Research report on the Lau China Institute

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Key points

- The Lau China Institute at King's College London is the UK's largest China studies centre.
- 99.9% of the Institute's funding comes from a single donor from Hong Kong in the People's Republic of China, Mr Lau Ming-wai. Lau has given at least £11 million to King's to date in support of the Institute. In 2017, Lau was made a fellow of King's. Lau's support is ongoing.
- Lau has served as an advisor to the government of Hong Kong working on Hong Kong's "integration" with China and on Chinese Communist Party United Front work targeting young people from Hong Kong. He was also given a formal role at a body overseen by the CCP's United Front Work Department.
- King's have been asked (via Freedom of Information requests and directly) what terms or restrictions, if any, were attached to Lau's donations, whether Lau made any request concerning the appointment of a director for the Institute, and for information about Lau's engagement with the Institute.
- King's has not disclosed this information. Following an appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office, the Commissioner upheld the position of King's. UK-China Transparency is now appealing to the First-tier Tribunal (General Regulatory Chamber).
- The Institute's director, Professor Kerry Brown, in 2020 received an award from a Chinese government think-tank for "telling a good story about China and disseminating China's voice well". Brown has been a frequent contributor to Chinese state media outlets.

Professor Brown gave no personal comment. A King's College London spokesperson said:

"In line with our duty to uphold and protect academic freedom, and as set out in our robust ethical review and gift acceptance policies, all King's Global Institutes operate completely independently from donors, who have no influence over the focus of any research undertaken by the institutes. We are proud of the work of our Global Institutes in bringing together leading academics to critically examine and deliver country-focused research and expertise, that helps shape and inform global understanding."

Basic information

The Lau China Institute (LCI) is based at King's College London (KCL). It describes itself as follows on its website:

"The Lau China Institute is a global centre for the research, study and understanding of contemporary China. We aim to study both China and work with Chinese scholars and others. As such, we seek research collaborations and deeper mutual understanding with the People's Republic of China, ensuring we sit at the heart of King's strategic approach.

"Established in 2011, we now have a community of core academics and postgraduate students, including roughly 30 PhD students. We are based within the School of Global Affairs, yet work across all nine faculties and beyond, to engage in multidisciplinary and innovative research."

The LCI is the UK's largest China research centre. 1 It states that it has 11 "core members" and 76 members overall, including PhDs, affiliates and administrative staff.² Other material published by the LCI (see 'summary report' below) states that as of 2020, the LCI taught over 300 students.³

The LCI and its members are involved in a range of programmes and research projects, including on topics deemed to be sensitive by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁴

Funding

The LCI replaced the short-lived King's China Institute, which was established in October 2010 with the blessing of China's ambassador to the UK (see image right).⁵

In early 2012, news outlets reported that the wealthy Lau family of Hong Kong had donated £6 million to KCL for the China Institute, which would be renamed the Lau China Institute. 6 The family is considered one of Hong Kong's richest, with an estimated combined net worth of well over US\$10 billion.

Reports differed on whether the donation was from Lau Ming-wai 劉鳴煒/刘鸣炜 and his father, Lau Luen-hung 劉鑾雄 / 刘銮雄, together, or from Lau Ming-wai alone.

Confucius comes to King's

The King's China Institute was officially launched on 22 October, in the presence of HE Mr Liu Xiaoming, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China. A bronze statue of Confucius, donated to the College by the Confucian Academy of Hong Kong, was unveiled outside the Maughan Library. Around 70 guests attended the launch, including the former Governor of Hong Kong, Lord Wilson.



From left: HE Mr Llu Xlaoming, the Principal, Dr Tong Yun-kal, the President of Confucian Academy of Hong Kong, Lord Wilson and Professor Xinzhong Y Director of the King's China Institute

Lau Ming-wai told the South China Morning Post, "I want to offer - as a symbol of my gratitude - financial support to the China Institute as a way of supporting Hong Kong and China's next generation of academics, leaders and entrepreneurs."⁷

According to the reports, the donation was made in February 2012. A few months later, Lau Luen-hung was charged with money laundering and bribery by a court in Macau. Lau Luenhung was convicted in March 2014, however, he has not served his sentence as there is no extradition agreement between Macau and Hong Kong. Following his conviction, Lau Luen-

⁵ https://www.kcl.ac.uk/archive/publications/comment194final.pdf

¹ Based on a comparison with other significant centres, such as those listed in the British Association for Chinese Studies' report on the state of China studies in the United Kingdom https://bacsuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/BACS-State-of-the-Field-2021-22-Report.pdf

https://www.kcl.ac.uk/lci/about and https://www.kcl.ac.uk/lci/about/members?page=7 - member count as of 07/03/2024

