sisters School District Mandarin Chinese Language Program Prepares Students for International Business," *Cascade Business News*, Oct. 20, 2015, (<https://cascadibusnews.com/sisters-school-district-mandarin-chinese-language-program-prepares-students-for-international-business/>), Nov. 16, 2023.

441 History of the Portland-Suzhou Sister City Association, Portland-Suzhou Sister City Association, (<https://www.portlandsuzhou.org/history>), accessed Nov. 15, 2023; Soochow University, Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education, May 5, 2023, (http://english.jsjyt.edu.cn/2023-05/05/c_883055.htm), accessed July 20, 2023.

442 *Ibid.*

443 *Ibid.*

444 *Ibid.*

445 History of the Portland-Suzhou Sister City Association, Portland-Suzhou Sister City Association, (<https://www.portlandsuzhou.org/history>), accessed Nov. 15, 2023.

446 Confucius Institute at Portland State University, PDX Scholar, University Library, Portland State University, (<https://pdx-scholar.library.pdx.edu/cipsu/>), accessed Nov. 16, 2023.

447 Rachele Peterson, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 96, 98.

448 Kevin Shank, "Faculty concerns over Confucius Institute contract," *VG PSU Vanguard*, Feb. 4, 2019, (<https://psuvanguard.com/confucius-institute-in-jeopardy/>), accessed Nov. 16, 2023.

449 *Ibid.*, 184. See also email from Portland State President Stephen Percy to President Yang Wei of the Chinese International Education Foundation, Jan. 27, 2021, (<https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Portland-State-University-Jan-27-2021-Letter-to-Soochow-University.pdf>), accessed Nov. 16, 2023.

Sisters School District was enthusiastic about the low cost of working with China and CIPSU to expand its Mandarin language offerings. Sisters teacher David Perkins, who launched the Mandarin program in Sisters High School in 2008, stated that the CC was “basically a freebie for the district.”⁴⁵⁰ In July 2023, Parents Defending Education discovered that despite CIPSU’s closure, the district nonetheless approved a budget of \$15,513 for the CC for the 2022-2023 academic year.⁴⁵¹

The district’s offering of Chinese in its school system is featured as a selling point for the local economy and is promoted by the Sisters Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber describes the district’s Mandarin program as spanning from the seventh grade through high school graduation, and includes the availability of AP-level courses.⁴⁵² The Chamber claims the program has “three native speaker Chinese teachers sponsored by Hanban, a part of the China Ministry of Education.”⁴⁵³ Sisters’ Mandarin curriculum utilizes the “Easy Steps to Chinese” series developed by Beijing Language and Culture University Press.⁴⁵⁴ The “Easy Steps” curriculum includes topics such as “education and employment,” “law and order,” “current issues,” and “world issues” at its higher levels.⁴⁵⁵ Notably, both simplified and traditional Mandarin scripts are included.⁴⁵⁶

China’s motivation for targeting Sisters School District is connected to its economic interests in Oregon. Located in Deschutes County, the Sisters School District sits near significant Chinese real estate investments. Tianqiao Chen, a Chinese billionaire and CCP member, owns roughly 200,000 acres of land in Oregon, including 33,000 acres near the Deschutes National Forest.⁴⁵⁷ Chen is currently the second-largest foreign owner of American land after other major investments in Oregonian timberland in Klamath and Deschutes counties.⁴⁵⁸ Chen is the founder of Shanda Interactive Entertainment and began investing in the area’s timberland a decade ago.⁴⁵⁹

450 Tyler Leeds, “Sister students learn Chinese,” *The Bulletin*, Jan. 31, 2020, (https://www.bendbulletin.com/localstate/sisters-students-learn-chinese/article_c89ef602-ed85-56a0-8814-1239c14977f5.html), accessed Nov. 19, 2023.

451 Little Red Classrooms: China’s Infiltration of American K-12 Schools, Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/#:~:text=Parents%20Defending%20Education%20uncovered%20contracts,St.>), accessed Nov. 19, 2023. See also Sisters School District 2022-2023 Adopted Budget, (<https://defendinged.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/0.0-22-23-ADOPTED-BUDGET-Sisters-School-District-OR.pdf>), accessed Nov. 19, 2023.

452 The Sisters Country, Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce official website, (<https://www.sisterscountry.com/play/arts--culture#!directory>), accessed Nov. 19, 2023.

