

## *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*

National Association of Scholars | [www.nas.org/ConfuciusInstitutes](http://www.nas.org/ConfuciusInstitutes)

### **Overview**

Since 2004, the Chinese government has planted Confucius Institutes that offer Chinese language and culture courses at colleges and universities around the world, including more than 100 in the United States. China also operates Confucius Classrooms at more than 500 American schools. The United States is home to about 40% of China's Confucius Institutes and Classrooms—more than any other country.

Confucius Institutes are part of the Chinese government's overseas propaganda efforts. They educate a generation of Americans to know little more of China than the regime's official history.

Since *Outsourced to China* was released in April 2017, it has been the subject of more than 70 radio, TV, print, and online stories and has helped to spark a wave of scrutiny for Confucius Institutes.

In February 2017 [FBI Director Christopher Wray](#) acknowledged the FBI is investigating Confucius Institutes. [Senator Marco Rubio in February 2017 urged](#) all Confucius Institutes and Classrooms in Florida to close, and in March [called on the Senate](#) to adopt two of the National Association of Scholars' recommendations: requiring greater transparency in foreign gifts, and making colleges and universities with Confucius Institutes ineligible for a portion of federal funding. In March, Senators Marco Rubio and Tom Cotton, along with Representative Joe Wilson [introduced legislation](#) that includes another of NAS's recommendations: requiring Confucius Institutes to register as foreign agents subject to additional scrutiny.

### **Weapons of Soft Power**

- **Whitewashed:** Confucius Institutes avoid Chinese political history and human rights abuses and portray Taiwan and Tibet as undisputed territories of China.
- **Censored:** Discussing the Tiananmen Square massacre is taboo. A Chinese director said if pressed to discuss Tiananmen in class, she would "show a picture and point out the beautiful architecture."
- **Entanglement:** Confucius Institutes provide funding and free textbooks and teachers. They help attract full-tuition-paying Chinese students, fund study abroad trips for American students, and are the conduit by which college presidents and administrators enjoy trips to and state dinners in China.
- **United Front:** Confucius Institutes are tied directly to the Chinese government and participate in China's global effort to shape its image and to mobilize Chinese nationals living abroad.

### **Answerable to the Chinese Government**

- **Top-Tier Government Oversight:** Confucius Institutes are run by the Hanban, an agency within the Chinese Ministry of Education.
- **Financial ties:** The Hanban provides operating funds, screens and pays Confucius Institutes' Chinese teachers and staff members, provides textbooks, and approves Confucius Institute courses, which are sometimes offered for credit.

- **Contracts Enforcing Chinese Law:** The Hanban specifies that Confucius Institutes must simultaneously “abide by the laws and regulations of the countries in which they are located” but also “[not contravene concerning the laws and regulations of China.](#)”
- **Judicial Jurisdiction:** The Hanban requires that in any dispute over the funding of Confucius Institutes, the parties to the case must “[accept the jurisdiction of the Beijing Court.](#)”
- **Protecting China’s Image:** The Confucius Institute Constitution and many Confucius Institute contracts specify that the Hanban can “pursue legal action” against a Confucius Institute that “[damages or tarnishes the reputation of the Confucius Institutes.](#)”

#### **Recommendations to Colleges and Universities**

- **Close Confucius Institutes.** End all contracts with the Hanban and do not renew expiring contracts.

#### **Recommendations to State and Federal Agencies**

- **Make colleges choose between Chinese and US funding.** Colleges should become ineligible for a portion of federal funding if they accept a Confucius Institute.
- **Provide transparency.** The Higher Education Act requires colleges and universities to disclose major gifts from foreign donors, but nearly all Confucius Institute-related gifts to go unreported. Lower the disclosure threshold to \$50,000 and require that colleges also disclose the value of in-kind gifts.
- **Register Confucius Institutes as foreign agents.** The Foreign Agents Registration Act exempts organizations engaged in “bona fide” educational endeavors. The Department of Justice should investigate Confucius Institutes for potential violation of FARA, and Congress should amend FARA to clarify that propaganda masked as education is not exempt.
- **Enforce antidiscrimination laws.** The Chinese government vets and proposes candidates for teaching positions in Confucius Institutes. The Department of Justice should investigate whether American colleges are complicit in discrimination.
- **Hold hearings.** Do Confucius Institutes engage in espionage? Does the Chinese government use Confucius Institutes to monitor, intimidate, and harass Chinese students? Does China require improper concessions to Chinese law? Do Confucius Institutes abridge freedom of speech at public colleges and universities? All of these questions can and should be addressed to ensure the safety and security of students at American universities.
- **Dear Colleague.** The White House should encourage the Secretary of Education to warn college and university presidents, plus school boards, of the risks posed by Confucius Institutes and Classrooms.
- **Restrict Visas:** Confucius Institute teachers are Chinese nationals selected by the Chinese government. Cease approving visas for Confucius Institute teachers until China demonstrates that no Confucius Institutes engage in espionage, surveillance, propaganda, or censorship.

#### **Contact:**

Rachelle Peterson, author, *Outsourced to China*

917-551-6770 | [peterston@nas.org](mailto:peterston@nas.org)

**About the author:** Rachelle Peterson is policy director at the National Association of Scholars. Her

Rachelle Peterson, Policy Director, National Association of Scholars  
[Peterson@nas.org](mailto:Peterson@nas.org); 917-551-6770

writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Policy*, *Commentary*, *Weekly Standard*, and elsewhere. She is the author of two previous reports for NAS.

**About the National Association of Scholars:** The National Association of Scholars is a network of scholars and citizens united by their commitment to academic freedom, disinterested scholarship, and excellence in American higher education. It upholds the standards of a liberal arts education that fosters intellectual freedom, searches for the truth, and promotes virtuous citizenship.