

Beispiele über die Politisierung und Zensur durch die Konfuzius-Institute

Quelle: The Debate Over Confucius Institutes PART II

<http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes-part-ii>

It is frequently pointed out that there have been few incidents involving censorship, discriminatory hiring, or other such violations of academic integrity in connection with the activities of Confucius Institutes. (See, for example, Mr. Thøgersen's contribution to the present debate.) Something has to be said, however, about what is being defined as an "incident" of this type. It seems that without much reflection, "incident" is here understood as an act of such character as to achieve notoriety beyond the educational institution concerned, notably as a report widely disseminated in the public media—in short, a scandal. The oft-publicized complaint of discriminatory hiring against McMaster University brought before the Ontario Human Rights tribunal by an erstwhile CI teacher from China who was an adherent of Falun Gong is a notable example; as is the mobilization of students by the Chinese co-director of the Waterloo University CI to protest the local media's coverage of a Chinese government repression of a Tibetan uprising.

If, however, we take into account the evidences of acts of similar import that for whatever reason do not receive similar publicity, perhaps because they are too private, parochial, or seemingly insignificant to interest a general public, it then becomes apparent that such incidents of academic malpractice are disturbingly common. For all their obscurity, moreover, events such as the recurrent suppression of topics that are politically taboo in China in a secondary school CI classroom in the US are of major relevance to the question of the academic legitimacy of the Confucius Institute project in general. In the same way, even the prohibition on displaying the Dalai Lama's portrait in the precincts of the Confucius Institute of the University of Chicago multiplies the significance of interdiction by the power of the icon (ikon). (Quand même, ceci n'est pas un Dalai Lama).

With a view to making the entire dossier public, I have collected a number of such incidents from public media and by communication with persons involved. I would like to make clear the reasons for my temerity in entering a debate about Confucius Institutes: one, that it has everything to do with the challenges CIs pose to academic freedom and integrity in the U.S. and elsewhere and nothing to do with animus to the PRC, the Chinese people, or with some sort of deranged anti-communism; and two, that the understandable reticence of China scholars with ongoing research interests in China to become engaged in criticism of the CI project makes it necessary for people like me to take up these essentially domestic, U.S. issues of academic integrity.

What follows here are a few illustrative examples (with sources noted at the end of each example). Among other reasons I offer them in the hope that readers might inform me (m-sahlins@uchicago.edu) of any of the like they may have come across, whether in print or from their own experience.

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A scheduled visit of the Dalai Lama was cancelled by the Chancellor of North Carolina State University in 2009, ostensibly because there had been insufficient time to prepare for such an august guest. The director of the NC State Confucius Institute got involved—after the cancellation, he said, as a warning for the future—telling the provost that a visit by the Dalai Lama could disrupt "some strong relationships we were developing with China." In this connection, the provost observed that a Confucius Institute presents an "opportunity for subtle pressure and conflict" (Bloomberg News: 1 Nov 2011).

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In a personal interview, the Deputy Director of the Center for East Asian Studies (CEAS) at the University of Chicago observed, with regard to possible public discussions at the Chicago Confucius Institute of Tibetan independence, Tiananmen 1989, or Falun Gong, "I think there is a certain amount of self-censorship." But fortunately, he said, there is money for that kind of discussion at the Center for East Asian Studies. Apart from the outright admission of "a certain amount of self-censorship" in the Confucius Institute—something like an academic equivalent of being a little bit pregnant—the compensatory suggestion that such contentious issues can be considered elsewhere in the university entails an even more subtle tolerance of intellectual repression. "Permissible censorship" it might be called, as it consists of the notion that censorship may be permitted anywhere in the university, so long as there is somewhere it is not permitted, some place where anything can be said. I have records of a similar dodge—i.e., no Tibet in the CI, but we can always do it elsewhere—from persons of responsibility in other universities. (Personal communication.)

Then again, according to an interested faculty member at Durham University (U.K.), Confucius Institutes have no political agenda because they don't even talk about such things as human rights. He says, "another point undermining the notion that there's an ideological agenda at play is that the programme just doesn't touch on some key issues. The Chinese are going to avoid contentious areas such as human rights and democracies and those kind of things" (The Diplomat: March 7, 2011).