453 *Ibid.*

454 *Ibid.* See also “Easy Steps to Chinese vol. 1 Textbook,” Beijing Language and Culture University Press official website, (<https://www.blcup.com/enPlnfo/index/3935#001>), accessed Nov 20, 2023.

455 “Easy Steps to Chinese vol. 1 Textbook,” Beijing Language and Culture University Press official website, (<https://www.blcup.com/enPlnfo/index/3935#001>), accessed Nov 20, 2023.

456 *Ibid.*

457 Alex Baumhardt, “Chinese billionaire owns hundreds of thousands of acres of Oregon timberland, report finds,” *OPB*, Jan. 21, 2024, (<https://www.opb.org/article/2024/01/21/tianqiao-chen-oregon-land-acquisition/>), accessed Jan. 24, 2024.

458 *Ibid.*

459 *Ibid.* See also Abinav Singh, “Lawmakers enraged after Chinese Communist party member purchases 200,000 acres of US land,” *WION*, Jan. 15, 2024, (<https://www.wionews.com/world/lawmakers-enraged-after-ccp-billionaire-purchases-200000-acres-of-us-land-679847>), accessed Jan. 24, 2024.

Chen's land purchases in Oregon recently caused a national uproar because the transactions are currently missing from US government records.⁴⁶⁰ In response to the revelation about the investments and accusations that Chen is a member of the CCP, a representative of Shanda disputed the latter notion, asserting that he rather had been a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) until 2018.⁴⁶¹ This is little consolation for concerns of American national interest, as the CPPCC is described as "a patriotic united front organization of the Chinese people, serving as a key mechanism for multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China."⁴⁶² Chen's investments, which are involved in the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, aim to "provide exclusive hunting opportunities for disabled veterans and young people."⁴⁶³

St. Cloud Area School District, Minnesota

In 2022, when NAS documented the closure and rebranding of CIs around the country, we noted that it remained unclear whether the CI at St. Cloud University had closed. Currently, its CI website (www.stcloudstate.edu/confucius/) redirects to the university's Center for International Studies.⁴⁶⁴ In its July 2023 report, Parents Defending Education notes that the CC at St. Cloud Area School District (SCASD) participated with St. Cloud State University to run its Chinese program, receiving over \$85,000 in grants and resources from the Hanban.⁴⁶⁵ This past June, the House Select Committee on the CCP noted that St. Cloud was one of two universities to receive funding from the US Department of Defense for "sensitive military research while publicly operating CCP-affiliated Confucius Institutes on their campuses."⁴⁶⁶

Once St. Cloud University's CI opened in 2014, it immediately began collaborating with the Minnesota Department of Education to license Chinese teachers at Madison Elementary and North Junior High School.⁴⁶⁷ As with other CCs, St. Cloud's CI included a collaboration with the Jilin Province Department of Education in China to "build partnerships" across

460 Miles Dilworth, "Chinese billionaire Chen Tianqiao's \$85 million purchase of Oregon timberland is missing from government records, alarming lawmakers: Is now the second-largest foreign owner of US land," Daily Mail, Jan. 13, 2024, (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12952121/chen-tianqiao-shanda-games-china-oregon.html>), accessed Jan. 24, 2024.

461 "Chinese billionaire's company responds to media reports," News Nation, Jan. 16, 2024, (<https://www.newsnationnow.com/business/chinese-billionaire-company-responds-media-reports/>), accessed Jan. 24, 2024.

462 See Roles and Functions of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference," The National Committee Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference official website, Aug. 26, 2021, (http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2021-08/26/c_470023.htm), accessed Jan. 24, 2024.

463 "Chinese billionaire's company responds to media reports," News Nation, Jan. 16, 2024, (<https://www.newsnationnow.com/business/chinese-billionaire-company-responds-media-reports/>), accessed Jan. 24, 2024.

464 Center for International Studies, St. Cloud State University official website, (https://www.stcloudstate.edu/international-studies/default.aspx?utm_source=website&utm_medium=redirect), accessed Oct. 25, 2023.

465 Little Red Classrooms: China's Infiltration of American K-12 Schools, Parents Defending Education, July 26, 2023, (https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/#:~:text=Parents%20Defending%20Education%20uncovered%20contracts,St.)), accessed Nov. 19, 2023.

466 Alfred University Closes Confucius Institute as a Result of Select Committee Investigation, Press Release, House Select Committee on the CCP, June 15, 2023, (<https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/media/press-releases/alfred-university-closes-confucius-institute-result-select-committee>), accessed Nov. 1, 2023.

