

China Institute and Columbia University

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Founded in 1926 in New York City, China Institute is the oldest and most comprehensive educational and cultural organization in the United States devoted to teaching the public about China and Chinese culture. Since its conception, it has been bound up with another premier educational institution of New York—Columbia University, which was one of the first prominent educational institutions with an oriental department and large Chinese student attendance. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the interwoven connections between China Institute and Columbia University by highlighting major figures that have played important roles in both of these two institutions.

Founders

China Institute owes its inception to three celebrated Columbians: the New Culture Movement leader Hu Shih (胡適), the world-renowned philosopher John Dewey and the international educational leader Paul Monroe.

Hu Shih was a student of Dewey in the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University. After completing his Ph.D. program in 1917, he returned to China to teach at Peking University. In 1919, Hu initiated a program to invite prominent American and British scholars to lecture on western intellectual trends and thoughts. One of the first scholars Hu invited was Dewey, whom he so admired that he later even named his second son “Sidu” (思杜). Dewey accepted the invitation and an intended short stay turned into a two-year lecture tour in China. While giving lectures in China, Dewey was surprised to find that many faculty members and students were well acquainted with the history and culture of the United States and most could understand his lectures without translation. He was dismayed at the same time to realize that the reverse was not true back home at Columbia, where few had a substantial knowledge of China, much less speaking its language. Upon returning to the U.S., Dewey brought the issue up with Paul Monroe, a professor of comparative education and Director of the School of Education at Columbia's Teachers' College who was also interested in China. Shortly after Dewey returned to New York, Monroe was invited by Hu Shih and others to go to China to lecture and conduct surveys. Both Dewey and Monroe felt a need to create a cultural and educational institution in the U.S. to disseminate authentic, basic and reliable information on China in the academic communities in America. The idea was well received, but funds were needed to support it. It was not until the establishment of the China Foundation endowed by the Boxer Indemnity (庚子賠款) that this dream became a reality.

The Boxer Indemnity was compensation, forced on the Chinese government in 1901, to eight countries, including the United States, for their loss of lives and properties in the Boxer rebellion in 1900. In 1908, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution remitting to China much of the U.S. share of the Boxer indemnity. The indemnity to the U.S. came in a number of remissions and each was used with a focus. The first remission was used to create a Tsinghua scholarship to enable a large number of Chinese students to come to study in the U.S. (Hu Shih, Kuo Pingwen 郭秉文, Meng Chih 孟治 and Chang Pengchun 張彭春, to be mentioned below, were all recipients of the scholarship). Because of the success in the application of the first remission, friends of China in the U.S. were able to obtain congressional approval for establishing a foundation for the promotion of education in China using the funds from the second remission in 1924. Through consultation between the Chinese and American governments, both sides agreed to appoint a board of fifteen trustees (ten Chinese and five Americans) to oversee the establishment of the proposed organization. The five American trustees included Dewey and Monroe and the foundation that came into being as a result was called China Foundation (中華文化教育基金會). Although the funds of the Foundation were intended for use in China, Dewey and Monroe succeeded in persuading the other trustees to appropriate part of the funds in the amount of \$25,000 to establish a bureau in New York City. The resulting bureau was named China Institute in America, which formally commenced its operation on May 25, 1926.

Pioneers

The newly founded China Institute was placed under the directorship of Kuo Pingwen and the first board of advisors included John Dewey and Hu Shih.

Kuo Pingwen came to study at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1908 and received his Ph.D. in 1914. While studying at Columbia, he served as the chairman of the Association of the Chinese Students in America. Kuo returned to China in 1915 to first become the acting president of Nanjing Normal School (南京高等師範學校) and subsequently the first president of Nanjing Southeast University. In 1924, he was appointed by the Chinese Government as one of the Chinese trustees at the board overseeing the appropriation of the Boxer Indemnity funds and then one of the ten Chinese trustees on the board for creating the China Foundation.

The trustees set the following as the missions of China Institute: disseminating information about Chinese and American education, promoting closer relationships between Chinese and American educational institutions through the exchange of professors and students, stimulating general American interest in the study of Chinese culture, and assisting Chinese students in America in their educational pursuit.

China Institute was a quick success. Upon its establishment, the infant organization immediately began to act as a clearinghouse for inquiries from Chinese students about American education and inquiries from Americans interested in Chinese education. The Institute helped the Chinese students in the U.S. by facilitating their admission to American colleges and universities with letters of introduction and testimonials, securing opportunities for them to gain practical experience, helping them with immigration procedures and administering an emergency loan fund.

In 1926, the same year of its founding, the Institute installed an exhibition on Chinese education at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia. Demonstrating the continuity of China's culture, its progress in modern education and the evolution of the Chinese civilization, the show attracted many visitors who were amazed by a China heretofore unknown to them. As a result, the judges awarded China the grand prize "for the development of a comprehensive system of public education and China Institute a medal of honor for "unique and original presentation."

To carry out its mission to promote closer relationships between Chinese and American institutions, the Institute arranged visits to China by American professors and Chinese professors to give lectures in the U.S. Two of the Chinese professors invited were Y.C. James Yen, Director of the National Association for the Mass Education Movement and Professor William Hung of Yenching University. To educate the American public about China, Kuo and his staff as well as speakers recommended by China Institute conducted many speaking tours across the United States.

Due to increased demand on its funds, the China Foundation was not able to support the operation of China Institute beyond 1929. Kuo was asked by the foundation to reorganize China Institute into a membership organization to seek support from the public. At that junction, Kuo was invited to return to China to take up a government post as the chief of the Bureau of International Trade in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. A search committee was formed to seek a new director. Committee members included Dewey and Monroe.

The new director chosen was Meng Chih, who assumed the position in 1930. The board of trustees included two members who were on Columbia faculty at the time. They were Paul Monroe, director, International Institute and Edwin R. A. Seligman, Professor of Political Economy. Monroe served as the President of the Board. It is possible that some of the remaining 12 board members attended Columbia at one time or another.

For close to half a century since then, Meng Chih's name had been identified with China Institute. He served as the Director of the Institute from 1930 to 1967, spanning 37 years. A direct descendant of Mencius (孟子), Meng Chih attended the renowned Nankai Middle School and later was among the fifty of all the twenty thousand applicants admitted to the prestigious Tsinghua University through a competitive examination.

In 1919, Meng was awarded a coveted five-year scholarship to study in the United States. Initially, he went to Davidson College in North Carolina. Two years later, he was transferred to Columbia for graduate study in sociology. Fortunately for him, he had Hu Shih and John Dewey as his academic advisors. This, however, was not the first time Meng met Dewey. They had already become good friends back in Beijing when Meng served as Dewey's private guide and interpreter during his lecture tour in China.

While at Columbia, Meng served as the spokesman for the Chinese Student Government and was heavily involved in Chinese and American activities and organizations. In 1923, Meng was elected President of the Chinese Students' Christian Association in North America, a national organization with 2500 members. He had also been elected President of the Tsinghua and Nankai alumni associations.

Meng was offered the position as the China Institute's director because of his name recognition. Following his appointment, Meng reorganized China Institute into an independent, self-supporting corporation. Meng made monumental contributions on many fronts, but none was more significant than his work in two areas.

First, he made China Institute a home away from home for the Chinese students in the U.S. In the early part of the 20th century, sending more students to pursue graduate studies in the U.S. was a matter of national urgency for China and so was the work to assist the students after their arrival. In 1933, Meng was appointed by Mei Yi-chi (梅贻琦), President of Nankai University to be the honorary Director of the Chinese Educational Mission in the U.S. to look after Tsinghua scholarship students and help deal with the problems that they faced in the U.S. This responsibility led him to visit 288 colleges and universities in 46 states. He met 1,700 Chinese students on these visits. To better acquaint him with the situation at home, the Ministry of Education in China invited him to conduct a survey visit to evaluate in person the performance of American-trained men and women who had returned to work in China. On his extensive visits to various localities in 14 provinces in China in 1936-7, he met 2,400 returned Chinese students from the U.S., most of whom were playing powerful and influential roles in various spheres of life in China, including government, finance, industry, commerce and education.

When Japan was on the brink of launching an all around attack on China in 1937, the China Foundation decided to transfer some of its funds to the U.S. for safekeeping and Meng was charged with administering scholarships in the U.S. through China Institute to provide relief funds for the Chinese students stranded there. It soon became clear that the funds provided by the China Foundation were too little for the more than 2000 Chinese students who needed help. Meng went all out to secure additional funding, including seeking the assistance of Eleanor Roosevelt, who was sympathetic with the plight of the Chinese students in the U.S. At the invitation of Meng, Mrs. Roosevelt addressed the Chinese students at the International House on Riverside Drive near Columbia in 1943.

