

Keynote Speech

2. The Prospects of the Confucius Institute

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Good morning everyone, I trust you had a pleasant afternoon and evening after the opening ceremonies yesterday. I'm very pleased that Minister Chan is going to take some time out of his schedule to stay and find out what BCIT has to say about the Confucius Institute. As Dr Chen indicated, we were in Beijing in July and it was a great honour to be in the Great Hall of the People to accept the plaque establishing the first Confucius Institute here in Canada. So I'm going to spend some time this morning talking about the Confucius Institute.

I think it's clear that China is emerging as one of the world's largest economies - I don't think there's any doubt about that. Anybody who has visited China in the last year or two can attest that there are construction cranes everywhere. I think that some 20 or 30 percent of the world's cranes are in China and I think another fundamental premise is that economic development depends on trade, particularly international trade. So if you follow that line of reasoning you say, okay, in order to have effective trading relationships, then you must understand the culture and hopefully the language of the country you are dealing with - particularly the culture. And, it is certain that China has recognized that the language they have is not necessarily one that a lot of people understand around the world and in order to do business they have to get more and more people to understand some Chinese language and some of the culture. They want to do it in a non-confrontational, and non-threatening way. This goes back to the teachings of Confucius and, hence, peaceful rise innovation; the concept of getting people to understand and participate, but in a non-threatening way, so that people don't think that someone's trying to take over everything but working towards partnering and working together.

Hence, the creation of the Confucius Institutes and, as indicated, the intent by 2010 is to have a hundred such institutes around the world. We in Canada have the first here at BCIT and I guess I'd like to spend a little time explaining why BCIT was chosen. We're very honoured to have been selected and I think there are some very specific reasons as to why that has happened. To do that, you'd have to understand what BCIT is and what we do.

BCIT, the British Columbia Institute of Technology, is a polytechnic institution. Now, in Canada, the word 'polytechnic' is not that well known. The last true polytechnic in Canada was actually Ryerson in Toronto, and they became a university in the middle 80s, so we at BCIT are the only polytechnic by legislation in Canada. That means we are not a college, we are not a university, we are not a university college; we are unique. We're different. We like it that way.

So what is a polytechnic? We have a lot of programs that are basically related to the engineering, business, health sciences, trades technologies, and we offer a full range of credentials for certificates through to applied master degrees. We have 18 undergraduate 4-year degrees and now we're starting to put on degree programs at the masters level. The other part of a polytechnic vision is that we actually engage in applied research. I need to explain that a little bit: applied research to us means doing research around solving problems for business and industry, as opposed to pure research that goes on in the universities. If you think of research in a university setting - and I know there are a number of people here who actually are doing research at the university level as a part of the Asian Studies Department or wherever you are in a particular university. Professors tend to drive the research in a university as a result of their interests, their skills, and their capabilities, and they apply for grants to do the research. We, at BCIT, respond to what business and industry would like us to do as opposed to being driven by the interests of the particular professor, so it's a little different approach. And then, we have exceptionally strong relationships with business and industry; we have all kinds of partnerships and arrangements with business and industry because at the end of the day, the only reason we exist is to train people so that they can be gainfully employed. We don't train people to go onto further education per se, although some do. Primarily, our role is to train people so they can go out and have good careers and get good jobs.

So, moving forward, you say, okay, that's very nice, BCIT is different from anything else - so where's the China connection? Well, we have a strong international presence in Asia, in fact, we have a very substantial international department and BCIT has chosen China as basically its fundamental area of major operation. It's been going on for several years. We have obviously seen China emerge through the 90s into 2000 to increase its openness towards the West and looking to the things that BCIT has, perhaps, to help them in terms of their economic development.

As you can see from the slide, since 1993 we've been involved in a number of CIDA projects to the tune of about 30 million dollars, and working with the Chinese Government. A lot of these are around economic development. Over the years we've trained probably about 2500 Chinese government officials and technical personnel in various things.

