

# Interview

## Building Bridges Between the U.S. and China

An Interview with Yue-Sai Kan and Chien Chung Pei, Co-Chairmen, China Institute

**EDITORS' NOTE** Chinese-American Yue-Sai Kan ([yuesaikan.com](http://yuesaikan.com)) is an Emmy-winning television producer, best-selling author, entrepreneur, and humanitarian. Her Looking East television series is the first nationally syndicated program to introduce Asian cultures to American audiences. Following her success in the United States, China's national network China Central Television invited Yue-Sai to produce and host One World, giving millions of Chinese their first look of the outside world. In 1992, Yue-Sai successfully transformed herself from a TV personality to an entrepreneur by creating the Yue-Sai Cosmetics brand, which is recognized by over 90 percent of the Chinese population today. Yue-Sai has written nine best-selling books, spreading the knowledge of beauty, etiquette, health and success among Chinese readers. Yue-Sai's humanitarian efforts have primarily been focused on education and children. She has built schools in her hometown of Guangxi and libraries in poor regions in Northern China. She awarded scholarships to students in a number of colleges in China as well as Hunter College and the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. Yue-Sai has also served as the National Director of the Miss Universe China pageant since 2011. She sits on the boards of the Ellis Island Honors Society, Committee of 100, and Prince Albert of Monaco's Philanthropy Roundtable. Yue-Sai Kan is the first and only living American featured on a Chinese postage stamp.

The son of legendary architect I. M. Pei, Chien Chung Pei spent the first 20 years of professional career contributing to many celebrated projects, including the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and the Grand Louvre in Paris, before founding Pei Partnership Architects with his brother in 1992. He then continued to develop nationally recognized expertise in museum architecture and medical facility design. Pei has completed two projects at Mount Sinai Hospital and the Martha Stewart Center for Living, a 7,800-square-foot outpatient geriatric wellness center. He is Co-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the China Institute in New York City and was a trustee of the Collegiate School in New York City and served on the Alumni Council of the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Pei has lectured at the University of Texas (Austin), the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), and Columbia University. He has also lectured at the National Gallery of Art and the National Building Museum, both in Washington, D.C., and at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. Pei earned a bachelor of arts cum laude in physics from Harvard College in 1968 and graduated in 1972 from Harvard's Graduate School of Design with a master's degree in architecture.



Yue-Sai Kan and Chien Chung Pei

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** The China Institute ([chinainstitute.org](http://chinainstitute.org)) was established in 1926 by leading American scholar John Dewey and leading Chinese scholar Dr. Hu Shih to broaden the appreciation of Chinese culture among Americans. China Institute is a non-profit cultural and educational institution that advances a deeper understanding of China through programs in education, culture, business and art in the belief that cross-cultural understanding strengthens the global community.

### Will you discuss the history and heritage of China Institute?

Pei: China Institute was founded in 1926 by the great educational reformers Dr. Hu Shih and K.P. Wen, together with John Dewey. Its mission was to be a home for Chinese students in the United States and to provide a bridge to educate Americans about China. Even back then, there was concern that Americans misunderstood China.

### How do you define the mission for China Institute today?

Kan: Our mission is to advance a deeper understanding of China through programs in education, culture, art and business. China Institute is the go-to resource on China – from ancient art to today's business landscape and its rapidly shifting culture. Its programs, school and gallery exhibitions bring to life the depth, complexity and dynamism of China. With China's rise as the world's second largest economy, we think our mission – to educate Americans and build bridges – is more important than ever. Understanding is crucial to ensure our mutual prosperity.

### China Institute recently moved its headquarters in New York City. Will you highlight the new space and how it will better represent China Institute's future?

Pei: We moved from a quaint townhouse on the Upper East Side to a much larger, modern space

in the newly dynamic downtown financial district. We now occupy the second floor, but by the end of 2019, we will be ready to open the 6,000-square foot downstairs space as well. That will be a total game changer, as we will be able to present installation art, technology, food, fashion, film, history and all kinds of programs that will bring China to life.

### China Institute hosts a number of important events each year. Will you discuss these events and how they help to further China Institute's mission?

Kan: China Institute hosts multiple public events every month, panel discussions on topics ranging from fashion, pop music and contemporary art in China to trade and technology. We also offer ongoing language and culture classes through our school and exhibitions at the China Institute Gallery. In addition to that regular programming, we host a glamorous annual Blue Cloud Gala, a fundraiser at which we honor luminaries in the U.S.-China world. We also host a Chinese New Year's celebration gala, and in the spring my own foundation co-hosts with China Institute, the China Fashion Gala, which raises funds for a China Institute Fashion Competition and the Yue-Sai Kan China Beauty Charity Fund Scholarship at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

### What opportunities are there for leading corporations to become involved in supporting China Institute?

Kan: There are many. We welcome sponsors to come and support our important programs, as well as our galas. After all, a deeper understanding of China among Americans will contribute to a more positive business climate – and an appreciation for the fact that U.S.-China business helps stimulate the U.S. economy, as well as that of the world.

### What interested both of you in committing your time and energy to Co-Chair China Institute?

Pei: I see the work of the China Institute as being strategically important in so many ways. If Americans have a better understanding of China and vice versa, then there is common ground and common language even despite trade conflicts and other challenges that may arise.

Kan: I think there is nothing more important right now than building bridges between the United States and China. Arts and culture, which are presented so well through China Institute's lively programming and gallery, are absolutely the best way to connect. Business, by definition, is about making positive connections. What better way to cut through the political bluster of the day than to focus on fashion, photography, technology or thought-provoking art? ●