



First for Women

WESLEYAN

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March 21, 2018

Dear Leaders and Friends of Higher Education:

As president of Wesleyan College in Macon, GA and co-founder of Wesleyan's Confucius Institute, I am saddened by the recent escalation of threats to the future of our Confucius Institutes which serve as centers of instruction for Chinese language and culture and as cultural bridges between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. I fully support your focus on important issues of national security, but the approximately 100 Confucius Institutes located in US colleges and universities should not rise to that level of concern. Instead, I hope you will partner with those who support the work of Confucius Institutes to prepare future generations of American citizens to provide leadership in business and government as the United States and China continue into the future as world leaders. I appeal to you to do the following:

1. Review the documents that Confucius Institutes share with you, such as the attached MOU between Wesleyan College and Hanban, the Confucius Institutes' parent organization. These documents should convince you that there is nothing in them that suggests Confucius Institutes will threaten academic freedom on our campuses; therefore, we ask that you please discontinue using that claim to criticize the Institutes. We will make these documents available through our website.
2. Support our efforts to establish international relationships with partner institutions, including those in China. Help us maximize their positive outcomes for higher education and future global economic development.
3. Oppose proposals to reduce some Title IV funds for institutions with Confucius Institutes.
4. Oppose efforts to require Confucius Institute staff to register as "foreign agents."
5. Consider the practical, educational and economic benefits of Confucius Institutes to your constituents at the local, state, and national level. In addition to initial start-up costs of \$150,000, Wesleyan has received approximately \$300,000 since 2013 to provide Confucius Institute instruction and activities on campus and to hundreds of students in five private and public elementary and secondary schools in Middle Georgia. We must match these gifts 1: 1 with college funds, either direct or in-kind. In addition, Hanban provides Institute teachers and staff at no cost to us.

## INTRODUCTION

Wesleyan College in Macon, GA was the first college in the world chartered to grant degrees to women (1836). Since then our graduates have become "firsts" in many fields: aviation, medicine, law, ministry, and government, to name a few. In the early 1900s the first Chinese women to earn degrees in the United States of America came to Wesleyan: Soong Ai-Ling, Soong Ching-ling, and Soong Mai-ling. The two younger sisters married men who changed the future of China: Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-Shek. In fact, Soong Mai-ling (Madame Chiang Kai-shek) was closely connected to several United States presidents and was the first foreign woman to address both chambers of Congress in 1943. Her persuasion, some may argue, shaped US foreign policy with regard to China, since it was Madame Chiang Kai-shek who served as interpreter and often spokesperson for her husband.

The Confucius Institute at Wesleyan College

The first Confucius Institute in the US was established in 2004. In 2011 a representative from Hanban, encouraged Wesleyan College to apply to host a Confucius Institute. We applied, and in 2012 our application was approved-to my knowledge the only women's college to date to host a Confucius Institute and probably the smallest institution with a student population under 700. Hanban assigned to us a partner institution, Guangzhou University, a comprehensive university in southeast China.

In April 2013 the mayor of Macon; community leaders; and representatives from the Houston Consulate, Hanban, and Guangzhou University joined hundreds of Middle Georgia residents to celebrate our grand opening. We recently celebrated five years of a productive partnership that provides:

- Chinese language instruction to college and K-12 students and a Saturday school for children of Chinese parentage who either were adopted or were raised not speaking Mandarin fluently.
- Two festivals each year featuring music and dance provided by our own students, faculty, and staff-Chinese and non-Chinese.
- A Chinese folk dance troupe taught by visiting graduate students from Guangzhou University.
- Courses in Chinese culture offered throughout the community.

Our partnership led to the establishment in 2014 of Wesleyan College of Guangzhou University, a unique dual-degree program that created a small women's liberal arts program within Guangzhou University. In this program, students spend their first year at GU, their second year (plus two summer sessions) at Wesleyan College, and their third and fourth years at GU. Because they earn sixty (60) credits in four terms at Wesleyan, and if they complete all Wesleyan and GU requirements, they will earn degrees from both institutions. To date, we have enrolled more than 150 young women in this program, and the first cohort of 55 will graduate in June. I am excited to think of the future impact on China from hundreds of women educated at Wesleyan.