467 Linda Vanderwerf, "St. Cloud State celebrates Confucius Institute opening," West Central Tribune, May 2, 2014, (<https://www.wctrib.com/news/st-cloud-state-celebrates-confucius-institute-opening>), accessed Nov. 1, 2023.

the state of Minnesota.⁴⁶⁸ St. Cloud University's CI was also notably housed in its School of Education rather than in a foreign languages department.⁴⁶⁹ When the CI opened, its then-director Kathy Johnson declared that the university was "part of an interdependent global community," and that the institute was about "bringing the global local and having an impact on the global."⁴⁷⁰

The Chinese language programs at Madison Elementary, North Elementary, and Apollo High School are vigorous and expand beyond simple language instruction. According to the Asia Society, Madison students take science, math, social studies, and language courses entirely in Mandarin.⁴⁷¹ Only in grades 3-5 do Madison students begin receiving instruction in English.⁴⁷² At North Junior High, students take "Chinese Immersion Social Studies, and Chinese Immersion Science" from grades six to eight.⁴⁷³ Students at the high school level can then take the Chinese Immersion Capstone Trip, while high-proficiency students can study in China.⁴⁷⁴ By 2016, St. Cloud State's CI broadened its reach to include the Metro Deaf School in St. Paul, which received a \$10,000 annual grant from the Hanban for five years.⁴⁷⁵ Today, the school offers dual-immersion programs in Chinese, Spanish, and Somali. The Chinese track is the most extensive of the three language programs offered.⁴⁷⁶

468 Ibid.

469 Daid Unze, "SCSU's new Confucius Institute brings East to West," SC Times, May 6, 2014, (<https://www.sctimes.com/story/news/local/2014/05/06/scsus-new-confucius-institute-brings-east-west/8789899/>), accessed Nov. 4, 2023.

470 Ibid.

471 Minnesota Chinese Immersion Programs, Asia Society official website, (<https://asiasociety.org/education/minnesota-chinese-immersion-programs>), accessed Nov. 4, 2023. See also Chinese Dual Language Immersion Program, PK-12 Education, St. Cloud Area School District, (<https://mn01909691.schoolwires.net/Page/7034>), accessed Nov. 4, 2023.

472 Ibid.

473 Ibid.

474 Ibid.

475 Chrissy Gaetke, "St. Cloud State Expands Chinese Immersion Programs," WJON AM 1240, Nov. 30, 2016, (<https://wjon.com/st-cloud-state-expands-chinese-immersion-programs/>), accessed Nov. 5, 2023.

476 See Chinese Dual Language Immersion Program, St. Cloud Area School District official website, (<https://www.isd742.org/Page/7034>), accessed Nov. 5, 2023. See also Somali Dual Language Immersion program, St. Cloud Area School District official website, (<https://www.isd742.org/Page/10689>), accessed Nov. 5, 2023. See also Spanish Dual Language Immersion Program, St. Cloud Area School District official website, (<https://www.isd742.org/Page/7035>), accessed Nov. 5, 2023.

Chapter 4



Countering China's Influence in American Education

Countering China's influence in American education requires implementing a “whole of country” strategy at the federal, state, and local levels. Countering China also requires creating a Mandarin language program to break China's near-monopoly on Chinese language instruction. This report, along with others published by NAS, and groups like PDE, find that China's influence operations are persistent, flexible, and lucrative for the actors who cooperate with them. Rather than only targeting universities and national-level elites, China's Confucius programs employ a subnational strategy aimed at forging ties with states, cities, and local school districts.

Confucius Classrooms demonstrate China's ability to take advantage of American non-profit law and use such organizations as intermediaries to reach their targets. China uses nonprofits precisely because they offer the veneer of organic civil society and hide ties to Beijing. Effective policy to counter such a misuse of law first requires revising the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) to close existing loopholes for education, business, and culture. Additionally, the enforcement of an augmented FARA should be extended to the state level. Second, the United States must create home-grown foreign language curricula that enable American learners to communicate the unique aspects of American society, history, and governance to foreign audiences. This second recommendation requires tapping into the expertise of American scholars to create pro-American foreign language programs that US schools can then adopt. Finally, legislators should disincentivize universities from taking foreign funds by implementing a mechanism of ratio funding and conducting mandatory financial audits.

