

## Confucian way to spread Chinese culture

By ZHANG YUWEI  
CHINA DAILY

NEW YORK — Twenty-five-year-old Steven Coons, a sophomore in foreign language studies at the University of Memphis, became a double major by adding Asian studies and international trade.

His reason was simple: the program is closely affiliated with the Confucius Institute (CI) at the university.

"I get to learn stuff from teachers from China who know the culture and language really well," he said.

"And this program offers almost everything — the language experience, culture exposure, and the business education. I think it is phenomenal."

Coons, who loves Chinese language, kungfu movies and food, seems to have a clear plan after graduation.

"The Chinese economy is growing at a phenomenal rate and there's a lot of room for expansion," he said.

"This major, which has both language and business aspects, will make me a lot more suitable for future job opportunities in China."

Asian studies and international trade was set up in 2007 on the CI at the University

the increasing demand for Chinese language learning and to enhance cultural diversity abroad.

While CIUM offers students opportunities to get a real taste of the Chinese language and culture, not many CIs in the US are as successful. Many are still striving to expand and be more involved with Chinese programs in the universities with which they are affiliated.

Institutes are created and funded in partnerships with institutions in various countries. Initially, Hanban provides \$100,000 for the first year and some teaching staff from China while the partner institution provides space and facilities.

Most partners in the US are institutions of higher learning, but there are CIs at school districts and local community organizations. Many are focused on organizing cultural events such as music festivals.

More than 280 CIs operate in more than 80 countries worldwide, with nearly 80 in the United States, where the first was established at the University of Maryland in 2004.

Joseph Nye, a scholar from Harvard University who coined the phrase "soft power" (the ability to affect others to



...and interna-  
 tional trade was set up in 2007  
 at the CI at the University  
 of Memphis was founded.  
 Wang Yiping, associate direc-  
 tor at the Confucius Institute  
 at the University of Memphis  
 (CIUM), said the institute is  
 responsible for designing the  
 labus, curriculum of courses,  
 required and electives, and the  
 annual promotion and public-  
 on and off the campus.  
 "If there is no CI at the uni-  
 versity, I can guarantee you that  
 there will be no Asian studies  
 and international trade pro-  
 gram," Coons said.  
 An anonymous \$1 million  
 donation to the university was  
 a key piece to make this pro-  
 gram possible.  
 Funding and fundraising  
 are critical to the existence and  
 sustainability for the CIs," said  
 Wang-te Kung, director of  
 CIUM who is a 75th genera-  
 tion descendant of Confucius.  
 "We received the funding  
 from a very generous donor,  
 before, the university can  
 not create such a pro-  
 gram parallel and compliment  
 to CI."  
 The institute is a nonprofit  
 program set up by Hanban,  
 the Office of Chinese  
 Language Promotion, to meet

Harvard University who  
 coined the phrase "soft power"  
 (the ability to affect others to  
 obtain desired outcomes  
 through attraction rather than  
 coercion or payment), said CIs  
 play an important role in the  
 rise of China's "soft power".

June Teufel Dreyer, a profes-  
 sor from department of political  
 science at the University  
 of Miami, said CIs are part of  
 China's efforts at soft power  
 to project a good image of the  
 country. The British have the  
 British Council, the US used  
 to have the US Information  
 Agency, she said.

However, there have been  
 increasing criticisms and  
 uncertainties about the set-  
 up from local communities.  
 Some scholars have raised  
 doubts about such programs,  
 saying they serve as a propa-  
 ganda function of the Chinese  
 government.

"Why would a country  
 spend money on something  
 like this if it did not have  
 any political goals in mind?"  
 Dreyer said.

Hong Wei, professor of  
 applied linguistics and direc-  
 tor of the CI at Purdue Univer-  
 sity, said these critics should  
 be more open-minded and  
 should not see China with



Children practice *taijii* at the Confucius Institute at the University of Maryland, which offers students a real taste of Chinese culture.

"limited perspectives".

"If we have the resources to  
 set up CIs to help people learn  
 Chinese, why don't we do it?  
 Why everything has to do with  
 politics? It is not fair," she said.

