

# Marathoner helps smokers go 'smober'

Former pack-a-day smoker hosts new anti-smoking program

By CINDY CHAN  
Epoch Times Staff

Like many young people, Ray Zahab started smoking in his early teens and eventually became a pack-a-day smoker.

Then about 10 years ago, when he was nearly 30 years old, he managed to quit.

This turned out to be a life-changing decision that not only opened a path to health and fitness but led to multiple adventures across the world that involve helping inspire youth and supporting causes that make a better world.

In 2004, driven by "challenge, distance, and discovery," Mr. Zahab took up running and became an ultra-marathon runner.

Since then, his feats of endurance have included runs across the entire Sahara desert, Tunisia, Siberia's frozen Lake Baikal (the world's deepest lake), Baffin Island, and along some of Canada's extreme coastal trails.

Last January he became the first person to trek from Hercules Inlet to the Geographic South Pole on only snowshoes, without using skis.

Mr. Zahab's expeditions have helped raise awareness and funds for bed nets against malaria and clean drinking water in Africa, and through his organization impossible2Possible (i2P), he dedicates himself to inspiring and educating youth through adventure learning.

But the adventurer with a heart has never forgotten how hard it



**SMOBER UP:** Ray Zahab, host of Smober Up, an online community to help smokers quit smoking, asks 25-year-old Jaime to run for a few minutes on a treadmill to assess her physical condition. He explains that smokers have reduced lung capacity and oxygen level. EVIDENTLY

was for him to quit smoking. So he's taken up a new project, serving as the host of Smober Up, an online community for helping smokers stop lighting up and become "smober."

Launched last month, Smober Up features a series of "webisodes" that document the challenges and successes along the quit-journeys of eight Canadians.

"Something like 75 percent of first-time quitters fail their first attempt, and that's a dramatic statistic," said Mr. Zahab. He himself failed "quite a few times" after deciding in 1998 that he would completely quit by New Year's Eve 1999. But committing to a deadline was what worked for him.

"It was knowing that it was my drop-dead date that really compelled me to do it," he said.

According to Health Canada, 37,000 people will die this year in Canada due to smoking. Among them, more than 300 non-smokers will die of lung cancer and at least 700 non-smokers will die of coronary heart disease, caused by exposure to second-hand smoke.

At over 10 puffs per cigarette,

pack-a-day smokers inhale an estimated 73,000 puffs of dangerous chemicals in cigarettes annually.

"Having a support network—a place for you to voice your opinions or learn from others or take inspiration from others—can really help to drop that statistic," Mr. Zahab said.

Smober Up will let viewers follow the "quit-journeys" of Fraser, Jaime, Kevin, KJ, Shelley, John, Kathleen, and Sumit on YouTube and Facebook, and provide a supportive forum for those considering quitting or who are on their own quit-journey.

"Smoking is like a nasty friend that you can't get rid of. You don't want it around but at the same time you're just not ready to kick it to the curb," says Shelley on one of the videos. She smokes in her garage because she doesn't want to smoke around her children.

"I want to be a good role model for them," she said. "I want to be stronger than smoking, because I want them to be strong too. That's my number one reason [for wanting to quit]."

John's sister, a non-smoker, died

from lung cancer in 2009, and he wants to quit because of "the promise that I made my sister, that one day I would quit in honour of her and respect for her life."

One of the biggest challenges is breaking the routine of smoking, Mr. Zahab said.

"It becomes a life pattern. It's habitual, and so you're used to having that cigarette in your hand, you're used to taking a cigarette break . . . and so breaking those cycles, as human beings it's very difficult to do that."

A recent Angus Reid survey of 1,005 Canadian adult smokers indicated that 75 percent of smokers have tried to quit more than once and failed. This is despite believing that smoking has negative effects on their life, including their health (48 percent), fitness (46 percent), and finances (37 percent).

The survey, conducted by the makers of Nicorette, a line of stop smoking aids designed to help smokers control their craving, also found that 85 percent of smokers say they want to quit but only 32 percent believe they will succeed.

To protect young people from unscrupulous marketing practices by the tobacco industry, new legislation came into force on July 5 making it illegal for retailers to sell cigarettes, little cigars, and blunt wraps containing additives or flavourings aimed at enticing children and youth.