³ https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Donor-report.pdf

⁴ https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/organisations/lau-china-institute

⁶ See, for example, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/6m-university-donor-charged-with-bribery-hhxhljcnt3h and https://web.archive.org/web/20230804171501/https://www.scmp.com/article/993250/tycoons-son-gives-gbp6m-uk-university https://www.scmp.com/article/993250/tycoons-son-gives-gbp6m-uk-university

hung resigned as chairman of the family company, Chinese Estates, to be replaced by his son, Lau Ming-wai.8

Throughout the period 2012-2014, between the announcement of the donation and Lau's conviction, there was no sign of progress at the new LCI: no appointments, no news. Information released by KCL (see below) states that no funding was received until February 2015, when the LCI apparently became active and Professor Kerry Brown was appointed as its inaugural director.

KCL told UKCT ahead of this report's publication:

"It is wrong to report that any donations were made by Lau Luen-hung, this is not the case. In terms of the timeline, it is normal for the logistics of setting up a new institute to take a while and for the funds to only be released once operations can begin."

In the Summer of 2017, KCL publicly announced that Lau Ming-wai had been made a Fellow of the university. The announcement stated that: "In 2012 he made an extraordinary gift to help create the Lau China Institute, which has brought King's to the forefront in UK research and teaching on contemporary China."9

In recruitment materials published in 2022 and 2023, KCL's Fundraising and Supporter Development Office boasts of having "secured significant donations including [...] £15m for the Lau China Institute." This may suggest that on top of the £11 million already gifted or pledged (see below), KCL expects a further £4 million remains to be given. UKCT asked KCL directly if this was the case and received no response.

Freedom of Information request relating to a Donor report

In 2020, KCL published a 'summary report' on the LCI which was dedicated to Lau Mingwai and thanked him for his ongoing support. 11 The 'summary report' was later removed from KCL's website. UKCT requested a copy of the document via a Freedom of Information (FOI) request. A copy has been received and has now been published by UKCT. 12

Emails sent internally at KCL and received in response to the FOI request by UKCT relate to the removal of the 'summary report' and include the following message sent in August 2023:13

"We've noticed that one of Ming Wai Lau's reports from 2020 is currently up on the LCI section of King's website: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/lci/assets/ming-wai-lausummary-report-final-2020.pdf. I'm not sure when this would have been put up, but are you able to arrange for it to be taken down as we don't generally publish donor report for confidentiality reasons."

⁸ https://www.forbes.com/sites/russellflannery/2014/03/16/billionaire-joseph-lau-resigns-after-bribery-verdict-son-is-chinese-estates-

chairman/
9 https://web.archive.org/web/20230815235636/https://www.kcl.ac.uk/archive/news/kings/newsrecords/2016/08%20august/new-fellows-of-

kings-college-london

10 See, for example, https://www.peridotpartners.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Jobpack_Strategic-Philanthropy-Manager_Kings.pdf The file has also been downloaded by UKCT and can be shared if the link above is removed.

¹¹ https://www.kcl.ac.uk/lci/assets/ming-wai-lau-summary-report-final-2020.pdf

¹² KCL also shared an email chain including discussion of the removal of the 'summary report' – there was no indication in the email chain that it was removed because of UKCT's scrutiny. The summary report is at: https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Donor- $\frac{report.pdf}{^{13}} \\ \frac{1}{https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Kings-internal-email-correspondence-re-the-report.pdf}$

The 'summary report' itself contains an introduction from LCI Director Professor Kerry Brown. The introduction begins as follows: 14

"On behalf of all my team at the Lau China Institute and King's College London, I am delighted to present the final report on the Lau China Institute.

"We would like to thank Dr Lau for establishing the Institute at King's. We are so proud of what we have achieved together during our seven-year partnership; from world-class research and academic excellence to building links with Chinese organisations in education, business and government.

[...]

"The Lau China Institute, because it is placed at the centre of London, is close to the heart of many of the business, political and cultural decision-making bodies not just for Britain, or Europe, but globally. Throughout the last year, we have worked with Transparency International, the World Bank, BHP Billiton and the G20 in Japan. We have also been involved in events in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Europe, China, Japan, Russia and Turkey. This testifies to the global nature of the subjects we cover and their intrinsically international nature.

[...]