David Prager Branner,  
 adjunct associate professor  
 of Department of East Asian  
 Languages and Cultures at  
 Columbia University, said  
 these criticisms are the "direct  
 result of poor strategy, which  
 could easily have been avoided  
 by paying greater attention to  
 local conditions in the US and  
 in US colleges".

"This is a lesson that we  
 Americans sometimes have  
 trouble learning when dealing  
 with Chinese organizations; it  
 is instructive to see that a Chi-  
 nese organization also some-  
 times needs to be reminded of  
 the issue, in dealing with us,"  
 he said.

Some US colleges have  
 refused to form relationships  
 with Hanban. The University  
 of Pennsylvania chose not to  
 host a CI because it wants its  
 freedom to design its cur-

riculum, and the involvement  
 of Hanban or the Chinese  
 government is a major factor  
 of the concern.

"I think the Hanban made  
 its motives look unclear by  
 the specific way it went about  
 setting up the CIs, including  
 on campuses rather than off,  
 and without taking time to sign  
 a reciprocal agreement with the  
 US government beforehand,"  
 Branner said.

Coons also disagreed with  
 these criticisms.

"Some people are, I think,  
 intimidated by the differences,"  
 he said.

"A lot of people are frightened  
 because it's run by Hanban of  
 the Chinese government.

"And they think China is  
 trying to put hands in a bunch  
 of different places or infiltrate,  
 but honestly, I really haven't  
 seen anything done at the CI  
 that way at all.

"All the people here at the  
 institute I work with never try  
 to promote any political agenda  
 or any sort of ideology or phi-  
 losophy or manipulate anyone.

It's always about teaching the  
 language and culture to people  
 who are interested."

Although many educators  
 in the US see challenges lying  
 ahead, they never seem to be  
 put off.

At a recent CI forum at Val-  
 paraiso University, directors of  
 CIs in the Midwest discussed  
 how to integrate CI programs  
 into the universities they are  
 affiliated with, and expand  
 local community services  
 such as evening classes for  
 adults and children. Both are  
 the main focuses of the insti-  
 tutes' expansion in the US.

Hong said more programs  
 should be set up for CIs to  
 increase their credibility and  
 impact, and there should  
 be a "win-win cooperation"  
 between CIs and US universi-  
 ties that offer Chinese pro-  
 grams or Asian studies.

Gan Changyin, Chinese CI  
 director at the Community Col-  
 lege of Denver, said CIs should  
 put more effort into providing  
 Chinese classes to primary and  
 secondary education.

Chinese has become the  
 second most popular foreign  
 language next to Spanish in  
 the US. And there has been  
 a trend that more and more  
 American schools are inter-  
 ested in starting Mandarin  
 classes.

This is backed by the US  
 Secretary of Education, Arne  
 Duncan, who told China  
 Daily recently that the US  
 needs to do a lot more to give  
 its younger generation the  
 appreciation of foreign lan-  
 guages such as Chinese.

"I think a lot more of our stu-  
 dents should learn Mandarin  
 and Cantonese," Duncan said.

"If we want them to thrive  
 in the international economy,  
 a big piece of that is to under-  
 stand foreign languages."

Duncan, however, said there  
 are not enough schools in the  
 US with enough teachers to  
 teach foreign languages.

"It is tremendously beneficial  
 for us to recruit teachers from  
 overseas to teach foreign lan-  
 guages here," he said.

In this case, CIs have the

advantage of providing ser-  
 vices, including teaching staff  
 and teaching materials. But  
 teachers' licenses have been a  
 challenge for CIs to be part of  
 the classrooms in local com-  
 munities.

Liu Jianguang, associate  
 director of CI at Valparaiso  
 University, said qualified and  
 experienced Chinese teachers,  
 selected from Chinese uni-  
 versities, sent to teach in US  
 public schools need to have a  
 US teachers' license.

"Without which they're  
 theoretically not eligible to  
 teach," said Liu.

Despite similar mandates  
 to their German and French  
 counterparts — Goethe Insti-  
 tutes and Alliance Francaise  
 — CIs seem to face more chal-  
 lenges to enjoy equal recogni-  
 tion in the US.

"The best way is to let nature  
 take its course," Liu said.

"People will (soon) see what  
 the CIs do is to help them learn  
 Chinese language and culture,  
 rather than alleged public rela-  
 tions strategies."

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