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Opening of Confucius Classrooms in
Portage Public Schools
Notes for John M. Dunn, President
Oct 24, 2011

Introduction

- President of WMU.
- Chair of the board that governs the cooperative program between Western and Beijing Language and Culture University to support the Confucius Institute.

The Confucius Institute

- The Confucius Institute program is sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Education and led by HANBAN -----
- There are more than 300 Institutes established worldwide for the purpose of sharing and supporting study in Chinese language, culture and history.
- The major contribution of WMU's Confucius Institute to Portage education has been the Chinese teachers who have come from BLCU to teach Chinese language and culture courses in Portage schools.

The Confucius Classroom

- The Confucius Classrooms that we are proud to dedicate here today are a sub-program within the Confucius Institute program. Confucius Classrooms are, essentially, resource centers that will hold books, teaching materials, educational equipment and other items to support the in-school programs.
- Here in Portage we are dedicating 4 Confucius Classrooms located at Amberly and Lake Center elementary schools and Portage Central and Northern high schools.
- The Confucius Classroom resource centers will greatly enhance our ability to teach about China here in Portage schools.

I would like to make a few comments about the general idea of close links to China and about the value of educational and cultural exchange.

American Links to Confucius and China

- Because of the post-WWII hostilities between the United States and China, Americans often think that we have had no friendly experiences with China.
AND
- The programs we are celebrating today are relatively new—the entire Confucius Institute program began in 2004 and Western’s Confucius Institute opened in 2009.
- BUT American links to Confucius and China reach far into our past:
 - Recently learned, for example, that in 1737, Benjamin Franklin published part of the book *THE MORALS OF CONFUCIUS* in his PENNSYLVANIA GAZETTE.
 - FRANKLIN was interested in the ways Confucius linked moral behavior between the common people and the government¹ and thought Americans could learn from Confucian thought.
 - Thomas Jefferson incorporated numerous Chinese architectural designed in his home at Monticello and in other buildings that he designed.²

¹ David Wang, “The US Founders and China—the Origins of Chinese Cultural Influence on the United States,” *Education About Asia* (Volume 16) p. 6.

² Wang, p. 10.

- Jefferson and others were also interested in agricultural practices in China and brought seeds and plant specimens from China to the United States.³
- The first post-independence sailing ship to depart the United States for an international destination was the *EMPRESS OF CHINA* bound for CANTON.⁴

Great Programs in Cultural Exchange

- The Confucius Institute programs offer great learning opportunities for Americans through cultural exchange.
 - Not only do the young students here in Portage have opportunities to learn about China.
 - The Chinese teachers, particularly Mrs. Peng and Mrs. Han Han, have had a very rich two-year experience in getting to know Americans, American school children, and a great deal about life in America.
- We also need to mention our Fulbright scholar exchange program that aims at sharing American culture with scholars and students from more than 160 countries around the world and has been doing so since 1948.

Conclusion

- Some people have thought that globalization means homogenization—a global process where different cultures are blended and, over time, all peoples around the world begin to think and act exactly alike.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

- Programs like the Confucius Institutes and Fulbright help us learn that different cultures and peoples are strong and growing; they teach us that understanding and respecting these great enduring cultures and appreciating the richness of our varying heritages can lead us not necessarily toward a more homogeneous world but toward a more peaceful world based on understanding and respect.
- In this context we can very readily applaud the opportunity to learn Chinese and to study the history and culture of one of the great peoples of the world.
- We thank our Chinese colleagues from HANBAN and from Beijing Language and Culture University for this support, and we applaud the leadership of Portage Public Schools for their foresight in developing the plan for Chinese language study and thank them for their cooperation in organizing and administering the program.