#### **FROM CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AT WESLEYAN COLLEGE TO AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER AT GUANGZHOU UNIVERSITY**

As an extension of our partnership, in 2012 we applied to the US Department of State to establish an American Cultural Center in Guangzhou University. The Center opened in May 2013 and has led to a fruitful relationship with the US Consulate-Guangzhou and the US Embassy-Beijing. I have provided several presentations about women's higher education through the Ed USA program of the embassy. We receive approximately \$25,000 each year from the US Department of State to operate our American Cultural Center at Guangzhou University. That funding allows us to send 6-8 faculty to GU each year to give lectures, host an annual ACC American Cultural Knowledge competition that draws students from more than a dozen Chinese universities, and provide programming throughout the year at the ACC.

#### **THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY**

I referred in my opening statement to "the recent escalation of threats to the future of our Confucius Institutes" and I will elaborate briefly on that statement.

1. On July 20, 2017 Representative Chris Smith asked presidents of every institution of higher education with a Confucius Institute to respond to a series of requests, including providing him with our contracts for the Confucius Institute (see attached), Confucius Institute budgets, MOUs for all institutional partnerships in China, and lists of all trips to China. I found the request to be unusual, and in my first month as president, I did not respond.
2. On February 5, 2018 Senator Marco Rubio wrote letters to Florida universities that host Confucius Institutes urging them to sever their ties with Chinese partners and close the Confucius Institutes.
3. On February 13, 2018 FBI Director Christopher Wray expressed his concerns to the Senate Intelligence Committee about Chinese intrusion into US higher education through Chinese students and Confucius Institutes.
4. On March 7, I received a request from the GAO that reads in part: "The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) is reviewing Confucius Institutes in the United States at the request of the Congress, and I am writing to request your school's assistance. Specifically, we plan to review (1) U.S. government funding and other federal support, if any, to Confucius Institutes, (2) agreements between U.S. colleges/universities and their Chinese partners concerning the operations of Confucius Institutes, and (3) the perspectives of school officials regarding Confucius Institutes." This letter requests that Wesleyan either provide our Confucius Institute contract or make it available online. We are happy to do both.

5. On March 15 we learned that Senator Rubio wants to add a provision in the Higher Education Act that denies some Title IV funds for institutions with Confucius Institutes.
6. We recently learned President Trump wants to restrict visas for Chinese scholars and students.
7. And finally, on March 20 Rep. Joe Wilson (SC) introduced H.R. 5336 which could restrict the work of our Confucius Institutes if they are charged with promoting "the political agenda of a foreign government," as they have been accused of doing.

I hope you can understand why many of us feel that this escalation of threats to the future of our Confucius Institutes-and potentially our Title IV funds and Han ban funds-represents a level of government intrusion that is surprising to us. I would also argue that the basis upon which some leaders in the US government have made these assertions and requests is faulty, and the progression to restriction on visas appears to be more politically motivated than designed to protect academic freedom or national security.

- Neither the People's Republic of China, the Ministry of Education, nor its subsidiary, Han ban have "hinder[ed] free expression and academic freedom" on our campus (quoting from Rep. Smith's letter of July 20, 2017).
- Nothing in our contract "leads to academic self-censorship of topics the Chinese government considers taboo" (quoting again from Rep. Smith's letter).
- Wesleyan College does not hesitate to discuss and teach about the topics that are considered taboo on many university campuses in China. In fact, our Chinese students delight in the freedom of expression and inquiry and emphasis on critical thinking that we encourage, and those who return to China-either as exchange students or dual-degree students-miss the academic rigor, free expression with other students and with their professors, and demand for critical thinking that they enjoy while they are here. Our colleagues at Guangzhou University have even invited us to give lectures about the values and pedagogies of American higher education when we visit their university, and when our faculty present lectures through our annual American Cultural Center symposium, hundreds of students and faculty flock to hear topics ranging from history and politics to religion and fine arts.
- This Confucius Institute is valuable to Wesleyan College and to Middle Georgia, and its programs and staff have been warmly welcomed by the campus and Middle Georgia community. We have entertained audiences at universities in contiguous states with our Confucius Institute programs, our student Chinese dance troupe has performed many times, and we have provided classes and cultural programming to thousands of children, youth and adults since 2013.

Please contact me at [vfowler@wesleyancollege.edu](mailto:vfowler@wesleyancollege.edu) if you have further questions about Wesleyan's fiveyear partnership with Guangzhou University and Hanban. I am grateful for your leadership and for your desire to protect the interests of Americans and American institutions of higher education.

Sincerely,



Vivia L. Fowler, President