By the 1940s, China Institute had been well established and recognized by both the American and Chinese Governments. It had become the channel for educational institutions in both countries to administer scholarships and exchange scholars. The amount of scholarships administered by China Institute by 1943 reached over \$2,500,000.

The second area in which Meng made outstanding contributions was his work on explaining China to America through many projects, programs and workshop he initiated. To a large extent, Americans' knowledge of China at the beginning of the 20th century was limited to Chinatown, which often presented a seamy front to the visitors. Meng was instrumental in reshaping the perception of the Americans about China and correcting the prevalent cliché attitudes of the public about Chinese culture. He did this via a host of educational programs or campaigns. Immediately after he took the helm at China Institute in 1930, he and Chang Peng-chun,

another Columbia Ph.D. recipient under John Dewey, were able to invite and arrange a visit and performance by Mei Lanfang in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles that gave a fresh look on Chinese culture. Mei's superb performance was a triumphant sensation. New York Times commented, "It is beautiful as an old Chinese vase of tapestry. You can appreciate something of exquisite loveliness in pantomime and costume, and you may feel for yourself vaguely in contact, not with the sensation of the moment, but with the strange ripeness of centuries. Perhaps you may even have a few bitter moments of reflection that although our own theatrical form is enormously vivid it is rigid, and never lives so freely in terms of the imagination as this one does. The chief impression is one of grace and beauty, stateliness and sobriety, of unalloyed imagination."

Meng's work in motivating Americans to study Chinese culture and language was not just confined to New York City. In the early 1940s, China Institute was already coordinating 40 information and hospitality centers throughout the United States. Between 1948 and 1961, Meng organized major programs of Chinese studies outside China Institute in places such as the University of Washington (Seattle), Mills College (Stockton, California), Cortland State Teachers College (Cortland, New York), Central College (New Britain, Connecticut), and the State College of San Francisco. In the 1950s, Meng was able to develop a sister China Institute of New Jersey and then organized a China Institute of the Midwest. Another successful program was launched in cooperation with the University of Maryland in 1955 to hold annual conferences on Chinese-American cultural relations for teachers of Chinese studies. These conferences continued for ten years and evolved in 1966 into an independent professional organization called the American Association for Chinese Studies.

Meng designed a number of basic introductory courses in Chinese history and culture for public school teachers in New York City. He was able to do something that even John Dewey couldn't do. That is, he persuaded Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in 1933 to grant China Institute the privilege of offering in-service credit courses for public school teachers in New York City. This allowed the Institute to expand its educational programs for Americans and gain recognition as the first and largest school of Chinese studies for nonspecialist teachers in the U.S.

In 1955, Meng installed at China Institute a series of public lectures by renowned scholars, both Chinese and Americans. Prominent Columbians who lectured at the series included Hu Shi on "Three Founders of Chinese Thought", L. Carrington Goodrich on "China's Contribution in Science", Chang Peng-chun on "Chinese Theater: Development and Technique", and Chou Wen-chung on "Chinese Music and Its Significance".

To reciprocate the generosity of the American government to aid Chinese students at the time of the war, the Chinese Ministry of Education set up a program in the late 1940s to offer scholarships for Americans who served in China during the war to study Chinese culture either in America or China for up to three years. China Institute was entrusted by the Ministry to administer the program. Meng Chih served on the selection committee. Fellow Columbians who served on the same committee included Hu Shih, who had become President of Peking University and Prof. L. Carrington Goodrich.

Successors

Meng Chih retired in 1967 and his work was taken up by successors, many of whom had a Columbia connection. From the early 1980's on, the people directing educational programs at China Institute have all been connected to Columbia. These included Marsha Wagner (1982-85), Morris Rossabi (1986-7) and Nancy Jervis (1988-present).

Marsha Wagner received her Ph.D. in Chinese and comparative literature. She taught at Columbia as Assistant Professor of Chinese literature. Wagner joined China Institute in 1982 as Vice President and Director of the School of Chinese Studies. She returned to Columbia in 1985 to serve first as Director of the C. V. Starr East Asian Library and then Ombuds Officer, a position she still holds today.

