



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 24, 2010

People's Republic in the Classroom

The People's Republic of China has been providing much of the capital to keep the U.S. government operating through its purchase of American debt. Now it is helping to shape our school curricula as well. The Chinese government is providing teaching materials and instructional assistance free of charge to school districts across the United States for the teaching of Chinese language and culture. The Hacienda La Puente Unified School District in Los Angeles adopted the program by a 4-1 vote in January of this year, though not without some controversy.



"I am not against the teaching of foreign languages, but this is a propaganda machine from the People's Republic of China that has no place anywhere in the United States," said John Kramer, a former superintendent of the district told the *Los Angeles Times*.

"A lot of people are saying it's a way for the Chinese people to brainwash our students. They are really misinformed," Jay Chen, vice president of the Hacienda La Puente board told the *Times*. "From Oregon to Rhode Island, public schools have implemented the same program. As far as I can see, nothing sinister is going on."

The program, called Confucius Classroom, is paid for by the Chinese government's Chinese Language Council International, also known as Hanban. China provides \$30,000 to \$50,000 for extra teaching materials, books and laptop computers. Hanban also provides some of its own materials and might send a teaching assistant from China to aid the classroom teacher, said Principal Janine Ezaki of Cedarlane Middle School in Hacienda Heights, the first school in the Los Angeles area to enroll in the program. At least seven Confucius classrooms have been established in the San Diego area, the *Times* reported.

The popularity of Chinese programs has grown as China has assumed an increasingly powerful role in the world's economy. In 2004, Beijing created the Confucius Institute, similar to Germany's Goethe Institut and France's Alliance Francaise, to promote the teaching of Chinese language and culture at institutions of higher education. By 2009, there were more than 280 Confucius Institutes worldwide. Last year Hanban launched Confucius Classroom for K-12 students. Already there are more than 200 of them in the world, including 60 in the United States.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hacienda Heights had a population that was more than 36 percent Asian, mostly Chinese, when the last census was taken in 2000. Mary Ann King, who has lived there 42 years, told the *Times* she is against taking money from Beijing to teach Mandarin in American classrooms.

"We don't need to accept money from a Chinese government," she said. "If it's funded by them, their doctrine will be part of the curriculum. It's wrong. We don't need to do this to our children."

Chester E. Finn, Jr., a former education official in the Reagan administration and currently with the



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Thomas B. Fordham Institute has posted his concerns about the program on his blog.

"Though one tiny corner of my conscience says sure, the more the Chinese spend IN the United States the less they'll have left to compete with and undermine us. But most of me is outraged — and a little bit alarmed."

People sounded a similar alarm when the Confucius Institute opened at UCLA in 2007, said Susan Pertel, the program's executive director. "Everybody was concerned we would be told what to do, what to teach," she said. "That's not the situation at all. It's very much a partnership."

"People accuse us of advancing a Chinese agenda," said Chen. "They say the Chinese community is taking over. But one of the reasons to have the program is to make Cedarlane more attractive to all students, not just the Chinese." But the school district's voters might have a different idea about how to make the schools attractive, said King, the former superintendent.

"Our kids need to be taught Americanism," he said. "This board is going to pay a price. I think the community is upset enough to vote them out."

Photo: A Cedarlane Middle School student assists her teacher counting numbers in Chinese during a Chinese Language and Culture class in the Hacienda La Puente Unified School District: AP Images



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