"It's not until you become smoke-free that you look back in retrospect and say, 'Oh, I feel so good now compared to how I felt before.' [It's] just an overall sense of wellbeing, you just feel like you're treating yourself better," Mr. Zahab said.

"When you quit smoking it almost seems ridiculous that you ever did. You look back and think, 'I can't believe I ever smoked.' Your head clears."

# Getting schooled by Beijing

**CONFUCIUS CONTINUED FROM P1**  
The Chinese regime doesn't deny it. Li Changchun, the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Chief and 5th highest ranking member of the ruling Politburo Standing Committee, calls the institutes "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up."

Canada is host to seven Confucius Institutes, four of them attached to post-secondary schools including McMaster University and the British Columbia Institute of Technology. They offer Chinese language and cultural classes, sometimes with course credit in degree programs.

## TROUBLE IN THE SCHOOLYARD

It is not the language classes that raise concerns so much as the institute's intentions and extra-curricular activities. Over the years, those activities have included getting universities to shut down events put on by groups Beijing doesn't like and pushing students to protest western media's coverage of China.

The schools are part of a broader effort by the regime to extend "soft power" via culture and education.

In 2006, one faculty member at Stockholm University's institute tried to stop the school's Asia Pacific studies department from having Erping Zhang as a visiting scholar because of his volunteer work for the Falun Dafa Information Center. An email from that professor was sent to the university's faculty alleging Zhang was not a scholar, despite having five degrees including a Master's in International Affairs from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

In Israel, a judge ruled Tel Aviv University had bowed to the Chinese regime by shutting down an art exhibition about the oppression of Falun Gong in China put on by students because the school feared losing perks provided by the Chinese regime, including a Confucius Institute.

As the University of Sydney closed a deal to have its own Confucius Institute in 2007, Jocelyn Chey, a former diplomat and visiting professor there told the Australian that having the institute on campus was going to make it difficult for academics to maintain their freedom and independence.

The University of Pennsylvania never applied to host an institute over concerns the regime would try to meddle with its curriculum while the University of British Columbia declined an offer to host one.

Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, a political science professor at Waterloo, says there is no doubt the institutes are part of the Chinese regime's soft-power campaign, but that doesn't necessarily make them subversive in nature, just unusual to Westerners.

He says that controversial activities associated with the institutes are unintended consequences of their close alignment with Beijing.

Working under the Ministry of Education as part of China's united front efforts to enlist non-communist supporters to its side, the institutes educate students to become sympathetic to official Chinese-state views, said Lo.

"In the long run, the cultural impact and the hidden diplomatic and political impact of Confucius Institutes will be tremendous. It is a long term strategy," he added.

He said key personnel for the institutes will be recommended by the Chinese Ministry of Education in China so "definitely their thinking tends to be politically acceptable to mainland Chinese government."

Subversive or not, the explosive growth of the institute hasn't worried alone CSIS but the U.S. Congress as well.

## U.S. CONCERNS

In its 2008 report to Congress, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission noted China's Central Propaganda Department controlled the media, internet and cultural and education institutions to make sure everyone stays in tune

with the regime's perspective. That control applies to the Ministry of Education that oversees the spread of Confucius institutes around the world.

"The propaganda system's central purpose is to perpetuate the political authority of the Chinese Communist Party by concealing negative information about the party and its history and by propagating narratives intended to bolster the party's authoritarian rule."

In 2009, the commission's report noted how the regime was working to shape the opinions of China in elite policy-making circles by influencing the commentary coming out of U.S. academics and think tanks.

"This takes the form of providing both positive rewards to 'friendly' scholar—such as preferred access to interviews and documents—as well as taking punitive actions such as denying visas for academics who anger Beijing. These rewards and punishments offer the Chinese government leverage over the careers of foreign scholars and thereby encourage a culture of academic self-censorship."

The long-term impacts of that and the role of Confucius Institutes is mentioned in a paper published by the same commission titled China's Use of Perception Management and Strategic Deception.

The paper notes that the U.S. State Department's International Security Advisory Board is concerned that China is in the midst of a comprehensive strategic deception campaign.

