

PROMOTING CULTURE *in* HARMONY

CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

➤ The Confucius Institutes (CIs) are non-profit public institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China whose ultimate aim is to enhance the understanding of the Chinese language and culture by people from different countries and regions in the world. Like Britain's British Council, France's Alliance Française and Germany's Goethe-Institute, CIs are set up to facilitate the deepening of friendly relationships between China and other countries, to promote multiculturalism and to construct a harmonious world through their active and interactive promotion of Chinese language teaching and cultural exchange programs in foreign countries with their foreign counterparts.

A joint effort and cooperation

After several years of preparation, the Confucius Institute at the University of Szeged, SE Hungary, was established in 2012 through the joint efforts of the University of Szeged and the Shanghai International Studies University (SISU). During this period, a statesman, now a Hungarian member of the European Parliament, István Újhelyi, a person with a deep understanding of China, played a key role. The first two years witnessed the fundamental work of CI being solidly laid for further development with joint efforts of directors, teachers and volunteers from both the Hungarian and the Chinese sides. In September 2014, two new directors were appointed at a time when the CIs are turning to their second ten-year plan to shift from language teaching orientation to culture exchange orientation.

The Hungarian Director, Richárd Mohr (pictured with the lion), is a well-known China expert in Hungary. He has been studying Chinese for over two decades, and worked from 2008 to 2010 as one of the chief representatives of the Hungarian delegation at the Shanghai Expo in 2010. The Chinese Director, Cao Hang comes from SISU. He is a former Fulbright senior research scholar to Harvard and has had a rich working experience in other international universities. The two directors are now working cooperatively for the new development of the Confucius Institute. As one of the two Hungarian institutions appearing in World Top 500 Universities by ARWU in 2014, the University of Szeged is now working hard to establish its international ties all around the world, and in this historical period, its Confucius Institute is playing a more and more important role in its relation with China and with the rest of the world.

In Hungary and worldwide

The first regular Confucius Institute was established in 2004 in South Korea as a symbol of China's unremitting efforts for world peace and international cooperation links between the Chinese people and people of other countries – as it was described by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the ten-year-anniversary of the CIs. The main goal of these institutes is to teach Chinese language and promote cultural exchange. Studying Chinese and knowing a bit more about the Chinese culture will help everyone understand China, the



economic superpower of the 21st century. As early as 25 years ago, when the Hungarian Director of Szeged CI started to study Chinese, one could hardly find a Chinese language course in Hungary. Nowadays, as one of the four CIs in Hungary, the Szeged Confucius Institute has 17 teaching sites, mainly in Szeged and its region, but also at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. Chinese language is now taught in primary and secondary schools, at universities and as an adult education. After realizing the role and importance of China, many students choose Chinese language as a backbone of their future professional life. Those who manage to pass a Chinese language exam called HSK (also offered by CIs) are often good enough to get a Chinese scholarship, which is a free ticket to build a China-related career.

Since 2004, China has collaborated with overseas friends by actively developing CIs. At the end of 2014, there were 465 Confucius Institutes and over 1,000 Confucius Classrooms (partnerships) established in 105 countries and regions. The total number of full-time and part-time faculty and staff reached over 10,000, and the total number of registered students over 500,000. More than 10,000 cultural events were staged, with audience participation reaching 7.2 million. In China, more than 260 universities and over 500 primary and secondary schools have actively participated in the joint development of CIs / Classrooms with the aim of meeting the pressing needs of people worldwide to learn the Chinese language and culture. What they did in the past ten years has been well received by all people around the world. The establishment of Confucius Institutes has not only promoted Sino-

foreign educational and cultural exchanges, but has also contributed to the enhancement of mutual understanding and friendship between the people of the world.

In harmony

Nearly all CIs are established as a cooperation of a Chinese and a foreign university, under the umbrella of Hanban (the Office of Chinese Language Council International) and Confucius Institutes Headquarters. Both universities appoint one director each, hence the CIs has a parallel administration – a great way to practice harmonious management, as the word 'harmonious' has become a key phrase in the recent Chinese terminology. Excellent English-speaking teachers with Chinese art capability are sent from the Chinese partner university. However, using English language for teaching Chinese can be tricky for Hungarian students – especially for those in primary school. So, the Confucius Institute at the University of Szeged cooperates with local English teachers from the given schools in order to bridge the communication gap between the Chinese teachers and the Hungarian students. Meanwhile, SISU's Department of Hungarian language, which will open this autumn, will hopefully be helpful in solving this problem in the future. Headmasters and teachers of the primary and secondary schools highly appreciate the opportunity brought to them by China as studying Chinese can create a great future for motivated students. Also, many of the schools hope that Chinese language can become a final exam language, so more students would choose it.

China Days

Cultural exchange is aimed at a broader target group. The Szeged Confucius Institute is frequently organizing China Days in schools. For instance, in January 2015, it held four events of this kind. China Days are mainly targeting schools that have or will have Chinese language teaching by the Institute, so it is kind of a teaser activity to draw the attention of more students to Chinese courses. These China Days are showing the most interesting and western-compatible cultural relics of China like Dragon Dance, Kung-fu show, calligraphy exhibition and workshop, tea ceremony, etc. The CI teachers also establish Chinese cultural stops during this event where those interested can participate in learning some Chinese, painting, calligraphy, Chinese scenery and also join in funny activities like trying on traditional Chinese matrimonial clothes or picking up ping-pong balls with chopsticks.

The Szeged Confucius Institute also organizes popular activities, like Mahjong courses, film clubs and Confucius Teahouse – a highly popular talk-show style gathering where people who influence the Sino-Hungarian relations can introduce their vision of China. Larger scale activities targeting the general population locally are also under organization, like participating in Szeged's cultural activities such as the Rose Festival or the Fish Soup Festival. Ultimately, by creating visible presence, the Confucius Institute is aiming to let people think about China, its present and its future role. **IDEA**