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In response to a critical press report, the Director of the Confucius Institute at Portland State University said her CI has sponsored lectures on Tibet, " 'with an emphasis on the beautiful scenery, customs and tourist interest.' " She said also that speakers have been invited to discuss such topics as China's economic development, US-China relations, and China's military, but she did not specify who they were or the content of their talks. "However... 'We try not to organize and host lectures on certain issues related to Falun Gong, dissidents and 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.' For one thing, she said, these are not topics the Confucius Institute headquarters would like to see organized by the institutes. 'For another, they are not major interest and concerns now by general public at large here in the US.' " (Oregon Live, March 8, 2011).

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An excellent ethnographic study by the anthropologist Jennifer Hubbert of Confucius Classrooms in a secondary school on the U.S. West Coast—actual location and name disguised for reasons of confidentiality—allows one to track certain modes of political censorship adopted by the Chinese teachers back to their Hanban origins. For Huppert notes that in their preparatory training by Hanban, the teachers were instructed to ignore or divert discussions of contentious political issues. (The same had been reported by the Chinese teacher who was the key figure in the McMaster case: She was told, "Don't talk about that. If the student insists, you just try to change the topic or say something the Chinese Communist Party would prefer" [China Digital Times: June 22, 2012])) Accordingly, Professor Huppert observed that when "politically laden questions" emerged in classroom discussions, issues such as the status of Tibet and Taiwan, the teachers refocused on language matters or cultural activities. When assigned to write reports on Chinese provinces, the students who chose Tibet were told to focus on cultural practices. The interest of a number of students in the 1989 crackdown at Tiananmen Square was likewise frustrated by teachers' responses in anodyne cultural terms—characterized by one student as "look at the fuzzy bunnies." (Apparently the students had had too many pandas for answers.) (Jennifer Hubbert, "Ambiguous States: Confucius Institutes and Chinese Soft Power in the American Classroom." In press, Political and Legal Anthropology Review).

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In 2011, a petition to eliminate Confucius Classrooms from the New South Wales public schools with some 10,000 signatures was presented by the Greens in the NSW Parliament. The Greens spokesman explained: "The NSW government has admitted that topics sensitive to the Chinese government, including Taiwan, Tibet, Falun Gong, and human rights violations would not be included in these classes....Teachers are recruited from China and paid by the Confucius Institute....They must meet certain criteria, including not having any involvement in Falun Gong. It is clear that the teachers have been politically vetted and will be deeply prejudiced toward Beijing's orthodoxy" (NSWGreens.org: Oct, 14 2011).

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The first CI in the U.S. at the University of Maryland was introduced and directed by a Physics professor with ties to the PRC, but without consulting the then director of the Chinese language program (who supplied this information) or the heads of the Department, School, or College in which Chinese language and culture is taught. "The whole thing was set up in secret" through a relationship between Hanban and the Physics professor, and then within the university exclusively between this professor and the University president. Initially, most of the CI was staffed by scientists with no cogent connection to Chinese language teaching. More than one attempt was later made to have the faculty of the established Chinese language program agree to accept the CI's authority and direction for teaching Chinese, Hanban offering in return to supply the teachers, their salaries, together with the textbooks and course curricula. Writes the erstwhile head of the Chinese language program: "During my tenure at Maryland we were never willing to agree to such an obvious ploy for external manipulation." (Personal communication).

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The proposed establishment of a CI at Pennsylvania in 2009 involved a covert end run around the China faculty similar to the one at Maryland, based on an arrangement instead between Hanban and the Graduate School of Education. The Chinese studies faculty discovered this arrangement at the last moment, when it was about to be endorsed; whereupon their exposure of the proceedings ended them. The China scholars issued a statement explaining they did not want a program of inferior pedagogy competing with their own, one moreover that would "engage in various unwelcome soft power initiatives such as are going on everywhere there are CIs" (Lionel M. Jensen, "Culture Industry, Power, and the Spectacle of China's 'Confucius Institutes,'" in *China in and beyond the Headlines*, 3d edition, 2012. Timothy B. Watson and Lionel M. Jensen eds., pp. 287-88; Bloomberg News: November 1, 2011).