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The Confucius Institute

1 Introduction

The following paper provides a brief introduction to the Confucius Institute.

2 The Confucius Institute

A press release on the Confucius Institute website states that:

The Confucius Institute Online is devot[ed] to satisfy[ing] the need of people who are interested in Chinese learning all around the world, promoting the understanding of Chinese language culture, enhancing the educational and cultural cooperation between China and the world, developing the friendship between China and other countries, to help developing a multicultural environment and building up a harmonious world¹.

The Confucius Institute is a series of on-profit public institutions which aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. Established in 2004, there were 322 Confucius Institutes and 369 Confucius classrooms across 96 countries in 2010.

There are two Confucius Institutes in the Republic of Ireland at University College Dublin and University College Cork with a further nine in the UK including in Manchester, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

¹ The Confucius Institute Online, www.chinese.cn/kid/en/article/2009-09/25/content_68533.htm

Confucius Institutes promote the teaching and understanding of Chinese language and culture around the world not just in third level education but in society as a whole. They operate in much the same way as the British Council, France's Alliance Francaise and Germany's Goethe-Institut.

They support the teaching of Chinese at all educational levels and the training of language teachers. The institutes facilitate academic and cultural exchanges but they also encourage closer business, political and cultural ties between China and the countries in which they operate through specifically tailored courses as well as cultural activities and lectures which give an insight into aspects of modern and traditional Chinese life².

They also promote an understanding of Chinese history, science, music, art, cinema, dance, traditional Chinese medicine, calligraphy, the martial arts and other sport.

The Confucius Institutes are named after 5th Century BC philosopher Confucius.

3 The Confucius Institute at University of Ulster

It was recently announced by the University of Ulster that a Confucius Institute will be set up at the University.

The University had to table a bid to set up the Confucius Institute for Northern Ireland at the University of Ulster (CINIU) with Hanban (The Office of the Chinese Language Council International – an affiliate of the Chinese Ministry of Education) which considered the merits of it and other bids in June.

In order to qualify to set up an institute, all universities who apply must partner with a Chinese institution. The University of Ulster's partner was the Zhejiang University of Media and Communications in Hangzhou on the southeast coast of China. Under the agreement, there will be staff and student exchanges in both institutions with PhD opportunities and the chance for staff and students to undertake certified professional development in areas such as Adobe software and the UK's National Council for the Training of Journalists' exams.

Hanban has provided initial start-up costs for Chinese language teaching materials and for the flying in of academics from China to participate in CINIU's academic and cultural activities. The University of Ulster has earmarked some of its budget for staffing CINIU and the running of two offices in Coleraine and Belfast. Hanban has also agreed to match income generated by CINIU³.

Key points regarding the establishment of CINIU are:

- The Institute will be based at Coleraine but will maintain an office at the Belfast Campus and organise activities at all UU campuses;

² University of Ulster, Confucius Institute Media Pack

³ Ibid

- It will operate in partnership with Zhejiang University of Media and Communications in South-eastern China;
- It will launch formally in Spring 2012;
- The CINIU is expected to make a significant contribution to Chinese-Northern Ireland relations by:
 - Teaching of Chinese language to undergraduate students and the wider public;
 - Promoting an awareness of Chinese language and culture across NI;
 - Acting as a focal point to promote China related activities across NI;
 - Developing and promoting teaching and research links between China and NI, including hosting scholars, researchers and language teachers from China; and
 - Providing services to the public and private sectors that facilitate a deepening of economic links between China and NI, including the establishment of a China-Northern Ireland Enterprise Centre to support businesses in both countries wishing to establish themselves⁴.

⁴ Ibid