Now, the next one is something a little different - pipeline relationships and pipeline students, which is a different terminology from what you might have seen. We have a number of relationships with universities in China, and what we have established is an approach whereby the institution in China will take a two-year diploma program at BCIT

and deliver it over three years in both English and Chinese. The graduates get both a Chinese diploma and a BCIT diploma. Then they can have the choice of going out to work, or coming to BCIT to take one of our degree programs. So, we are concentrating on getting students coming to BCIT at the higher diploma degree level as opposed to the entry level in year one. There is a particular reason for that: almost every educational institute in Canada is looking for Year One students. At BCIT, it presents a problem for us. The programs that are of interest to students from China and other countries are also the ones that are of interest to people in BC. And, if you know BCIT very well, you know most of our programs are full with rather long waitlists. So students apply and, unfortunately, they get discouraged because they can't get in. So we have said we're not going to do that anymore; we're actually going to set up the structure so students come to BCIT later on and come to the degree programs which is really what they want in any event. So that's what this pipeline relationship is all about. It's a little different approach from almost any other institution in Canada.

We also spend a lot of time now talking about how we can teach people in educational institutions in China on how to deliver education in a polytechnic way. A polytechnic way means that you combine the lab and the theory into one program and they're all very much inter-related, as opposed to being separate. So if you think of mechanical technology, we are doing some theory, people going to the lab, working with equipment, more theory, back in the lab, back and forth. It's an integrated approach that requires you to do things very differently in terms of how you set up a curriculum and of course you must have a fairly significant amount of equipment to be able to do this. That's the approach we take and, in China, this has not been an approach widely used. The Chinese have been very good with the educational side and the academic side, but now they want to know how they can do this. In fact, in October we are getting 16 or 17 presidents from institutions in Liaoning Province who will spend a couple of weeks at BCIT learning about this and how they might use this in their institutions. As you can see from here, we've been authorized by the Chinese Government as an overseas training site.

So, we think we're ideally suited for a Confucius Institute. Just a few statistics on BCIT: we're the largest educational institution in BC by number of students, 55,000 (not by budget - UBC has us beaten on that one). And we have five major campuses in Vancouver: one in Burnaby; aerospace at YVR; marine campus in North Vancouver, on the NorthShore, and then two in the downtown area. One in particular I want to focus on this morning is the eight-storey business tower that is on the corner of Dunsmuir and Seymour in downtown Vancouver. We own that building, and that is where we do a lot of business and computer-related training; a lot of programs and courses specifically relating to the needs of the downtown core of Vancouver. This is where the Confucius Institute will be physically located. We have a very nice spot on the eighth floor - great view - and it's going to be set up in terms of having an office environment, a resource centre, and a number of classrooms, and so forth. That is where we are putting the Confucius Institute in terms of its physical location, so it will be very well centrally located in downtown Vancouver and, if you recall, one of the criteria around the Confucius Institute was that it

actually be in a business centre in a large city, because you want to make sure that the clientele are those that are able to come to you from business and industry and people involved in trade. So when you think about this - we're in downtown Vancouver, and B.C. of course is the gateway to Asia, and with the large number of people of Chinese heritage who are in the lower mainland - it all starts to make some sense.

So what will we be doing at the Confucius Institute? We're going to provide courses, resources, so that people who are in business already can learn about China, how to do business in China, and learn about the culture and the history. So they can learn how to interact. But we're not going to do the things that the universities are currently doing, that's not our role. Universities do some of this as well, but clearly Asian Studies departments in universities do many different things. A lot of the professors are engaged in research and looking at gaining better understanding of Chinese history, culture and politics and making all the connections. We don't see ourselves in that arena. Ours is a much more pragmatic approach in terms of delivering material that'll be of specific interest to people who want to engage with China. So, we will be inviting the university sector to talk to us about how they can connect with the Confucius Institute and, hopefully, it can become a living laboratory for professors to use in their research as one opportunity with the university sector. Clearly, we are not in the business of doing what is traditionally part of the university sector - that's not our intent. Similarly, we don't see ourselves doing things that the private sector is doing in terms of teaching basic English to students who are from China.. We think we can work with them as well. It's not that we're trying to get into that territory either. Fundamentally, we have a specific niche.

All this will be guided by a Board. We will have the advising board; this is traditional for BCIT. When we have a program area we always have a group of people who are very much engaged with the business and industry in the area. They come together and give us advice, periodically. I'm very pleased to tell you this morning that Dr. Chen has agreed to sit on our Board, which I think is great, because that provides a strong link into your organization which will help to promote and work with the different things that are going on in terms of teaching Chinese as a second language. Dr. Chen, welcome.

