

Case Studies on the Confucius Institute Management System

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Abstract

Confucius Institutes have become important institutions and channels for promoting Chinese language and culture internationally. With the establishment of 500 Confucius Institutes around the world, however, many problems are emerging, which need to be considered. There are major defects in the management of Confucius Institutes, which are manifested as follows: a) The Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) has granted too much authority to the Confucius Institute management offices of Chinese universities, while lacking supervision and punishment mechanisms; b) Hanban fails to give powerful support to Chinese and host-country directors in a weak position and the restraints on directors in a strong position are insufficient; c) Some heads of Confucius Institute offices conspire with Chinese directors in a strong position to use the resources of Confucius Institutes to pursue their personal gains; and d) Some heads of Confucius Institute offices conspire with host-country directors in a strong position to make Chinese directors mere figureheads. Based on case studies, the paper analyzes the above problems and proposes measures to improve the Confucius Institute management system.

Key words: Confucius institute; Management system; Case

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INTRODUCTION

Confucius Institutes have become important institutions and channels for promoting Chinese language globally and a key international platform through which the discipline of International Chinese Teaching enjoys development. With the establishment of 500 Confucius Institutes around the world, however, many problems are emerging, which need to be considered.

1. CASE STUDY ABOUT DEFECTS IN THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

1.1 Case 1: Confucius Institute A

In the Confucius Institute A, the Chinese director utilized the resources of the school for his personal gains and bribed the relevant officers of the university he worked to get the position he wanted. He was an unpopular teacher in the school of foreign languages of a Chinese university, but by questionable means, he climbed to the position of Chinese director of Confucius Institute A. During his four-year tenure at the Institute, he took advantage of his position to travel between China and the host country at the expense of the Institute and utilized the opportunities including Hanban-sponsored council meetings to offer European tours to the top leaders of his university to pave the way for his development after returning. When working abroad, he had a private acquaintance with the host-country director and taught him how to cheat

superiors. Consequently, they paid no attention to teaching, but engaged in the “image project” of government exchanges. With false performance results, the Chinese director was even granted the honor of Excellent Chinese Director from the Confucius Institute Headquarters. In his eyes, cheat is more useful than concrete performance obtained through painstaking efforts.

After returning home upon the expiration of his tenure in 2012, the Chinese director was transferred to the international institute of his university and promoted to be the head of the Confucius Institute Office of the university. Since then, he got up to his old tricks again and used the resources of Confucius Institute program to seek his own interests. He never had a mind to do a good job, but always focused on squeezing out capable colleagues who were deemed as a threat to him.

1.2 Case 2: Confucius Institute B

The head of the Confucius Institute Office of a Chinese University conspired with the Chinese director of Confucius Institute B to utilize public resources to pursue their own gains, undermining the image of China at abroad. In Confucius Institute B, the former Chinese director had made remarkable achievements in his six-year tenure and was awarded the honor of Excellent Chinese Director by the Confucius Institute Headquarters and selected as the representative of all Chinese directors to give a speech. He also met with President Xi Jinping during Xi’s visit in Thailand. His outstanding performances were fully recognized by the Confucius Institute Headquarters, but became a root of jealousy leading to false accusations against him later by the head of the Confucius Institute Office of his university. When he was going to return home after his tenure, the Thai party did its best to retain him, and finally, he agreed to serve as the host-country director of the Institute.

The head of the Confucius Institute Office as aforesaid assigned his close friend to Thailand to serve as the Chinese director and prompted the latter to break the power of the host-country director and turn all staff from the Thai party away, including accountants and cashiers, to arrogate all financial powers to herself. These two persons deceived the officers of their university and made threats against the Thai party, ultimately driving the host-country director back home. The husband of the Chinese director was also appointed by the head of the Confucius Institute Office as his assistant to provide convenience for the three to work in collusion. Shielded by the head of the Confucius Institute Office, the Chinese director became increasingly arrogant and engaged in corruption and bribery and even had illicit sexual relations. Local students felt her behaviors were intolerable, and finally reported it to the Confucius Institute Headquarters. The Confucius Institute Headquarters attached great importance to the issue and sent a commissioner, together with the members from the commission of discipline inspection and financial

department of the university, to Thailand to find out truth. At last, the Chinese director was transferred back, but the head of the Confucius Institute Office continued to defend her by concealing the decision of the Confucius Institute Headquarters from the top officers of the university as well as other teachers.

1.3 Case 3: Confucius Institute C

The head of the Confucius Institute Office of a Chinese university conspired with the host-country director of Confucius Institute C to make Chinese director merely a figurehead.