Morris Rossabi received his Ph.D. from Columbia in Chinese history in 1970. He became Director of the School of Chinese Studies at China Institute in 1986. He is currently an adjunct professor of history at Columbia. Even though he returned to Columbia, he has been involved in many projects of the *Teach China* program at China Institute, writing curriculum and providing resources for secondary school teachers. China Institute will organize a summer institute next year (2005) at Columbia on China and the Islamic World and Prof. Rossabi will be a key speaker.

Nancy Jervis received her Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia in 1987. While at Columbia, she studied with Morton Fried, a China specialist and also the last American to do fieldwork in China before 1949. Interestingly, Jervis was one of the first American anthropologists to do fieldwork in China after 1949. She did her fieldwork in Henan for a number of years starting from 1972. Since joining China Institute in 1988, Jervis has been Vice President and Director of Programs. Her responsibilities largely involve running China Institute's School of Chinese Studies. The School, founded in 1933, is the oldest educational center of its kind in the United States, with more than 70,000 alumni. In its early years, the School was primarily attended by public school teachers for in-service training. While it continues to conduct courses and workshops for teachers, it also offers the general public courses on Chinese language, history, culture, and cuisine, studio courses in painting, calligraphy, music, and taijiquan, as well as lectures, symposia, operas and films about art, literature, business, travel, and contemporary Chinese society. Over the years, the School has expanded to include a public program, a language program and an educational program, each serving a different constituency.

For many years since 1998, China Institute had been offering a free China Survey lecture series to introduce the general public to China's role in world history and in contemporary affairs is now the concern of teachers at all levels. To meet the demand, China Insti

China Institute's language program is one of the largest outside the universities in the U.S. It has grown from a few classes in the 1930s to a full fledged program of 400 students today. It boasts of a strong and dedicated faculty. Many faculty members are either former teachers at Columbia or people who are currently teaching and working at Columbia. China Institute's 1999-2000 annual report had the following:

“China Institute has a Chinese cultural star in its midst and his name is Ben Wang. Wang teaches Chinese language, calligraphy, classical Chinese literature and drama, as well as much less highbrow cultural skills like mahjong and Chinese chess.

Ben Wang is China Institute’s most popular teacher and perhaps its most demanding. His entertaining style, intense manner, and interactive method keep students on the edges of their seats, not only hanging onto his every word, but awaiting the certain moment when they will be put on the spot.”

With his profound knowledge of Chinese language and literature, Ben Wang (汪班) is an institution himself. In his 18 years teaching at China Institute and speaking at various universities and museums throughout the United States on behalf of China Institute, he has captivated thousands of listeners and exposed them to a splendid China and Chinese culture. Not surprisingly, Ben Wang is from Columbia, where he taught Chinese in the East Asian Department from 1974-75 and then from 1987-1991. Besides teaching at China Institute as Senior Lecturer in Language & Humanities, Wang is also a frequent guest lecturer at Columbia. In recent years, he has lectured at Columbia on the classical theater and calligraphy among other topics. His lectures regularly see a sold-out house.

Other teachers at China Institute with a Columbia connection include Zhang Xiaodan (張曉丹), Wang Hailong (王海龍), and Zhao Ruixue (趙瑞雪).

Columbians from China Institute

The personnel flow between China Institute and Columbia is not just a one-way traffic. Over the years, a number of people have moved from China Institute to work for Columbia in the pursuit of the same goal of promoting Chinese studies. Two recent examples are Torrey Whitman and Heidi Johnson.

Torrey Whitman served as President of China Institute from 1997 to 2002. He received his B.A. in Chinese from Stanford University.

During his tenure at China Institute, Whitman oversaw the construction at China Institute of an exquisite Suzhou Scholar’s Garden, which unites rock, water, plants and man-made structures to recreate an ideal Chinese world. The garden is the first authentic outdoor classical Chinese garden built in Manhattan. Like a Chinese landscape painting, the garden draws the visitors into nature and slowly reveals its complexity.