"Thank you for believing in our vision for the Lau China Institute. With your support we have established the Institute as a central source of advice and strategic direction. Through working with key stakeholders in the UK, Europe and China, we are significantly impacting on the shape and direction of policy and overall public discourse about China. None of this would be possible without your support."

The report also referred to Lau's "continuing support".

Freedom of Information request relating to partnerships and funding

In response to a separate FOI request sent by UK-China Transparency (UKCT), KCL released the following table of donations to the LCI:15

Date	Donor	Fund Description	Gift Amount
27/02/2015	Donor #1	The Lau China Institute	£6,000,000
20/06/2018	Donor #2	The Lau China Institute	£7,416
24/09/2020	Donor #1	The Lau China Institute	£4,000,000
24/09/2020	Donor #1	Lau China Institute Fund	£200,000
13/10/2021	Donor #1	Lau China Institute Fund	£200,000
28/09/2022	Donor #1	Lau China Institute Fund	£200,000

 $^{^{14}}$ https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Donor-report.pdf 15 https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Funding-partnerships-FOI.pdf

By way of explanation for the anonymity provided to LCI's supporting donors, KCL described this information as "personal information" protected by GDPR and exempt from disclosure. ¹⁶

Main Freedom of Information request relating to the donation and its terms

The results of a third FOI request sent by a third party and shared with UKCT suggest that the £200,000 sums given in each of 2020, 2021 and 2022 (see above) are portions of a sum of £1 million pledged by Lau in 2020 and associated with a "Lau China Institute Discretionary Fund" (see below). ¹⁷

Amount Pledged	Gift Date	Fund Description
£1,000,000	24 th August 2020	Lau China Institute Discretionary Fund
£4,000,000	24th August 2020	The Lau China Institute
£6,000,000	1 st September 2011	The Lau China Institute

KCL later clarified that the £1 million sum constitutes a "discretionary engagement fund, including an Institute Manager, post-doctoral positions and programme activity". ¹⁸

The £4 million was an "endowment towards creating a Chair in Chinese International Relations". The person appointed to this role in June 2021 "after an international search" was Professor Astrid Nordin. ¹⁹

The £6 million was an "endowment to create the Lau Chinese Institute".

This third FOI request also asked for:

- "a) Emails sent in 2011 and 2012 between KCL staff responsible for administering this donation and Dr Lau,
- b) Any due diligence conducted by KCL on Dr Lau,
- c) A list of Dr Lau's visits to the Institute,
- d) Any agreement or MOU signed in relation to this gift,
- e) Details of any requests Dr Lau made in respect of his gift or has made since,
- f) Details of any further donations by Dr Lau, or any other 'ongoing support' as mentioned here (https://www.kcl.ac.uk/lci/assets/ming-wai-lau-summary-report-final-2020.pdf)
- g) Information as to how Dr Lau's donation is held by KCL. Is it invested? Is it in an endowment?"

KCL refused to release any information other than the table above. UKCT then appealed to KCL, requesting an internal review of the refusal to release more information. In its review, KCL mostly upheld its decision, with reference to information exempt because it was

 $^{^{16}\,}https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Funding-partnerships-FOI.pdf$

https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2-KCL-initial-response.pdf

¹⁸ https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/3-Internal-review-result.pdf

¹⁹ https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/chair-of-chinese-international-relations-appointed-to-the-lau-china-institute

personal information, but also because it was commercially sensitive and given confidentially, stating: "As you will see, in addition to supporting the use of the exemption at S.40(2) – personal information, two further exemptions also apply here: S.41 – confidential information; S.43(2) – commercial interests".

As part of this review, KCL provided "A copy of the standard terms and conditions" (in response to part d. of the request) and some further basic details (see above) about how the £1 million, £4 million and £6 million sums have been used. The terms contain reference to a "Schedule" which may delineate a more detailed purpose – however, KCL did not provide this "Schedule".

UKCT assisted the sender of this third FOI request in their engagement with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) regarding KCL's failure to disclose information. In May 2024, the ICO issued a decision:

"The Commissioner's decision is that KCL correctly cited sections 41(1) and 43(2) of FOIA. The public interest regarding section 43 lies in nondisclosure. The Commissioner finds that KCL breached section 1(1)(b) and 10(1) of FOIA by disclosing information to which the complainant was entitled beyond the legislative timeframe. It breached section 17(1) of FOIA by later relying on exemptions it had not included in the refusal notice."