An Australian university officially signed an agreement with a Chinese university on establishment of a Confucius Institute in May 2011. At that time, the host-country director was the mistress of the president of the university. She took the advantage of such relationship to get the professor title, set up a China Research Center and served as its first director.

The cooperation between Chinese and foreign directors was unequal at the very beginning and the aforesaid agreement totally reflected the personal will of the host-country director. The host-country director was eager to monopolize the power, so she tried her best to block the Chinese director to take office. Moreover, before the Chinese director left for his assignment, the head of the Confucius Institute Office of the Chinese university lowered herself by responding to the host-country director directly and taking on all matters that should be handled by the Chinese director. As to the student study tour sponsored by the Confucius Institute Headquarters during the winter vacation in 2012, for example, all arrangements and expenses were discussed between the head of the Confucius Institute Office and the host-country director. They brushed aside the Chinese director. The head of the Confucius Institute Office threw the things about the inauguration of the Chinese director aside and told the host-country director on the phone that the Chinese director was so comfortable and he was playing everyday.

Since the host-country director did not deliver the invitation letter of her university to the Chinese director, the latter was able to obtain the visiting scholar visa. Finally, the visa was got via a green path with the efforts of the officers of Confucius Institute Headquarters. By overcoming all obstacles, the Chinese director arrived at his office at Confucius Institute C in 2013.

At daily work, the host-country director often scolded others for no reason. She required all staff to stay with her at the office from arrival through all the day, and took the funds from the Confucius Institute Headquarters as her own by using them without any plan and purpose. She neither discussed nor shared the information about budget and final accounts with the Chinese director. The reason why she attempted to obstruct the Chinese director was that she wanted do everything as she liked, deceive her superiors or subordinates and keep sponging money

with false accounts. In her eyes, the Chinese director was a thorn in her side. Consequently, to get rid of the Chinese director, she acted in collusion with the head of the Confucius Institute Office by making complains to relevant superiors. In less than three months after the Chinese director was installed in his new office, the host-country director made false accusations against the Chinese director before the university president in charge of foreign-related affairs. The head of the Confucius Institute Office did not give any help to the Chinese director and did not care for the work of life of Chinese staff, but fabricated more stories to destroy the reputation of Chinese director. At that time, the officers of Confucius Institute Headquarters who were responsible for the American and Atlantic Area required Chinese directors to report on a regular basis. Thanks to this mechanism, the Confucius Institute Headquarters was informed of the problems existed in Confucius Institute C and ordered the host-country director to make correction. Unbelievably, the head of the Confucius Institute Office used this matter as an excuse to told officers of the Chinese university that the Chinese director created a big trouble. When the Chinese director went to Beijing to attend the global Confucius Institute Conference, the head of the Confucius Institute Office hypocritically told the Chinese director that the university would manage to persuade the Australian party to retain him on one hand, while scheming with the host-country director to entice Confucius Institute Headquarters to recall the Chinese director on the other hand. But, they failed. Several days after he returned to Australia, the Chinese director received a document drafted by the head of the Confucius Institute Office in the name of the Chinese university, asking him to come back to China within the specified period. The inconsistency between the document in Chinese the Chinese director received and the English version sent to the Australian party led to a serious diplomatic event. Security guards called by the host-country director took the keys to the office from the Chinese director, pushed him out of the office and cut off his contact with the outside by phone or via Internet. According to the document in Chinese, the Chinese director scheduled to return after the Spring Festival (15 days from receipt of the document to the date of return), but he suddenly was ordered by the host-country director to leave in a week. By inquiring the reason, the Chinese director learnt there was conflict between the Chinese version and English version of the document the head of the Confucius Institute Office sent. However, the Chinese director was not sent the English version.

2. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

We can learn from the above three cases that there are many problems in the management of Confucius

Institutes, and root cause of most problems is the defects of the management system, which may hinder the further development of Confucius Institutes, cause significant waste of national funds, and undermine the images of Confucius Institute and Chinese people.

First, the heads of Confucius Institutes Offices in Chinese universities have too much power. Due to the design of the personnel system, the Confucius Institute Headquarters has no power to hold any wrongly-behaved heads accountable for their behaviors, and sometimes, is even reluctant to give its opinions on handling of misbehaviors or violations. In some Chinese universities, though there are university officers in charge of foreign-related affairs who are responsible for contacting Confucius Institute Offices, there are no dedicated persons or organization responsible for supervising the heads of Confucius Institute Offices. Consequently, the relevant university officers only rely on the words of the heads of Confucius Institute Offices. What's worse, some university officers have long been deceived by Chinese directors. Some heads of Confucius Institute Offices use the resources of Confucius Institutes to offer overseas tours to their superiors, so as to win the favor of the latter. Naturally, some university officers may be partial to those persons.