It also details China's plans to open 1,000 institutes around the world by 2020. Half of those are expected to have opened by this year.

Universities are attracted to the institutes by the offer of free teaching staff supplied by Beijing, and in some cases, kickbacks from the regime.

## LESSONS IN PROPAGANDA

Last month, Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont., announced its own institute and over \$150,000 in startup cash and up to \$100,000 in annual project funds provided by the regime.

But such funding comes with a catch, and could give the regime leverage over the school, say critics. For example, Brock could find itself in the position of hosting a forum to deny the widely reported human rights abuses in Tibet.

That happened last year when Minister Xie Feng, Deputy Chief of the Chinese Embassy in Washington D.C., told delegates at an event at the Confucius Institute at the University of Maryland about how China freed Tibet from slavery. He went on to refute and attack claims of abuses made by human rights groups.

"The freedom of religious belief and normal religious activities of the Tibetan people are protected," he said, failing to mention that carrying a picture of the Dalai Lama is a crime or that monks regularly protest religious persecution.

"Tremendous changes have taken place in Tibet over the past 50 years. Tibet has progressed from darkness to brightness, from poverty to prosperity, from autocracy to democracy, and from self-seclusion to opening up. The problem between us and Dalai Group is not over ethnic, religious or human rights issues, nor is it over whether autonomy is needed. Rather, it has always been a struggle between progress and retrogression."

And that's what Beijing would have us believe. Now they're getting their chance.

# Groups call on Cannon to expel diplomat

## EXPULSED CONTINUED FROM P1

Under the Vienna Convention, a country can at any time declare a diplomat from a foreign country persona non

grata and have them removed without explanation.

Speaking for the Falun Dafa Association of Canada, Grace Wollensak told

reporters in Ottawa that the language used by Liu and organizer Yuan Pinghua, who was also caught on tape, was a disturbing reminder of why many

left China.

"They used words like 'fight,' 'battle,' 'struggle,' 'political struggle,' even 'war' in their action plan and mobilization and referred to Canadian protesters as the 'enemy.'"

She said such hostile language has been invoked by the regime in the various political movements it has carried out in China for 60 years. Those movements began by targeting landowners, business owners, and later intellectuals. Presently, Falun Gong practitioners are the main target in mainland China.

"It is not acceptable that they are exporting it here in Canada to instigate hate against Canadian groups," said Wollensak. "Liu's actions were completely outside the scope of his diplomatic duties as set out in the Vienna Convention."

A letter co-signed by the 13 groups notes that Liu targeted "Falun Gong, Tibetan separatists, Uyghur separatists, and democracy [activists]" who he said were planning protests that would "sabotage" and "interfere" with Hu's visit.

He laid out a plan for three days of "counter attacks" against the protesters, including bringing enough people to Parliament Hill to "surpass" the number of protesters, arranging day and night shifts outside the Westin Hotel starting from June 22 (one day before Hu's arrival), and carrying out "counterattacks" against protesters on the way to the airport and to the governor general's residence.

In a separate letter, former MP and Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific, David Kilgour, said it is not a matter of what the Canadian government could do, but what it should do.

"In my view, there is more than enough evidence to justify expulsion of this official. He should be expelled."

"Usually what constrains the Government of Canada when dealing with foreign officials is concerns about reciprocity. The Government of Canada will not do anything to others it would not want inflicted on its own diplomats. Yet, how long would the Government of China allow a Canadian official to stay in Beijing who tried doing something similar there to what Liu Shaohua has done in Canada? The answer is not an instant."

Events calling for Liu's expulsion were held in Ottawa, Vancouver, and Toronto.

Groups participating included the China Rights Network, China Democratic Party, Canadian Friends of Burma, Canadian Tibet Association of Ontario, Uyghur Canadian Society, Tibetan Youth Congress, the Interfaith Committee on Restorative Justice, One Free World International, and others.



Standing across the street from Toronto's Chinese consulate, protesters called on Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon to have Liu Shaohua, first secretary of the education section at the Chinese Embassy, declared persona non grata and expelled from Canada. ALLEN ZHOU/THE EPOCH TIMES

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