

Study: China Engaging in Wide Campaign to Influence American Life



FILE - An American flag is flown next to the Chinese national emblem.

A new study by longtime China experts in the U.S. has concluded that Beijing is engaging in an increasingly aggressive campaign to influence and shape perceptions about China held by American politicians, university scholars and students, as well as executives at major corporations.

“Except for Russia, no other country’s efforts to influence American politics and society is as extensive and well-funded as China’s,” according to the report by Stanford University’s Hoover Institution and the Asia Society’s Center on US-China Relations.

The report, called “Chinese Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance,” details a wide range of Chinese activities in the U.S. to “advance its influence-seeking objectives.” It includes lobbying “influential civil society groups,” but also accessing critical U.S. infrastructure and technology and engaging in “covert, coercive or corrupting” behavior, such as pressuring Chinese

students studying on U.S. campuses to spy on other Chinese students at the same schools.

The report said China has, with the assistance of U.S. universities, established so called 110 Confucius Institutes on U.S. campuses, but the institutes are forced to use Communist Party-approved materials “that promote PRC Chinese viewpoints, terminology and simplified characters; the avoidance of discussion on controversial topics such as Tibet, Tiananmen, Xinjiang, the Falun Gong, and human rights in American classrooms and programs.”

Now, however, some U.S. universities, including the University of Chicago and the Texas A&M system, have had second thoughts about the Confucius Institutes and have closed branches at their schools. The report said U.S. institutions should rewrite their contracts with China to eliminate a clause that stipulates Confucius Institutes must operate according to China’s laws.

One of the report’s authors, Orville Schell, said money flowing to U.S. universities “will not come with any explicit prohibitions, but implicit ones,” that if the schools “want to get more [money], don’t say this, don’t say that,” an effort aimed at “modulating and controlling what people say about it and how they view it.”

The report said Hollywood, the film capital of the world, has been influenced by Chinese investment and now routinely makes films that portray China’s government in a favorable light. It said that two decades ago, films such as “Red Corner,” “Seven Years in Tibet,” and “Kundun” addressed topics the Chinese government deemed sensitive. Hollywood studios now are teaming up with Chinese interests to produce such films as “The Martian,” a hit in which the Chinese government saves the American protagonists.

“The rush of Chinese investment into the American film industry,” the report concludes, “has raised legitimate concerns about the industry’s outright loss of independence.”

Schell said that after a year and a half of research, he and others came to the conclusion “that the relationship between the U.S. and China when it comes to influence is not reciprocal.”

He said, “The open society of the United States gets used for Chinese purposes in myriad ways that are not available to Americans in China.”

American universities have not been granted the same access in China as Beijing has received, and U.S. journalists are severely restricted inside China.

The report's conclusions echo those of U.S. Vice President Mike Pence in a speech last month.

"Beijing is employing a whole-of-government approach," Pence said, "using political, economic and military tools, as well as propaganda, to advance its influence and benefit its interests in the United States."

The Hoover-Asia Society report comes as U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President XI Jinping have in recent months imposed tit-for-tat tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars of exports flowing between the world's two biggest economies.

The two leaders are meeting Saturday night over dinner in Buenos Aires at the G-20 summit of the world's leading economies and could possibly reach a new trade agreement. But obstacles remain and agreement on a deal is uncertain.

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