Second, in Confucius Institutes in developing countries, Chinese directors are generally in a strong position and they may have too much power without supervision. As the case study 2 shows that the new Chinese director conspired with the head of the Confucius Institute Office to get a dominant position in the institute and solely decide all financial and management matters. What she did during her tenure seriously damaged the image of the Chinese people and caused irreparable damage to the development of Confucius Institute program. Nevertheless, due to the management system in and between the Confucius Institute Headquarters and Chinese universities, the Chinese director was not given any due punishment. The defects of the management system remain, persons who did wrong things have not been punished, and all misbehaviors or violations are hidden, which casts a shadow over the development of Confucius Institute B in the future.

Third, there is a phenomenon that in Confucius Institutes in developed countries, host-country directors are in a strong position and they usually have too much power without effective supervision and restraints. Moreover, many heads of Confucius Institute Offices in Chinese universities worship everything foreign, and in order to seek their own gains, they often attempt to please the foreign party at the cost of the interests of Chinese directors, just as the case study 3 shown. Under such system, it is more impossible for the Confucius Institute Headquarters to effectively supervise and restrain those host-country directors.

The defects of the management system of Confucius System are manifested in different forms in different Confucius Institutes and lead to slight or serious consequences. Of course, the problems mentioned above may not exist in a few of good Confucius Institutes. However, there is no small matter with diplomacy, so as Confucius Institutes and relevant teaching exchange, which involve international communication. The emergence of such problems in any Confucius Institute will be very detrimental to the development of the Confucius Institute program as well as the overall image of the Chinese people and China, and also have a negative impact on the considerable amount of funds from the Chinese government to support each Confucius Institute. So, what should we do?

3. MEASURES FOR IMPROVING THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

First, as to the problems concerning the heads of Confucius Institute Offices in Chinese universities, the following mechanisms and measures are recommended to improve the current management system: a) The Confucius Institute Headquarters may notify the problems existed in every Confucius Institute to the relevant university presidents in charge of such affairs, or for major problems, to the presidents or the secretaries of relevant universities, rather than contact the relevant Confucius Institute Offices. b) Advice and suggestions on solving problems arising out of management and improving management shall be proposed. c) Chinese directors shall be given more power in their contact with relevant Chinese universities. The appointment and removal and the tenure of Chinese directors shall be jointly decided by the Confucius Institute headquarters and the relevant university presidents in charge of such affairs. The Confucius Institute Offices of Chinese universities may only perform the functions including paper works and administration of Confucius Institutes.

Second, as to problems concerning Chinese directors in a strong position, efforts shall be made to enhance financial supervision and improve the financial management system. Moreover, performance reports and financial reports shall be signed by Chinese directors and their foreign counterparts and relevant Chinese and host-country personnel.

Third, as to problems concerning host-country directors in a strong position, Chinese directors shall play an active role in supervision. Similarly, more efforts shall be made to enhance financial supervision and improve the financial management system. Performance reports

and financial reports shall be signed by both Chinese director and host-country director and relevant Chinese and host-country staff. Chinese directors may proactively communicate with the management of relevant foreign universities, hence supervising their foreign counterparts in a more effective way. For this end, the Confucius Institute Headquarters and the officers of relevant Chinese universities shall create opportunities for Chinese directors to meet and communicate with members of the management of foreign universities. The performance of Chinese director's duties by any staff members of Confucius Institute Offices on behalf of Chinese directors shall be prohibited.

In addition, the requirements on morality and capability in selection of the heads of Confucius Institute Offices and Chinese directors shall be enhanced. For Chinese directors, the requirements on performance shall be strengthened. A mechanism and process for handling problems in a centralized way shall be established and the sanction decisions shall be open to everyone. When a Chinese institution applies for the establishment of a Confucius Institute, the Confucius Institute Headquarters shall consider the extent to which it attaches importance to the matter. Since top universities usually do not pay much attention to the Confucius Institute program, if any less famous university or other institution attaches great importance to the program, has a well-designed management system and is willing to give reasonable support, more funds and resources may be input to it.

CONCLUSION

The Confucius Institute program matters the national strategy. Everyone who works for or in Confucius Institutes is an ambassador of Chinese culture, a glorious but arduous job. Though there are many defects of the Confucius Institute management system, the Confucius Institute program will enjoy a better development and make a greater contribution to the enhancement of "soft power" of China, as long as the Confucius Institute Headquarters, Chinese universities and related institutions lay importance on relevant problems, keep on improving the system and encourage Chinese directors to play a more active role while strengthening supervision in all aspects.

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