Recommendation 1: Revitalize the Foreign Agent Registration Act

Increased awareness about the risk the CCP poses to American interests over the past few years has created fertile ground for assessing and re-inventing existing policies to counter China's influence. Reforming the FARA offers one of the most direct and comprehensive means of countering China's influence strategy.

Enacted in 1938 in the leadup to World War Two, FARA mandates the disclosure and registry of individuals with relationships with foreign governments. The Department of Justice (DOJ) notes that the FARA requires:

The registration of, and disclosures by, an “agent of a foreign principal” who, either directly or through another person, within the United States (1) engages in “political activities” on behalf of a foreign principal; (2) acts a foreign principal’s public relations counsel, publicity agent, information-service employee, or political consultant; (3) solicits, collects, disburses, or dispenses contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for or in the interest of a foreign principal; or (4) represents the interests of the foreign principal before any agency or official of the US government.⁴⁷⁷

CCs, CIs, and their intermediary organizations meet these criteria. However, China's influence strategy in education and the economy clearly exploits existing loopholes in this law. Here, examining China's presence in higher education and the K-12 system cannot be divorced from revelations of China's influence in the American high-tech sector, its purchase of agricultural land, or surveillance in the form of spy balloon flights and cyberattacks.

The most significant weaknesses of FARA are derived from its exemptions. Currently, the law carves out significant exemptions for foreign governments to influence swaths of American society to the detriment of national interests. FARA currently exempts “religious, scholastic, academic, fine arts, or scientific pursuits,” as well as “bona fide commercial activity and other activity not serving predominantly a foreign interest.”⁴⁷⁸ This report highlights how China's influence operations neatly fit many of these exemptions.

In theory, the FARA's definitions of a “foreign principal” would include the individuals and organizations involved in its Confucius programs. A Congressional report last year notes that FARA considers “foreign political parties” to be “entities under the laws of a foreign

477 Frequently Asked Questions, US Department of Justice official website, (<https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara/frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=FARA%20fosters%20transparency%20by%20requiring,make%20such%20information%20publicly%20available.>), accessed Jan. 6, 2024.

478 Frequently Asked Questions, US Department of Justice official website, (<https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara/frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=FARA%20fosters%20transparency%20by%20requiring,make%20such%20information%20publicly%20available.>), accessed Jan. 6, 2024.

country,” and foreign citizens in the US as “foreign principals.”⁴⁷⁹ Similarly, the report notes that those “agents” working on behalf of a foreign government include anyone “directly or indirectly supervised, directed, controlled, financed, or subsidized in whole or in major part by a foreign principal.”⁴⁸⁰ By this standard, multiple school districts and nonprofits have operated or continue to function as Chinese agents.

The CCP’s strategy to influence layers of society and authority in the US not only abuses exemptions in the FARA but follows a different logic of law and interest than that which exists in the West. For Communist states such as China, no separation exists between public and private spheres of civic life, nor does a true separation exist between the state and private sector. Because of the fusion of state and society common in totalitarian regimes, the FARA in its current form offers little protection against influence operations. Countering China in the education domain requires reforming the FARA to specifically eliminate scholarly and research exemptions.

Penalties for violating the FARA include 5-year prison terms, and fines up to \$250,000; however, FARA offers gradations of enforcement for “misdemeanors” that include smaller fines, shorter prison terms, and the use of civil enforcement powers by the Attorney General.⁴⁸¹ The FARA is a rarely-used tool against Beijing despite growing concerns over the threat China poses to US interests. An audit conducted in 2016 by the Congressional Research Service discovered that “voluntary compliance” is not only the preferred method of enforcement, but that the DOJ has only pursued seven criminal FARA cases between 1966 and 2015.⁴⁸²

To combat China’s influence campaign and its layered strategy of penetrating different sectors of society, three specific reforms should be made. These reforms include:

- Eliminating exemptions for academic, scholastic, art, and scientific pursuits. China and other foreign adversaries extensively use these loopholes.
- Explicitly stating that 501(c)(3) nonprofits are subject to FARA oversight. China’s CCs and CIs openly abuse the American nonprofit sector, both by coopting existing nonprofits in education and by taking advantage of nonprofits unclear of the motivations behind the foreign actors supporting them. Applying FARA to nonprofits rectifies this problem.
- Eliminating exemptions for commercial activities involving “private” subsidiaries of state-owned enterprises. State-owned companies predominate in many

479 “Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA): A Legal Overview,” Congressional Research Service, March 9, 2023, (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11439>), accessed Jan. 6, 2024.

480 Ibid.

481 Frequently Asked Questions, US Department of Justice official website, (<https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara/frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=FARA%20fosters%20transparency%20by%20requiring,make%20such%20information%20publicly%20available.>), accessed Jan. 6, 2024.

482 “Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA): A Legal Overview,” Congressional Research Service, March 9, 2023, (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11439>), accessed Jan. 6, 2024.

countries outside the US, including China. Such companies not only enjoy fewer market pressures than their private American counterparts, but also purchase former privately owned subsidiaries, thereby converting them into extensions of a foreign power. Because of this, FARA should be amended to apply to such businesses.

- Extending authority for FARA enforcement to state governments in parallel to Federal enforcement. Because China’s influence in education is designed to target and influence state and local officials, FARA must be amended to meet this evolving threat. State governments should have an extended authority to investigate and fine nonprofits and businesses acting on behalf of foreign interests. Similar laws to FARA should also be legislated at the state level.
- Once amendments to FARA are made, enforcement should be made a policy priority.

Recommendation 2: Develop Foreign Language Curricula Based on the American Narrative

By relying upon Mandarin-language programs tied to the Chinese government, America cedes the training of future China experts to the CCP. At the K-12 level, this risk is exacerbated by exposing American students to ideas communicated by a foreign adversary. This problem is not unique to Mandarin or China, but demonstrates the twofold challenge of meeting the demands for quality foreign-language training at the K-12 level while maintaining sovereignty in education. Solving both requires the creation of America-focused foreign language curricula.

During her 2011 speech promoting the 100,000 Strong Initiative, then-First Lady Michelle Obama declared that “America has no better ambassadors to offer than our young people.”⁴⁸³ While foreign language acquisition enables cross-cultural communication, American students are ill-prepared to communicate ideas and values unique to the American experience.

In 2018, the test conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress discovered only 15 percent of eighth-grade students “reached or exceeded proficiency in US history,” while civics proficiency among the same sample ranked at 24 percent.⁴⁸⁴ As recent domestic political and public discourse demonstrates, many Americans lack a basic knowledge of

483 Students Join First Lady Michelle Obama in Calling for US-China Education Exchange, East-West School of International Studies, Jan. 21, 2011, (<https://www.ewsis.org/2011/01/21/students-join-first-lady-michelle-obama-in-calling-for-u-s-china-education-exchange>), accessed Jan. 10, 2024.

484 Donna St. George, “Students’ understanding of history and civics is worsening,” Washington Post, May 3, 2023, (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/03/civics-history-education-naep-democracy/#>), accessed Jan. 10, 2024. Natalie Wexler, “Why Kids Know Even Less About History Now—And Why It Matters,” Forbes, April. 24, 2020, (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nataliewexler/2020/04/24/why-kids-know-even-less-about-history-now-and-why-it-matters/?sh=4cd8f9cb6a7a>), accessed Jan. 5, 2024.

US history. Not enough Americans have a sophisticated understanding of classical American ideas such as natural rights, republican governance, and the Constitution. Grasping the nuances of foreign cultures is critical to obtaining mastery of foreign languages; however, American students must similarly be able to communicate American ideas to the outside world. Solving this problem requires tasking pro-American educators with crafting curricula for critical languages. Accomplishing this should include:

- Building complete curricula for foreign language acquisition for critical languages designed for American students at universities and the K-12 level. Using the scale developed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CFER, Levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2),⁴⁸⁵ a series of language courses in progressing levels of difficulty should be developed by a team of educators that includes native speakers of the target language, non-native fluent speakers, and educators in American history and civics.
- Beginning levels at A1 and A2, the curriculum should seek to prepare students for basic interactions and communication in speaking, listening, and writing. A pro-American curriculum in the target language should ideally begin integrating texts about US history and the Constitution, starting at the Intermediate B1 and B2 levels. The B2 level, which CFER describes as enabling students to comprehend “extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument,” should begin introducing material from US history such as famous speeches, descriptions of major historical events, and more advanced concepts related to natural law, civil rights, and American government.⁴⁸⁶ By the B2 level, students should ideally be empowered to “read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems,” and “read contemporary literary prose.”⁴⁸⁷ This level is ideal for building the requisite skills that students need to begin true citizen diplomacy, as it encourages the formulation of coherent thought about American issues and challenges in the target language.
- CFER describes advanced and proficient levels (C1 and C2) as points at which students can begin using their language in professional settings to understand “factual and literary texts” and easily communicate complex concepts.⁴⁸⁸ A pro-American foreign language course should ideally integrate matters of cultural, political, and economic relevance to relations between the US and the countries where the target language is spoken. For example, a Mandarin

485 CFER Levels, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, (<https://www.eur.nl/en/education/language-training-centre/cefr-levels>), accessed Jan. 4, 2024.