However, the ICO has ruled that KCL does not need to provide further information. It is clear from the ICO's response that they are not aware of the existence of the "Schedule". UKCT is taking the case to the First-tier Tribunal (General Regulatory Chamber) and will post updates in due course.

Donor profile

During and prior to his donation, Lau Ming-wai (henceforth 'Lau') was appointed to several formal roles at Hong Kong government advisory bodies. Two are examined here.

From March 2010 to March 2013, Lau served as a member of the Hong Kong government's Greater Pearl River Delta Business Council 大珠三角商務委員會, the function of which was to promote the economic integration of Hong Kong and the Mainland, including by making recommendations to the Chinese central government.²¹

In March 2015, Lau took up the role of Chairman of the Commission of Youth 青年事務委員會 of the Hong Kong government. ²² The English name of this body was changed to the Youth Development Commission in 2018, from which point until 2022 Lau served as Deputy Chairman (whilst a series of government officials served as Chair). ²³

During Lau's time at this body, it was involved in programmes in collaboration with the United Front Work Department of the CCP.²⁴ Lau discussed this work in an interview with the Chinese-language version of the *New York Times* in March 2016. With reference to prodemocracy disorder that year, Lau stated that he supported the end-goal of the Chinese

²⁰ These have been published by UKCT, see https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/3b-Appendix-to-internal-review-standard-terms.pdf

https://www.cmab.gov.hk/en/archives/regional_cooperation_0201_3.htm

²² https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201101/28/P201101280117.htm

²³ https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201803/28/P2018032800401.htm?fontSize=1

²⁴ See, for example, http://www.thnet.gov.cn/thdt/thyw/content/post_3657133.html and http://www.locpg.gov.cn/jsdt/2019-07/15/c 1210196194.htm

government's directive on "strengthening patriotic education for young people across the country" ("加強對全國青少年的愛國主義教育"), which had been published that January and demanded "patriotic education" from primary school up and in every subject, in addition to efforts to ensure pro-CCP sentiment amongst Chinese students abroad.²⁵

Lau said that, for Hong Kong, "Integration with China needs to happen on all levels - economic, social, cultural and so on." ("與中國的融合需要在各個層面進行——經濟、社會和文化等等。") He explained that his work involved promoting youth exchange, travelling and internships to the Mainland, noting that "patriotism" would take time to foster. This is 'United Front work' of the kind typically directed or overseen by the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD).

In addition, from January 2013 to January 2018, Lau was member of the eleventh congress of the Sichuan Province Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Lau's role was defined as that of a "special invitee" (特别邀请人士). ²⁶ The role of "special invitee" is given to those attending CPPCC congresses in their personal capacity, and not as a representative of an entity of any kind. ²⁷

The CPPCC is a formal political advisory body to the Chinese government with national and regional committees. Most of its members are not CCP members and as such the CPPCC is closely connected to the UFWD, which selects non-CCP members and oversees congresses.

Lau has a dozen odd active appointments at companies registered with Companies House. On several of these, he lists his nationality as "British". On the majority, however, he lists his nationality as "Chinese". On all, he lists his country of residence as "Hong Kong". ²⁸

The Chinese government's treatment of the LCI's director

Professor Kerry Brown has served as director of the LCI since July 2015.²⁹ LCI's website provides a detailed biography of Professor Brown.³⁰

In 2021, Brown was awarded a 2020 China Cultural Exchange Person of the Year Award, according to KCL, "for his commitment to unity in the face of 2020's urgent global challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change to social injustice." ³¹

The award was organised – per the Chinese government think tank that did so - in line with CCP instructions and in order to celebrate those contributing to the "construction of a culturally powerful socialist country" and to "telling a good story about China and disseminating China's voice well". ³² Brown is a frequent contributor to Chinese state media

 $^{{\}color{blue} ^{25}} \underline{\text{https://www.prcleader.org/post/the-patriotic-education-campaign-in-xi-s-china-the-emergence-of-a-new-generation-of-nationalists} \underline{\text{https://www.prcleader.org/post/the-patriotic-education-campaign-in-xi-s-china-the-emergence-of-a-new-generation-of-nation-of$

²⁶ Formal list of representatives:

 $[\]underline{https://web.archive.org/web/20160317031003/https://www.sc.gov.cn/10462/10464/10797/2013/1/9/10243666.shtml.}$

²⁷ Description of role of 'special attendees': http://whszx.gov.cn/ShowArticle.asp?PID=1406

²⁸ https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/officers/2TtDJrxPcGKHmrET12cbqABbe4w/appointments

https://www.kcl.ac.uk/alumni/assets/intouch-spring-2016.pdf

³⁰ https://www.kcl.ac.uk/people/kerry-brown

^{31 &}lt;a href="https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/kerry-brown-wins-2020-china-cultural-exchange-person-of-the-year">https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/kerry-brown-wins-2020-china-cultural-exchange-person-of-the-year On Guosheng Think Tank 国声智库, see https://archive.vn/tdqFj for its work on Xi Jinping Thought and the role of state officials in its governance, and https://archive.is/r8cfx on its foundation. 'Guosheng' means 'Nation-voice'.