I'd like to move on now to talking about some of the specific things around the BCIT operation. This is a list of courses. I'll go through a couple of these and talk about them but, there are some things that you need to know about BCIT over and above just the courses. One of the things that we'll be establishing at the Confucius Institute is a resource centre. We're very much committed to using the latest technology in terms of delivering programming. We, as of this last June, embarked within BCIT proper on a 25 million-dollar five-year project called Technology Enabled Knowledge (TEK). The purpose of this is to make sure that the classrooms, the educational structure, the curriculum, and everything related, is making good use of, and taking advantage of, all the latest technologies. Part of this is hardware-related, software-related, making sure the classrooms are "smart classrooms," with all the latest equipment. Also, we have to teach our instructors how to use these new ways of teaching effectively. We have a very large department within BCIT;

there are 40-odd staff who do curriculum development using applications with WebCT and other things that are related to the various technologies. This is a very key cornerstone of how we will position the Confucius Institute. It will be looking at how we can use all the technologies to help with the delivery, over and above what might normally be just paper and pencil and chalk and chalkboard which have their place but we also think that there are other things that we need to do.

This first course has some Basic Chinese with some of the phraseology that you might run into in a very cursory way. Those of us who do business in China rely very heavily on people who can translate for us; Dr. Gu and Jenny Fu, colleagues who are here as well, for many years have provided that service, and that's part of doing business in China. Clearly, getting people to realize that you understand a little bit is important but you don't have to understand it all, because there are people who can help you, and as long as you choose the right people, you're okay.

And then of course you have Business Chinese Fundamentals. There may be several levels of this kind of program, and you get into some of the culture issues, not the least of which I guess is learning that the most dreaded word of the Chinese language is called "ganbei" When you go for a dinner in China there is a particular ritual, and certainly it is very different from how we conduct dinners here in North America, so you're learning those kinds of things needed to be working with the Chinese. These are the kinds of things that I think people need to know. We've already had a lot of interest from a couple of companies that have said, we need to do this in China, but can you maybe help 10 or 12 of my employees understand some of the basics and what they might expect. They've never been there; what can they expect when they step off the plane and so forth? One thing they can expect is a very warm and sincere welcome in China. I've been there 13 or 14 times now, and I must say it's a pleasure to go, because Chinese people are very, very warm and friendly and sincere, so that's a great start.

And of course we talk about trade. All that's being done by the Government in China, in my opinion, is being done for a very specific reason. That is "value added" going down the road, which is to increase trade and open up markets, which then benefits the companies back in China, allowing them to expand and grow; all that trickles back into the China economy, which then helps to provide the kinds of service that perhaps some of the Chinese people at the moment don't enjoy. That's the purpose of the Confucius Institute from our perspective.

Then of course you have the tourist aspect. There are a lot of people who say, maybe I'd like to go out and take a two-week tour of China, go see the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, all the things that I've heard about, and I have an opportunity to go. We can help them understand a little bit what they can expect as a tourist. Obviously there are students at BCIT and the other educational institutions around the province who might want to take one or two of these courses so they can gain awareness. When someone takes a course at BCIT there's a credential that comes out of it, something to say you've taken the course

and, hopefully, some of these courses can be used to gain credit at other institutions - we'll have to work through that. That may or may not happen but that's certainly what we're aiming for, that some of these courses would be available for credit purposes at other institutions because B.C. likes to do that, likes to make sure that students who take a course at one institution can apply for credit at another. B.C. is the best province in Canada for that kind of activity.

You can see that we're working through a number of very applied, very pragmatic course structures here. There will also be a test centre for the Chinese Proficiency Test, the HSK, and other things.

That kind of gives you an oversight of BCIT, and why we think that the Confucius Institute is an excellent fit with BCIT. This may be a little different from some of the Confucius Institutes that are being established elsewhere in the world and that's good because then it'll provide some comparison for the people who fund these institutes to look and say what's working, what isn't, and where we're getting the benefit, and where we're not. Clearly, we're going to invite input from you, the members of the community, as to what you would like to see. These courses will be of varying length, they could be offered during the day, the evening, the weekend. If you think of part of this as a part-time studies operation, then it'll be similar to that kind of structure. Most of these will have some tuition attached, and that will be reflected with the length and the type of course, and so on. At this point, I will stop talking and open up to questions and answers.