486 CFER Levels, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, (<https://www.eur.nl/en/education/language-training-centre/cefr-levels>), accessed Jan. 4, 2024.

487 Ibid.

488 Ibid.

curriculum designed in such a matter could integrate material about Chinese immigration to the US, cultural contributions from Chinese Americans, and historical material such as the alliance between the US and the Republic of China (now Taiwan) during the Second World War.

Recommendation 3: Establish Ratio Funding Restrictions on Universities

Most Confucius Institutes may have closed due to the tarnishing of the CCP's "Confucius" brand; however, universities remain an easy target for hostile powers. Indeed, CIs embedded in American universities and colleges have served as one of the primary conduits by which Beijing has accessed the American K-12 system, along with accessing emerging technologies. Existing safeguards against this abuse, such as Section 117 disclosure requirements, have largely failed to dissuade universities from accepting significant Chinese funds. For example, the University of California at Berkeley failed for eight years to disclose a \$220 million investment from the Chinese municipality of Shenzhen and a \$19 million payment from China's Tsinghua University.⁴⁸⁹ Similarly, though CIs have closed, a recent report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine proposed waiver criteria for universities that would allow for the resurrection of Confucius programs.⁴⁹⁰ In response to the proposed waiver criteria, Paul Manfredi, the director of CIWA at Pacific Lutheran University, stated that CIWA's program "seems to work well."⁴⁹¹ With universities still intending to pursue funds and partnerships with foreign adversaries, policy must change the incentives universities face when they enter into those partnerships.

Reestablishing the accountability of universities to the American public requires prohibiting taxpayer funds from competing with foreign grants and donations. Congress and state legislatures should respectively mandate the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and state tax boards to conduct regular audits of any college or university receiving taxpayer funds, and levy fines against schools that are found to receive foreign funds at an equal amount.⁴⁹² For example, in the case of UC Berkeley, the university would be fined \$240 million as a result of its accepting \$240 million in Chinese funds. Fining universities the amount they receive from foreign sources changes the incentives to partner with foreign adversaries by establishing a zero-sum game.

489 Yuichiro Kakutani, "Berkeley's \$220M Mistake Exposed in Massive Deal With China," Daily Beast, May 26, 2023, (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/uc-berkeley-failed-to-disclose-dollar220m-tech-deal-with-china-to-us-government>), accessed Jan. 12, 2024.

490 Katherine Knott, "Could Confucius Institutes Return to US Colleges?" Inside Higher Ed, Jan. 25, 2023, (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2023/01/26/report-proposes-waiver-criteria-confucius-institutes>), accessed Jan. 12, 2024.

491 Ibid.

492 See "NAS Statement on Safeguarding American Education from Foreign Influence," National Association of Scholars official website, Feb. 23, 2023, (<https://www.nas.org/blogs/statement/-3>), accessed Jan. 13, 2024.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the problem posed by China's Confucius programs and the proliferation of foreign funds in American schools amounts to a violation of sovereignty in education. In the case of China, Beijing has developed a conscious and intentional strategy to exert influence on various sectors of American life surrounding American K-12 schools. Due to the largely state and local focus of Beijing's efforts, this problem of foreign influence in US education poses a unique threat. China's influence strategy exploits unique characteristics of the American system of government. Language provides the tools needed to communicate ideas, and ideas carry consequences. American students need foreign language skills for US power to continue in 21st-century geopolitics. Revitalizing FARA to meet the threat posed by Beijing and taking ownership of foreign language curricula to enable the communication of American ideas will assist in meeting this challenge. Fining universities in equal amounts of the funds they receive from foreign sources helps re-establish the accountability of universities to the American public. Forcing universities to be responsive to taxpayers and empowering students to communicate American ideas in critical languages are necessary steps to implement a "whole of society" counter to maligned Chinese influence.

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