³² https://web.archive.org/web/20210207000355/https://www.sohu.com/a/446801359_419573

outlets (see Appendix 1, overleaf). Brown accepted the award and KCL celebrated the achievement online. 33

 $^{33}\ \underline{\text{https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/kerry-brown-wins-2020-china-cultural-exchange-person-of-the-year}$

Appendix 1. Professor Kerry Brown's contributions to Chinese state media

This list is non-exhaustive. Further examples can be found online. Some outlets, such as Beijing Review, for which Brown has written 18 pieces, list all articles on a single page.³⁴

- October 2017, China Daily, 'New leadership approach is creating certainty' (interview)³⁵
- February 2018, *Xinhua*, 'Interview: British think tank involved in Japan-funded anti-China propaganda "keen to attack," says sinologist' (interview)³⁶
- April 2018, *China Daily*, 'China's vision of common destiny of a shared future'³⁷ (opinion piece co-written with Carla de Utra Mendes)
- March 2018, China Daily, 'Adjusting to China's global role', (interview)³⁸
- March 2018, *China Daily*, 'Brown: China now a central force' (interview)³⁹
- July 2018, *Beijing Review*, 'Time for a Rethink: as old alliances come under strain, the EU's future lies in partnership with China' (opinion piece)⁴⁰
- March 2019, Beijing Review, 'Lessons from Belt and Road' (opinion piece)⁴¹
- November 2019, *Xinhua*, 'China Focus: China's path offers wisdom to world, academics say' (report/interview) ⁴²
- November 2019, *China Daily*, 'More needs to be done to bolster Sino-UK ties, says leading academic' (interview)⁴³
- July 2020, *Beijing Review*, 'Rejecting Huawei will not help Boris Johnson take back control of UK' (opinion piece)⁴⁴
- May 2020, *China Global Television Network*, 'British expert: Stop blaming China' (video interview)⁴⁵
- September 2020, *China Global Television Network*, 'Sinologist Kerry Brown urges West to stop 'moralizing against China' (video interview)⁴⁶
- January 2021, *Beijing Review*, 'The need to grasp the complexity of contemporary China is more urgent than ever' (article co-written with Gemma Deng Cheng'er) ⁴⁷
- November 2022, *China Global Television Network*, 'What's unique in China's modernization?' (video interview)⁴⁸
- February 2024, *China Global Television Network*, 'West's prediction of Chinese economy mostly wrong' (opinion piece)⁴⁹

³⁴ https://www.bjreview.com/Columnists/Kerry Brown/

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2017-10/11/content_33100710.htm

³⁶ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-02/01/c_136024336.htm

https://regional.chinadaily.com.cn/hainan/2018-04/08/c_210800.htm

http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2018-03/16/content 35861261.htm

³⁹https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201803/30/WS5abd768ca3105cdcf6515325.html

⁴⁰ https://www.bjreview.com/Opinion/201807/t20180709_800134769.html

⁴http://www.bjreview.com/CHINA_INSIGHT_2019/MARCH_2019/201904/t20190429_800166568.html

⁴² http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/02/c_138523689.htm

https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/global/2019-11/15/content_37523246.htm

⁴⁴ https://www.bjreview.com/Opinion/202007/t20200726_800215599.html

https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-05-11/British-expert-Stop-blaming-China-QpbjOBSoNy/index.html

 $^{{}^{46}\,}https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-09-20/Sinologist-Kerry-Brown-urges-West-to-stop-moralizing-against-China-TWGOm5N46Q/index.html$

⁴⁷http://www.bjreview.com/Opinion/Voice/202101/t20210104 800231617.html

⁴⁸ https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-11-04/China-s-uniqueness-in-pursuit-of-modernization-1eGm3RjuU36/index.html

 $[\]frac{^{49}}{\text{https://web.archive.org/web/20240301165515/https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-02-22/West-s-prediction-of-Chinese-economy-mostly-wrong-1roO4JIVNAI/p.html}$