

NEWS & VIEWS

Special Edition

January 2012

Confucius Institutes and the U of M: A Human Rights Paradox?

The March 2011 UMFA [newsletter](#) featured an article by UMFA Member Terence Russell titled “What is the Confucius Institute?” At the time, the University of Manitoba (UM) was in discussions regarding establishing such an institute on campus. These discussions are still ongoing.

Confucius Institutes (CI) are headquartered in Beijing, China. They are financed by the Office of Chinese Language Council International, also known as “Hanban”, which is an organization affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

CIs operate within universities, colleges, and secondary schools around the world and involve partnerships with individual universities in China. The Chinese university partner will provide teaching staff and educational materials to the CI, while the PRC provides overall funding and supervision of the CIs. This has raised concerns over the government’s ability to limit academic freedom and introduce propaganda into the classroom.

According to the Confucius Institute Headquarters’ website, as of August 2011, there were 353 CIs in 104 countries and regions in the world. This includes 9 CIs in Canada.

Although an [article](#) in Maclean’s magazine this past summer quoted UM Director of Marketing Communications John Danakas as saying that “conversations have ended... for logistical reasons” regarding a CI opening on campus, this is not the case.

According to the minutes of the October 5 Senate meeting, Danakas was only speaking to a “specific exploratory discussion that at that point had been abandoned by the University.” Vice-Provost Dr. David Collins said that there are ongoing discussions about pursuing a CI and if those discussions result in a proposal being developed, the proposal would then come before Senate at that time.

Navitas Not Enough?

UMFA Members already know that Navitas, a private, multi-national, for-profit corporation, has opened a subsidiary for international students here at UM called the International College of Manitoba, or ICM. ICM is not an educational institution, but is a corporation that employs people to teach courses in its “pathway” programs. ICM currently is taking on teaching activities already performed, or that could be performed by UMFA and CUPE 3909 members.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

This special edition newsletter explores the UM’s ongoing interest in establishing a Confucius Institute on campus, and the potential implications and conflicts.

We are interested in feedback from you. Please send comments to fau@umfa.ca.

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program that offers instruction in the languages, histories and culture of China, India and Japan. The Asian Studies Centre was established at the UM in 1990 with the mandate to stimulate and organize teaching and research on Asia. The faculty, students and the program itself could be negatively impacted with the opening of a CI on campus. This is unacceptable.

A University Conflicted and the Case of Falun Gong

There is an inherent conflict in a situation where a university, whose President has made human rights a strategic focus for the school, would even consider welcoming an institution from a country notorious for human rights violations.

UM President David Barnard has tried to position the University as a leader in human rights, encouraging debate and discussion around the understanding of human rights issues. In October, Barnard made a public apology before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the University's indirect role in the residential school system. In his apology, Barnard said that even though post-secondary institutions did not fund or operate residential schools, the University failed to recognize and challenge the system and the assimilation policies of the schools. He also apologized for the role of the University in educating many of the teachers and clergy who went on to run residential schools.

Furthermore, to encourage discussion around human rights, the University began offering a series of seminars in the fall under the banner "Critical Conversations: The Idea of a Human Rights Museum." It is here that we can clearly see the conflict between what the University preaches on one hand, while it considers allowing a CI on campus on the other hand. Included in this series was a presentation on the case of Falun Gong conducted by UM Social Work professor Dr. Maria Cheung and prominent human rights lawyer David Matas.

Falun Gong, sometimes referred to as Falun Dafa, was first introduced in China in 1992 and is a spiritual discipline that consists of moral teachings, meditation, and gentle exercises. Cheung explained that for many years Falun Gong was actually supported by the Chinese government. But, in a matter of seven years, Falun Gong had grown to have an estimated 70-100 million followers in China, outnumbering members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). These numbers triggered immense jealousy and insecurity in former PRC President Jiang Zemin. Although Falun Gong was not a religion, it was a movement the CCP did not control. It subscribed to a different enough ideology to strike fear into the CCP and be perceived as a direct threat to the Party's power.

On June 10, 1999 under Zemin's order, a "6-10" office was created with a directive to all levels of government to wipe out Falun Gong by whatever means necessary. According to the [Falun Dafa Information Centre](#), this included subjecting Falun Gong followers to various methods of torture, rape, brainwashing, abduction, abuse, labour camps and prison camps. Not surprisingly though, China denies the existence of this office.

The Falun Dafa Information Centre also alleges that with the vast number of Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned, the CCP began a brutal practice to deal with the number of people incarcerated. Current and former hospital employees have said that the Falun Gong have been used in reverse organ-matching – they have been killed so that their organs can be used for on-demand transplants. The information centre says that organs such as livers, kidneys, hearts, and cornea are removed from the anesthetized, but still living, Falun Gong adherents and sold to Party officials and wealthy individuals from China and abroad. Undercover investigators have recorded conversations where physicians in Chinese hospitals boast about this practice.

In 2006, Matas along with former Canadian MP David Kilgour conducted an independent investigation into the organ harvesting crimes. They compiled compelling evidence showing that Falun Gong followers are victims of live organ harvesting in China. Their investigation revealed that the origins of over 41,000 organs transplanted since 1999 have been unaccounted for.

Propaganda's soft outreach, China's violation of human rights

The CCP has engaged in massive propaganda efforts to stifle Falun Gong and portray the group as dangerous. Books and pamphlets on the practice have been banned with some forcibly seized and burned in public. Websites have been blocked. All have been replaced with the CCP's own radio, TV, web and print propaganda, which is even being sent to other countries demonizing Falun Gong.

It is no secret that the Chinese government has committed numerous heinous human atrocities in the past: the Tiananmen Square massacre, Tibetan oppression, the one-child policy, and labour violations to name a few. With these acts well-known, why would any University, let alone one that is a strong advocate for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, consider allowing the Chinese government set up an extension of their soft-power on campus?

Could it simply come down to money? In the United States, Stanford University received \$4 million from Hanban, while Texas A&M and the University of Utah both received \$100,000 to start CIs. The University of Michigan is receiving \$250,000 annually until 2014 for their CI which specializes in performing arts. However, funds provided to hosting institutions are sometimes used to direct the action of the schools in order to be amenable with China's

wishes. CIs use their teachers and students as instruments of their propaganda.

For example, in 2008 a Tibetan protest in China turned violent when protesters were confronted by military troops. At the University of Waterloo's CI, an instructor called on her students to condemn "anti-China" reports in the press on this matter.

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In 2009, the Dalai Lama had been invited to speak at North Carolina State University. CI director Bailian Li put pressure on the university to cancel the event stating that a visit by the Dalai Lama could “disrupt some of the strong relationships we were developing with China.” The event was cancelled, with the university citing a lack of time and resources as the reason for doing so. While explaining the cancellation, University provost Warwick Arden acknowledged that CIs do present “opportunity for subtle pressure and conflict.” Li Changchun, the CCP's Propaganda chief has said that CIs are “an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up.”

Just like its propaganda, China's lack of respect for human rights spreads beyond its own borders. In a case reported on this past summer by the [Epoch Times](#), a teacher who came to Canada from China to teach at a CI at McMaster University said she had to sign a statement promising not to practice Falun Gong. She was also warned that she would be punished should she breach the agreement.

A review of the “[Overseas Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program](#)” on the Confucius Institute Headquarters' website clearly states that applicants should have “no record of participation in Falun Gong and other illegal organizations and no criminal record.” Teachers are also instructed to deflect any questions from students on any topic that may be deemed sensitive by the CCP.

By imposing their restrictive views on what teachers can practice and discuss, CIs blatantly violate Canadian human rights and principles of academic freedom. The University of Manitoba has made public apologies for failures to defend human rights in the past, but by instituting a CI, the University sets itself up for further repentance down the road.

What can we do?

UMFA is strongly opposed to the establishment of a CI. At this point, it is not clear when exactly the University of Manitoba plans to move forward with a proposal for establishing a CI on campus, but that doesn't mean action can't be taken in the meantime. We congratulate the Faculty of Social Work which recently passed a unanimous motion to oppose the opening of a CI. The motion is as follows:

“WHEREAS the University of Manitoba administration has indicated that there are continuing discussions about whether or not a Confucius Institute (CI) will be established at the University of Manitoba with funding from the People’s Republic of China (PRC); and

WHEREAS CIs are directly administered, funded and supervised by the Central PRC government; and

WHEREAS the PRC government has suppressed information that may be shared in CIs, and CI instructors are prohibited from discussing sensitive topics, such as Taiwan, Tibet, Tiananmen and Falun Gong, thereby violating essential rights to academic freedom associated with policies recognized by the University of Manitoba and included in the UMFA Collective Agreement; and

WHEREAS CIs violate the Canadian Code of Human Rights by using hiring policies that exclude certain groups from employment (a required qualification is “no record of participation in Falun Gong”),

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty of Social Work oppose any contract that might be considered by the University of Manitoba administration to establish a Confucius Institute at the University of Manitoba.”

UMFA strongly encourages other Faculties to have this discussion and pass motions of their own opposing the establishment of a Confucius Institute at the UM. Doing so will send a clear message to the administration that human rights and academic freedom are greatly valued here, and CIs are not welcome on this campus.

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