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AE MicroMacro – China

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New Confucius Institute branch in Warsaw

What happened? On September 23 [Warsaw Institute of Technology announced the establishment of the Confucius Institute](#) in cooperation with Jiaotong University. The operations of the new branch will cover not only providing Chinese language courses, organizing workshops and other cultural or social events but will also include business consulting services and workshops in the Chinese economy, law, and business environment.

Who is who? Warsaw Institute of Technology is the oldest and [the best technological university](#) in Poland, [also one of the best Polish higher educations institutions](#) with around [30 thousand students](#). Confucius Institute (CI) is presented in the official materials as a non-profit organization devoted to promoting Chinese language and culture. Actually, it is sponsored, supervised and managed by [Office of the Chinese Language Council International \(Hanban\)](#) located [within the structures of the ministry of education](#). CI has currently [over 500 institutions around the world](#) with 184 in Europe only. There are 6 branches and one subbranch of CI in Poland.

Big Picture. The activities of the CI raise growing anxiety among scholars, think tank analysts, politicians and public opinion in many democratic countries. CI operate as a unit enmeshed in the structure of the host university. In the United States the government initiated action to [limit Chinese influence at the universities](#) and in Australia they come under scrutiny. Multiple universities or local governments in the [US](#), [Canada](#), [Australia](#), [Sweden](#), [Germany](#), [France](#), [Denmark](#) and other countries have terminated their cooperation with CI and/or closed their branches. While in many countries CI is in retreat or under growing pressure in Poland their branches thrive.

Why it matters for Poland?

Polish experts on China warn, that CI seeks other goals than promoting Chinese language and culture, e.g. PISM analyst: "[CI branches are tools of Chinese soft power, whereby](#)



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[China's authorities seek to influence public debate in the host country, exploiting the credibility and authority of universities](#)". Polish Internal Security Agency warns that [CI can be exploited by the Chinese intelligence](#) and participants of the exchanges arranged by CI can be targeted as prospect collaborators. The increased presence of the CI or other Chinese state and CPC sponsored or supported organizations in Poland and growing number of their activities greatly facilitate the Chinese official and often misleading narrative on China's state foreign policy and domestic situation to gain prominence in the public discourse. This process is paired with the relatively weak support granted by Polish state to public institutions and private organizations presenting more critical views on a wide range of topics e.g. China's human rights abuses or authoritarian Leninist one-party political system.

Researchers and academics are among the most vulnerable. They often depend on the Chinese institutions' financial and organizational support to conduct researches in China or on China related-topics. Being offered financial support from the Chinese side they often choose to be silent on issues considered as sensitive by CPC officials. Some choose to openly support Beijing's position. CI benefits from Chinese subsidies and this creates unfair competition for local Polish language schools. The growing interest of CI in providing services for business including matchmaking with Chinese peers can increase Chinese influence across Polish business circles. To create the environment for more balanced discourse on China and to deprive CI the special status, that is not granted to other similar institutions such as Goethe Institute or British Council, [CI shall be separated from the universities, local branches activities should be limited to teaching language](#) but only under the condition, that the fair competition is guaranteed.