In 2000, Whitman led a group of education officials in the social studies and humanities involved in China-related curriculum development on the district, city, state, and national levels on a study tour of China. For two weeks in May of that year, seventeen education policy-makers, from organizations as diverse as the New York State Education Department and the textbook publisher, Prentice Hall, traveled to urban and rural China to learn about modern and traditional China through lectures and observation. The results were encouraging, as attested to by Jo Ann Larson of New York State Education Department when she says, “we had made some hard decisions about what to cut and what to include in the social studies core curriculum, but this trip reinforced our changed emphasis, to teach less about Western civilization and more about other culture.”

Heidi Johnson is another recent Columbian from China Institute. She worked at China Institute from 1997-2002, first as Assistant to t

(ExEAS) initiative at Columbia, overseeing all aspects of the ExEAS program, which is supported by the Freeman Foundation and de

postdoctoral fellows and professors from Columbia and other New York

area institutions. Additionally Heidi Johnson manages the ExEAS postdoctoral fellowship and undergraduate internship programs. At

Reworking a tradition

It would be remiss for me not to mention my Columbia and China Institute connections.

Like Nancy Jervis, I also studied in the Anthropology Department at Columbia, first with Morton Fried and then, upon his death a year into my program, with Myron Cohen. While there, I assisted Prof. Cohen on a three-year research project on the Chinese family. The project involved a number of scholars from China and some of my fellow graduate students focused on China. I received my Ph.D. in 1992. Interestingly, I did my dissertation in the former office of John Dewey in the Philosophy Hall, having no inkling whatsoever that I would be later associated with an institution he helped create some sixty years earlier.

After a number of career pursuits, I came to teach at China Institute in 1997 and subsequently became the Director of Language and Curriculum in 2000. During my tenure, our language program saw an appreciable growth with the enrollment of students reaching

400 per term. This was attributable to the upsurge of interest in learning Chinese in the general public and a most dedicated teaching faculty that attracted students far and wide.

Since its establishment in 1926, China Institute has been a magnet for Chinese intellectuals in the New York area. Distinguished Chinese scholars living in the U.S. such as Hu Shih often lectured at China Institute in the past, and writers and others from China traveling to this country, including Lao She, often stopped off in New York to lecture at China Institute, sometimes in English but mostly in Chinese. This tradition, which was maintained until several years ago through the Institute's summer program at Silver Bay on Lake George, has now been revived and reinvigorated in the form of Saturday Chinese lecture series that started in January 2001. The weekly lectures are given in Chinese (and sometimes bilingually) by prominent writers, actors, art collectors, and other leaders in their fields. Many of the speakers have a Columbia connection, including N.T. Wang (王念祖), C.T. Hsia (夏志清), Shirley Mow and Zhou Hongyu (周洪宇). The lectures attract a disparate audience of native speakers and others fluent in Mandarin Chinese. Counting among our audience are many Columbia students. In the course of over three years, we have conducted over 100 lectures on a range of topics including poetry, novels, art, theater, history, language, archaeology, cinema, opera and religion. The lecture series serves three important functions in New York's rapidly expanding Chinese émigré community: it keeps educated students and immigrants in touch with their home country; it provides a free forum for Chinese speakers to discuss their ideas with compatriots; and it offers both the Chinese immigrant community and students interested in China opportunities to hear about the latest scholarship and modern culture, in Chinese, directly from the experts. I have been chairing the lectures since the series started in 2001. In response to the increased demand following the influx of thousands of Chinese students and immigrants from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other parts of the world, China Institute launched a Renwen Society (人文學會) in 2003 as a new tier of the Institute's membership primarily to support the Chinese lectures and events. The Renwen Society is now co-chaired by me and Ben Wang.

Looking ahead

China Institute will soon celebrate its 80th anniversary. In tracing its history, we see the strong connection and extensive interaction between Columbia University and China Institute since the early days of the 20th century. The very concept of China Institute originated with two distinguished Columbia University professors John Dewey and Paul Monroe and facilitated by two of their students, Kuo Pingwen and Hu Shih. The subsequent organization and administration of the Institute were steered mostly by people with Columbia background. Over the year, China Institute's mission has changed quite a bit with the current focus on education about China, but recently the goals seem to be coming a full circle with more educational exchanges like study abroad being planned and the Renwen Society focusing on Chinese scholars and lectures. With the rich resources of Columbia University and the dedication of China Institute, it is expected that the tradition of collaboration between these two institutions will continue in the future in their pursuit of a common goal of promoting a mutual understanding between China and America.