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## **SICHUAN, CHINA AND CONFUCIUS IN ARIZONA: PROMOTING GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH A LIBRARY EXHIBITION**

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Arizona State University

### Introduction

On October 22, 2007 the joint Arizona State University-Sichuan University Confucius Institute was launched in Tempe, Arizona. This global collaborative effort was celebrated at Arizona State University Libraries by the installation of the Confucius Institute Exhibit. The Exhibit promoted the mission of the new Confucius Institute and underscored the value of international educational partnerships. The goal of the semester-long Confucius Institute Exhibit was to positively showcase the University's global initiatives while embedding the notion that the Libraries play a vital role in campus culture at Arizona State University. The Exhibit contained photos, art and artifacts about Confucius and his influence on Chinese history and culture, China's Sichuan province, and Sichuan University and its libraries.

### The Confucius Institute at Arizona State University

Arizona State University (ASU) is committed to building strong, long-lasting relationships with institutions around the world as part of its goal to provide education in a globally-engaged setting (Arizona State University 2008). The partnership between ASU and Sichuan University, a prestigious institution located in Chengdu in the Chinese province of Sichuan, became official in early 2007. The two schools were designated sister-institutions and officials from both institutions gathered in Beijing to sign official documents creating the foundation for collaborative projects such as the Confucius Institute.



*Leaders from Arizona State University and Sichuan University at a signing ceremony in Beijing*

The new Confucius Institute will provide Arizona citizens access to in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture and language. The concept and mission of the Confucius Institute was conceived by the Chinese government's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. This agency, known as Hanban, has successfully launched Confucius Institutes in partnership with universities all over the world since 2004 (Hanban 2008). Although the principal activity of the Confucius Institute is Chinese language instruction, the overarching goal is to develop and enhance mutual understanding between the Chinese people and other peoples of the world. This mission intertwines with ASU's goal of education in a globally engaged setting.

### A Role for the Library

ASU Libraries provided the space to host the exhibit for an entire fall semester at the Noble Science and Technology Library on ASU's Tempe campus. Designed to be visually stimulating and aesthetically appealing to all library visitors, the exhibit filled seven glass cases with informational placards, artifacts, photos and art. The exhibit was officially unveiled at a ceremony that was part of the launch festivities for the Confucius Institute. On that day, the library hosted dignitaries from Sichuan University and the Chinese consulate in Los Angeles, as well as scholars, students and community members who came to see the Confucius Exhibit and learn more about ASU's new Confucius Institute.



*Confucius Institute Exhibit Launch*





### *Confucius Institute Exhibit Launch*

The exhibit team reached beyond library professionals for expertise. Team members included librarians from two ASU campuses with professional interest in Chinese culture, special skills in exhibit installation and in library public relations. The team also included the China Initiatives Specialist from the office of ASU President Michael Crow, the Chair of the Confucius Institute, and an on-campus graphic designer to assist with exhibit design and printed materials such as posters, banners and bookmarks. Through this collaboration, librarians were afforded the opportunity to work with colleagues across campuses and the university, striking up relationships that may not have appeared in typical workgroups. Faculty with expertise in Asian studies collaborated with the Libraries to extend the Exhibit into cyberspace, recording a series of educational podcasts (Arizona State University Libraries 2008) on the Confucius Institute and the exhibit itself.

As ASU and Sichuan University cemented their friendship through the launch of the Confucius Institute, ASU Libraries was also exploring the possibilities for positive international connections. An agreement between the two University's libraries was finalized in December 2007. This collaboration provides for resource sharing and librarian exchanges, and also lays the groundwork for future collaborative activities and projects.

### Impact

The success of the project was clear as Confucius Institute Exhibit installation came to a close. Due to continuous interest in the materials and the volume of guests to the event, Library administrators approved a scaled-down version of the original exhibit for a second library in the ASU system (ASU Libraries News

2008). The profile of the ASU Libraries was raised as campus newspapers (Dunaj-Killman 2007) and blogs reported on the Confucius Exhibit.

Anthony (Bud) Rock, ASU's Vice-President for Global Engagement, described the exhibition in terms of the impact on its visitors. He stated, "The Confucius Institute Exhibition will create an understanding of and an appreciation for the variety of contributions people from other societies can make to the globally dynamic knowledge community (ASU Libraries News 2008)." Hoyt Tillman, affiliated professor at ASU's Center for Asian Research agreed that the selection of ASU Libraries as the exhibition site was particularly advantageous. In an email to the exhibit team, he stated, "I was particularly pleased that the Library (both Noble and Hayden) was the site for this exhibit. Not only did this selection make it available to the maximum number of students and staff, but it was also symbolic in highlighting the intellectual component of the exchange."

Additionally, ASU Libraries Exhibit Committee past-chair Katherine O'Clair remarked that the Confucius Institute Exhibition was a success on many levels. In an email to the team she stated, "The Confucius Institute Exhibit was a groundbreaking one for ASU Libraries. Not only did it bring together several different units within the university (such as ASU Libraries, Office of the President, School of Life Sciences), but it was also the first exhibit at ASU Libraries to be a cross-university collaborative effort. It was exciting to have everyone working together to produce this exhibit and breaking through the barriers that once defined us as separate entities. This effort was an example of people from 'one university in many places' working together to create something great."

The success of the Confucius Institute Exhibit was largely due to cross-library, cross-campus, and cross-departmental collaborations. By drawing on the diverse expertise within the libraries as well as ASU academic and administrative units, the exhibit was complete in content, perspective, and design. The most rewarding aspect for the exhibit team was the chance to expose the ASU and local community to elements of the rich culture of Sichuan, the history and principles of Confucianism, and the Institute named after the great Chinese thinker. The partnership between ASU and Sichuan University was enhanced and highlighted by the exhibit as guests experienced the information through an inviting, enjoyable experience. The Confucius Institute Exhibition allowed for successful collaborations on multiple fronts, and these collaborations will allow for deeper, more integrated library partnerships around China initiatives in the future.

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学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆。

先師孔子行教像



Studying without thinking leads to confusion; thinking without studying leads to idleness.

## Confucius Institute Exhibition

October 22 - December 8, 2007

at the  
Noble Science and Engineering Library  
ASU Tempe Campus

**ASU** Libraries  
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY