

CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE: A TOOL FOR CHINESE CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

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ABSTRACT

The rise of China has given birth to the promotion of Chinese language and culture abroad. Recently, culture has increasingly become a pillar in Chinese diplomacy. The main vehicle of promoting Chinese language and culture internationally is the Confucius Institute. Confucius Institutes are non-profit governmental educational cooperation between universities and colleges in China and universities and colleges in other countries whose aim is to promote Chinese language and culture. This paper tries to establish that Confucius Institute is one of the tools of Chinese cultural diplomacy in the twenty-first century. The paper adopts a descriptive approach, making use of secondary data from journals, magazines and online materials. At the end, it is established that Confucius Institute can be understood as a form of Chinese cultural diplomacy.

KEYWORDS: China, Confucius institute, culture, diplomacy, cultural diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

China has a long history which we cannot treat in detail here due to space and scope of the study. China is one of the greatest nations and world's first civilizations. For centuries, the political system in China was based on hereditary monarchy which was known as dynasty. China had many dynasties beginning with the Xia dynasty around 13th century BC. The last imperial dynasty in China was known as Qing dynasty which was established in 1636 and ended in 1912. The Republic of China (ROC) was established on January 1, 1912 after the Qing dynasty was overthrown in Xinhai Revolution. The Republic of China was succeeded by People's Republic of China (PRC) which was established in October 1, 1949 by Mao Zedong, the Chairman of Communist Party of China (CPC). Since 1949 to present, China has been governed by Communist Party of China which is also referred to as Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The current party leader and the president of People's Republic of China is Xi Jinping has been in charge since 2012.

Napoleon once said, "China is a sleeping giant. Let her lie and sleep, for when she awakens she will astonish the world." At the turn of the twentieth-first century, the sleeping giant is fully awake (Lee, 2007). China's peaceful rise (quiet rise), also known as China's peaceful development was an official policy in China under President Hu Jintao. This policy characterizes China as a responsible world leader that avoids unnecessary international confrontation rather adopts the use of soft power. It also tries

to rebut the China threat theory and reestablish China as a nonthreatening world power (Hu, 2006). According to Morrison (2006), since the opening up foreign trade and investment and implementing free-market reforms in 1979, China has been among the world's fastest-growing economies.

In a book titled "The Rise of China" edited by Brown et al (2000) states that many observers have begun to debate the international implications of China's rise. Some analysts argue that China will inevitably pose a threat to peace and security in East Asia. A few even predict a new cold war between Beijing (China) and Washington (United States). Others claim that a powerful China can remain a benign. None believes that China can be ignored. The awakenedness of China is a blessing or curse to some people and nations. China's rapid rise as a new world economic and military power has obviously brought it into conflict and competition with the United States. Pant (2012) says that the rise of China as an emerging great power and as the most likely challenger to the global preponderance of the US is already having a significant impact across the globe.

China's rise is the result of a combination of factors. Whittaker (2003) says that since the 1980s, the Chinese government has pursued an export-oriented trade strategy and policies of trade liberalization. They have taken steps to stabilize the People's Bank of China and the Chinese financial system at large, primarily by massively lowering interest rates, maintaining a closed capital account, implementing a system of state-owned enterprise, selecting privatization to promote competitive advantages internationally and promoting profitability. One thing is very evident; the rise of China has given birth to the promotion of Chinese language and establishment of Confucius Institute.

PROMOTION OF CHINESE LANGUAGE: NOTCFL and HANBAN

Promotion of Chinese language after the opening up and standardization of Chinese has been the focus the Chinese government since 1949. The National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL) was established in 1987 to enhance the mutual understanding and friendship between the Chinese people and other peoples of the world, promote economic and trade cooperation as well as scientific, technological and cultural exchanges between them (Hanban). In the quest to achieve a global superpower, the world needs to understand China, Chinese people, culture, and language. The world cannot fully understand Chinese people and their culture without understanding their language. Hence, the introduction of National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign language (NOTCFL).

The National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL) was later called Hanban which is the abbreviation of Office of Chinese Language Council International. In Chinese language, it is known as Guojia *Hanyu* Guoji Tuiguang Lingdao Xiaozu *Ban*gongshi. According to Hanban's website, Hanban, a non-profit government organization, is a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education and is committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide. Hanban's goals include making Chinese language and culture teaching resources and services available to the world, meeting the demands of oversea Chinese learners, and contributing to the formation of a world of

cultural diversity and harmony. Hanban's objective is to cultivate knowledge and interest in the Chinese language and culture around the world, especially in people who are not native speakers of Chinese. Hanban's primary functions include making policies and development plans for promoting Chinese language internationally, supporting Chinese language programs at educational institutions of various types and levels in other countries, drafting international Chinese teaching standards, developing and promoting Chinese language teaching materials.

In organizational structure, Hanban is under the Chinese Ministry of Education which has the following subdivisions: division of general affairs, division of human resources, division of discipline inspection, division of auditing, division of finance, division of assets management, division of development and planning, division of policy studies, division of Asian and African Confucius institutes, division of American and Oceanian Confucius institutes, division of European Confucius institutes, division of teachers, division of volunteer affairs, division of teaching and resources, division of Chinese testing and scholarship, division of cultural affairs, division of sinology and China studies, division of international exchanges, division of logistics, and information office.

Scholars and writers especially in the west have criticized Hanban. For instance, the Economist called Hanban "government entity". To them, Hanban is synonymous with the Communist Party of China (CPC) which is the Chinese ruling party in government. Marshall Sahlins of the University of Chicago once referred to Hanban as an instrument of the party state operating as an international pedagogical organization (Sahlins, 2013). Despite the criticisms, the promotion of Chinese language under the supervision of Hanban has been successful in many ways. Hanban has helped to create a positive image of China abroad through Confucius institute. According to Gil (2008), "the promotion of Chinese language learning throughout the world is seen as part of China's effort to accomplish its foreign policy goals through the use of soft power". The task of promoting Chinese language is the duty of the Ministry of Education which once wrote on its website:

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) is an integral part of China's reform and opening up drive. To promote TCFL is of strategic significance to popularize the Chinese language and culture throughout the world, to enhance the friendship and mutual understanding as well as the economic and cultural cooperation and exchanges between China and other countries around the world, and to elevate China's influence in the international community (Ministry of Education website as quoted in Gil, 2008).

Whether it was National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL) or it is Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), the goal is the same. Recently, Hanban is changed to a new name. According to the South China Morning Post, "Beijing has decided to rename Hanban, the headquarters for its

Confucius Institutes, to the Ministry of Education Center for Language Education and Cooperation”. A deputy director and Communist Party Secretary of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, Ma Jianfei, said during an online National Chinese Language Conference in June 2020, “the purpose of the new center would be to uphold the concept of openness, inclusiveness, and respect, trust, and strive to provide assistance to people from all over the world in learning Chinese as much as possible” (Dallmeyer, 2020). The recent change of name from Hanban to Ministry of Education Center for Language Education and Cooperation was as a result of criticism and backlash. In an article titled ‘CCP’s Confucius Institute Disguised Under New Name’, Ding (2020) states that ‘Beijing abandoned its Confucius brand after a global backlash over censorship to switch to a new look as the ‘Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation’, while its headquarters, or Hanban, had changed its name to the Ministry of Education Center for Language Education and Cooperation.

CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE

In order to meet the demand of learning Chinese language around the world, Hanban is committed to providing Chinese language and culture teaching resources and services worldwide. It goes all out in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world. According to Hanban’s website,

As China’s economy and exchanges with the world have seen rapid growth, there has been a sharp increase in the world’s demands for Chinese learning. Benefiting from the UK, France, Germany and Spain’s experience in promoting their national languages, China began its own exploration through establishing non-profit public institutions which aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries in 2004: these were given the name Confucius Institute.

The Confucius Institute, which is named after the noted Chinese philosopher, Confucius, is born out of the demands to learn Chinese language around the world. Although Hanban claims to model Confucius Institute after Britain’s British Council, France’s Alliance Francaise, Germany’s Goethe-Institut and Spain’s Instituto-Cervante but many scholars do not accept the claim. Mosher (2012) notes, “Unlike Alliance Francaise, the Confucius Institutes are not independent from their government; unlike the Goethe-institut establishments, they do not occupy their own premises. Instead, participating universities agree to provide office space in exchange for funding, and to cede academic control to the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party”. In support of Mosher, Sahlins (2013) asserts thus:

Although Chinese officials argue that Confucius Institutes are like other language and culture organizations such as Portugal’s Instituto Camoes, Britain’s British Council, France’s

Alliance Francaise, Italy's Societa Dante Alighieri, Spain's Instituto Cervantes and Germany's Goethe-Institut but some western commentators do not agree saying 'unlike these organizations, many Confucius Institutes operate directly on university campuses, thus giving rise to what they allege to be unique concerns related to academic freedom and political influence...'

According to Zheng (2019), "Confucius Institute is governmental and not independent from the Chinese government, yet Goethe Institute and British Council are in figure under Non/Quasi-governmental organizations. In this sense, Confucius Institute cannot be comparable to neither the Goethe Institute nor British Council, despite what Hanban has assured".

There are similarities and differences between the Chinese Confucius Institute and Western language centers/institutes. China is concentrating on the similarities while the West is focusing on the differences. There is always a Chinese characteristic in almost everything China does, including Confucius Institute. According to the Hanban, the establishment of the Confucius Institute by partnering with academic institutes around the world 'helps to increase academic collaborations, to boast their connection with China, enhance their own language and Chinese studies programs'.

Confucius Institutes are non-profit governmental educational cooperation between universities and colleges in China and universities and colleges in other countries. Confucius Institute was established in 2004 by Hanban. The first Confucius Institute was opened on 21 November, 2004 in Seoul, South Korea, after a pilot institute was established in Tashkent, Uzbekistan around June 2004. The second Confucius Institute was established in the University of Maryland, College Park in November 2004. The year 2004 is a significant year in the history of the Confucius Institute.

According to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes, chapter two which lists the services Confucius Institutes offer. The Confucius Institutes shall provide the following services:

- a. Chinese language teaching;
- b. Training Chinese instructors and providing Chinese language teaching resources;
- c. Holding the HSK examination (Chinese Proficiency Test) and tests for the Certification of the Chinese Language Teachers;
- d. Providing information and consultative services concerning China's education, culture, and so forth;
- e. Conducting language and cultural exchange activities between China and other countries.

Penn (2014) states the aim of Confucius Institute "is to promote Chinese language and culture, support local Chinese teaching internationally, and facilitate cultural exchanges". Despite these stated functions, services and aims of Confucius Institute, some scholars and writers especially from the West have different views and ideas

about Confucius Institute. According to Paradise (2009:648), “the Confucius Institute project can be seen at one level as an attempt to increase Chinese language learning and an appreciation of Chinese culture, but at another level it is part of a broader soft power projection in which China is attempting to win hearts and minds for political purposes”. Jocelyn Chey, a former diplomat and expert in Australia-China relations states Confucius Institute is “a propaganda vehicle for the Chinese Communist Party, and not a counterpart to the Goethe Institute or Alliance Française” (Chey, 2008). Critics say Confucius Institutes are ready-made platforms for the State’s agenda, promoting an overly rosy image of PRC while discouraging discussion of politics (Zhao and Huang, 2010). Similarly, Marcus (2013) asserts, “Critics have accused Confucius Institutes of spreading propaganda”. The Economist (22 October 2009) states that the organization (Confucius Institute) has been criticized due to concerns of rising Chinese influences in the countries in which it operates. According to Steffenhagen (2008), Confucius Institutes face many criticism,

In the short-frame of their rapid expansion, the institutes have been the subject of much controversy. Criticisms of the institutes have included administrative concerns about finance, academic viability, legal issues, and relations with the Chinese partner university, as well as broader concerns about improper influence over teaching and research, industrial and military espionage.

This is to say that most of these criticisms and accusations directly or indirectly are based on the fear of Chinese dominance and influence on the host nations of the Confucius Institute. There may be no much criticism and accusation if China is not an emerging superpower with the intention of becoming world superpower. Confucius Institutes would not have attracted all these accusations and criticisms if the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is not fully involved in establishment and management of the Confucius Institutes. Wang and Adamson (2015) states, “If China was to lose its economic or political strength for any reason, there would probably be a significant decrease in the desire to learn Chinese”. According to Gil (2008) and Bianco (2007), this popularity (in learning Chinese language – Confucius Institutes) is due largely to its great commercial potential. Shen (2017) asserts that Confucius Institutes have become important institutions and channels for promoting Chinese language and culture internationally. With the establishment of 500 Confucius Institutes around the world, however, many problems are emerging, which need to be considered.

Failure to consider and address these emerging problems of Confucius Institutes led to the closure of some Confucius Institutes around the world. While some universities and colleges have rejected the offer to establish Confucius Institutes, many universities that host Confucius Institutes are terminating their contract and closing the institutes. According to an online media ‘In the name of Confucius’, in February 2013, Canada’s McMaster University was the first reportedly to close a Confucius Institute. As of 2020, there have been at least 50 universities, 2 governments and 1 school board around the

world that have cut ties with Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms, which resulted in 49 closures of the institutes.

In December 2013, the Canadian Association of University Teachers passed a resolution calling on all Canadian universities and colleges that currently host Confucius Institutes on their campuses to cease doing so, and those contemplating such arrangements to stop. In December 2014, the first university in Europe to host a Confucius Institute, Stockholm University, announced its plan to close its Confucius Institute. The reason for the decision according to the university chancellor is that “generally, it is questionable to have, within the framework of the university, institutes that are financed by another country”. The closure of Confucius Institutes or termination of its contracts is a major setback to the development of the young and fastest growing language and culture institute.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Before we go into the definition of cultural diplomacy, it is important we understand culture and diplomacy. In a simple terms, culture is the people’s ways of life. In a complex definition, culture is an umbrella term which encompasses the social behaviour and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups (Edward, 1871). Diplomacy can be defined as the substance, aim and attitudes of a state’s relations with others, diplomacy is one of the instruments employed to put these into effect. It is concerned with dialogue, and negotiation and in this sense is not merely an instrument of a state, but also an institution of the state-system itself” (Xu, 2014).

Cultural diplomacy is a type of public diplomacy and soft power. Public diplomacy is any of the various government-sponsored efforts aimed at communicating directly with foreign publics to establish a dialogue designed to inform and influence with the aim that this foreign public supports or tolerates a government’s strategic objectives (Munro, 2017). He states there are two kinds of public diplomacy. The first is branding, or cultural communication, in which the government tries to improve its image without seeking support for any immediate policy objective. The second type of public diplomacy includes various strategies designed to facilitate more rapid results – a category sometimes called political advocacy. Soft power, according to Lexico (Oxford), is a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence. In other words, soft power involves shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. A defining characteristic of soft power is that it is non-coercive; the currency of soft power includes culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2012). Coined by Nye in the late 1980s, the term ‘soft power’ – the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion (Ikenberry, 2004). Soft power has been referred to as a form of national power that is based on ideational and cultural attractiveness, which is intentionally or unintentionally utilized by actors in international relations to achieve strategic imperative (Nye, 2004)

According to Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD), founded in 1999 in the United States of America, cultural diplomacy (or ‘diplomacy between cultures’) has existed as a practice for centuries. Whilst the term ‘cultural diplomacy’ has only recently been

established, evidence of its practice can be seen throughout history and has existed for centuries. Cultural diplomacy may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond; cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society. Pajtinka (2014) states that cultural diplomacy which is a set of activities undertaken directly by or in collaboration with diplomatic authorities of a state, which are aimed at the promotion of foreign policy interests of this state in the realm of cultural policy primarily by means of fostering its cultural exchange with other (foreign) states, is an important part of diplomacy in our days.

The purpose of cultural diplomacy is for the people of a foreign nation to develop an understanding of the nation's ideals and institutions in an effort to build broad support for economic and political goals (Maack, 2001). The focus of cultural diplomacy is to influence a foreign audience and use that influence, which is built up over the long term, as a sort of good will reserve to win support for policies. Cultural diplomacy seeks to harness the features of culture to induce or attract foreigners to the following:

1. Have a positive view of the country's people, culture and policies,
2. Induce greater cooperation between the nations,
3. Aid in changing the policies or political environment of the target nation,
4. Prevent, manage and mitigate conflict with the target nation.

Besides, cultural diplomacy can assist a country have a better understanding of the other countries she is engaged with and it also encourages mutual understanding. Cultural diplomacy is a way of conducting international relations without expecting anything in return in the way that traditional diplomacy typically expects (Waller, 2009). Cultural diplomacy can and does utilize every aspect of a nation's culture; according to Waller (2009), this includes:

1. The arts including films, dance, music, painting, sculpture, etc.
2. Exhibitions which offer the potential to showcase numerous objects of culture.
3. Educational programs such as universities and language programs abroad (like Confucius Institute).
4. Exchanges – scientific, artistic, educational etc.
5. Literature – the establishment of libraries abroad and translation of popular and national works.
6. Broadcasting of news and cultural programs.
7. Gifts to a nation, which demonstrates thoughtfulness and respect.
8. Religious diplomacy, including inter-religious dialogue.
9. Promotion and explanation of ideas and social policies.

All these tools of cultural diplomacy seek to bring understanding of a nation's culture to the audiences in other nations. These tools are generally not created by a government, but they are produced by the culture and then the government facilitates their expression to a foreign audience abroad, with the goal of achieving influence. Institutions of cultural diplomacy includes: France's Alliance Francaise, Italy's Istituto

Italiano di Cultura, Hungary's Balassi Institute, Britain's British Council, USA's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Agency, Denmark's Danish Cultural Institute, Germany's Goethe-Institut, Spain's Instituto Cervantes, Japan's Japan Foundation, South Korea's Korean Cultural Center, Sweden's Swedish Institute and China's Confucius Institute.

CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE: A TOOL FOR CHINESE CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

China's commitment to bolstering its connections with the rest of the world has been a strong feature of its economic and foreign policies since 1978, after the death of Mao Zedong and the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping. In 2002, the Chinese government began to consider setting up institutions to promote Chinese language and culture overseas. One of the key elements of this policy of promoting Chinese language and culture internationally has been Confucius Institutes (Flew & Hartig, 2014). For China, next to politics and economics, culture has increasingly become the third pillar in China's diplomacy. China has already done some achievements in cultural diplomacy, such as: Confucius Institute Projects, Buddhist forum in Hangzhou in April 2006, Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, Shanghai World EXPO in 2010, Year of Chinese Culture, etc (Xu, 2014).

In support of the above statements, Chinese President Hu Jintao, while addressing the Australian Federal Parliament in October 2003, said "the Chinese culture belongs not only to the Chinese, but to the whole world". According to Xu (2014), concepts such as public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and soft power now feature prominently on the Chinese government's agenda. For example, at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the then Chinese president, Hu Jintao stressed the need to promote the attractiveness of Chinese culture as a way of enhancing the country's soft power. Towards current situation of China's cultural diplomacy, culture is the new tool in diplomacy. For China, Chinese leaders have been aware of the growing relevance and importance of cultural diplomacy, taking its unique culture and utilizing platforms for cultural exchange programs, festivals, movies, music, religious forums, sports and tourism with the outside world in the 2000s, such as these new initiatives: Confucius Institute, exports of Chinese cultural products, and recently, efforts to make the Chinese media global players (Xu, 2014). China has invested heavily in cultural diplomacy over the last decade through arts and cultural exchanges, Confucius Institutes, the very large numbers of Chinese students abroad, growth in the number of students from other countries studying in China, and the creation of foreign language services for China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI) and the Xinhua News Agency. (Rawnsley, 2009 and Huang, 2012 as cited in Flew & Hartig, 2014)

Pan (2013) argues that the Confucius Institute project can be understood as a form of cultural diplomacy that is state-sponsored and university-piloted, a joint effort to gain China a more sympathetic global reception. The Confucius Institution project involves a complex of soft power techniques. However, it is not entirely representative of soft power capability, because the problems embedded in the project and in the wider

society run counter to the Chinese government's efforts to increase the Confucius Institutes' attractiveness and popularity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After establishing the fact that the Confucius Institute is a tool of Chinese cultural diplomacy, the next thing that comes to the mind is its effectiveness. Within the space of fifteen (15) years, Hanban has established more than five hundred (500) Confucius institutes and nearly two thousand (2000) Confucius Classrooms in more than one hundred and fifty (150) nations and regions around the world. I agree with Zheng (2019) that the promotion of Chinese language (and culture) learning by Confucius Institute has been successful in creating a positive image of China and attracting learners despite the challenges and criticisms.

In the recent past, the Confucius Institute has received many criticisms and accusations especially from the West. For effective cultural diplomacy of the Confucius Institute, these criticisms and accusations need to be addressed. The purpose of Hanban (Confucius Institute) should be to uphold the concept of openness, inclusiveness, and respect, trust, and strive to provide assistance to people from all over the world in learning Chinese as much as possible. Hanban should be more transparent and less autocratic in the management and operation of Confucius Institutes, by so doing, Confucius Institute will be a powerful tool for Chinese cultural diplomacy.

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