

The Confucius Institute (CI) is the Chinese government's multi-billion dollar Chinese language and culture program, with locations at over 1,600 foreign universities and schools around the world.

Ostensibly, it offers convenient Chinese language and culture programs, but many worry that these institutes pose risks to academic freedom, human rights codes, and even national security.

"In the Name of Confucius" is the first documentary to expose the many growing controversies surrounding the Confucius Institute.

The film has won a number of international awards and nominations and has been screened dozens of times around the world. In the flurry of these international screenings, director/producer Doris Liu graciously took the time to answer questions for Friends of Falun Gong.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYa55jk2uVI>

Where are you from and what is your background in film?

I'm originally from China, and now I'm a Canadian citizen. I didn't go to film school, but I did take some workshops. Before I started making films, I was a TV reporter for a few years.

Film has the power to move people in a way that other media can't; why do you think this is?

Film is a comprehensive art that includes storytelling, characters, moving images, sound, and music. With good editing, film can resonate with viewers at a deeper and more profound level than any other art form. Documentaries, in particular, have a unique power to move people because they're truthful.

How did you first hear about Confucius Institutes? What made you want to make this film?

As a Chinese, I had heard about Confucius Institutes for many years, and I knew that they teach the Chinese language. But I didn't know much about it, let alone the controversies.

In early 2013, I read an article from a leading Canadian paper, saying that McMaster University in Ontario, where I live, was closing down its Confucius Institute because the institute violated Canadian human rights codes — Sonia Zhao, a Falun Gong practitioner who taught at McMaster, had to sign a hiring contract when she was selected in Beijing that says she could not attend illegal activities such as Falun Gong. She filed a discrimination complaint to the local Human Rights Tribunal.

I was a TV reporter when I read the story, and I had been a university teacher back in China. The story caught my interest immediately, as it had all the elements that resonated with me: education, China-Canada relationship, the Chinese diaspora in Canada, and Chinese culture.

A quick Google search brought me to some serious concerns and criticisms about the Chinese institutes: they pose risks to academic freedom and even national security.

Was the Confucius Institute good or bad? I decided to find out the answers by making a documentary, and I wanted to share my findings with others.

Confucius Institutes are fairly controversial, with many people feeling strongly for or against them. Did you get any pressure to stop filming? Was there ever a time that you thought you wouldn't be able to finish the film?

Documentaries examining controversial topics are always hard to make because the parties that are concerned or criticized oftentimes are not willing to discuss the concerns and criticisms openly. This is exactly what happened when I made this film.

The Confucius Institute host institutions that I was hoping to get access to either refused to participate in the film or stopped my interviews.

One Canadian university asked me to sign a media consent form that would give the university the right to pre-screen and even rescind any interview content that they didn't want me to use.

When I refused to sign the consent on the grounds of editorial freedom, the university canceled the three interviews originally scheduled for the day after.

Representatives of two Canadian school boards walked away from our interviews when I pressed them for a response to the criticisms surrounding the Confucius Institute program. One even threatened to retaliate.

At one of the above school boards, the Chinese director of its Confucius Institute used her smartphone and filmed me conducting interviews with the board representatives. The director told me she would report on me to Beijing because of my media presence.

After that, I couldn't get access to any Canadian Confucius Institutes, except for a couple of telephone interviews.

Although the rejection of the Confucius Institute host schools to participate in my film was the biggest challenge in making this film, there was never a time that I felt I couldn't finish the film — I had the exclusive personal story of Sonia Zhao, after all.

And later when public outcry broke out in front of the Toronto school board protesting their decision to open a Confucius Institute, I knew I had a great story to tell.

What impact do you think 'In the Name of Confucius' has had?

"In the Name of Confucius" has been screened in 12 countries on 5 continents, including America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, Spain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Taiwan, and Japan.

Among the dozens of public screenings were premieres in the UK and Australian parliaments, as well as screenings in about 20 universities around the world.

The film has educated tens of thousands of audience members about the issue of Confucius Institutes and the Chinese government's political influence, including politicians, educators, academia, students, journalists, government officials, and the general public.

With dozens of media reports about the film, both in English and Chinese, it also helped to raise awareness among broader recipients.

The film has also inspired some organizations, groups, and individuals to launch campaigns to request investigations into their local Confucius Institutes, such as the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission's inquiry and investigation of the CIs in the UK, multi-grassroots groups' urging the New South Wales government's review of CIs at NSW State in Australia, the American Tibetan community's campaign urging the University of Massachusetts Boston to review its agreement with the CIs, and the efforts in Spain requesting public hearings at their local parliament about the Confucius Institute and classroom programs.

What kind of feedback have you received about the film? What has touched you the most?

The most common feedback from all the screenings was that audiences thought the film was very informative and inspiring, and it has made them aware of a very important issue that most of them hadn't heard about before. The film has inspired them to look into this issue and to know more.

Every time, the audience members applauded at the end of the screening, and many of them would come to me after the discussion, shake hands with me, and thank me for making this important film and sharing with them. I remember one audience member said, "You have my highest respect. What you are doing is helping thousands of thousands of people!"

Their encouragement and commendation of my courage and bravery touched me the most, and I feel that all the challenges, difficulties, and hardships I have endured and overcome have been paid off. It's very rewarding.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

I believe that the Chinese government doesn't like my film. But I didn't know to what extent it hates my film until last November when I was invited by a Washington D.C.-based NGO, Initiative for China, to screen my film at an international human rights conference held in Tokyo, Japan.

One day before the opening of the conference, the organizer was told by the venue manager that the Chinese government had requested that the Japanese government cancel the

Documentary Exposes Confucius Institutes

FoFG - Last Updated Saturday, 25 August 2018 12:09

three-day event and threatened that the screening of the film *"In the Name of Confucius,"* as well as inviting a Falun Gong practitioner to give a speech, would damage Sino-Japan relations.

Fortunately, the Japanese government didn't bow to its Chinese counterpart. The conference went on and my film was screened and well received by attendees from around the world.

In June, three theaters in Sydney, Australia, declined the local organizers' application to screen my film after learning what my film was about.

Earlier this month, a screening at a Confucius Institute host university in New Zealand was first changed from public to internal screening, and then was postponed without giving any reason.

"In the Name of Confucius" discusses the risks that Confucius Institutes pose to human rights codes, academic freedom and integrity, and national security. Suppression of my film from the Chinese government or its Confucius Institutes won't stop it from educating more and more people.

The suppression won't stop me from doing what I have been doing either. As a documentary journalist, I am more than determined to continue uncovering hidden truths and sharing what I learn with others.

How can people see or host a screening of your film?

[Check out the website for public screening schedules and watch online:](#)

[The Chinese version is available to buy/rent online at:](#)

If you wish to purchase a DVD of the film, with both English and Chinese subtitles, please contact via email: confuciusfilm@gmail.com

[Stay tuned by following us on Facebook:](#)

or subscribe to our email list: <http://eepurl.com/cwCa2v>

[To host a public screening, please visit our website:](#)

We also encourage people to ask their school or public libraries to buy an education license of *"In the Name of Confucius"* in DVD form so that library members can check it out. [Here's information about the education license:](#)