

Original Article

Confucius institute and china's cultural diplomacy: A case study of confucius institutes in Malaysia

Xia Nan^{1*}, Yang Yanan²

¹School of International Education, Chengde Medical University, Chengde, Hebei, China, ²Department of Social Science, Chengde Medical University, Chengde, Hebei, China

ABSTRACT

On November 21, 2004, the first Confucius Institute was set up in Seoul, South Korea. With the rapid growth of the economy and the enhancement of comprehensive national strength of China, Confucius Institute has enjoyed substantial growth. Until 2017, China has set up over 525 Confucius Institutes and 1113 Confucius Classrooms around the world to promote its language and culture. In Malaysia, the first Confucius Institute was set up in University of Malaya. The development of Confucius Institute raises a series of basic questions. First, what are Confucius Institutes and what are their purpose and function? Second are Confucius Institutes tools of China's cultural diplomacy? Thus, this study seeks to answer these questions. To aim these questions, it describes the most common concepts which are related with Confucius Institutes including soft power, public, and cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, it investigates the Confucius Institutes using Confucius Institutes in Malaysia as a case study. This paper concludes that the set and propaganda of Confucius Institute in line with China and Malaysia interests, and it promotes the mutual understanding and friendship of the two countries. The objective of Confucius Institutes is to promote the communication of multicultural. Confucius Institutes are the tools of China's cultural diplomacy rather than the conspiracy.

Keywords: Confucius Institutes, Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power

Submitted: 28-08-2018, **Accepted:** 07-09-2018, **Published:** 28-09-2018

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, peace and development have become the themes of our era. More and more countries began to pay close attention to the promotion of national soft power. In 2003, the Chinese government announced the plan of establishing Confucius Institutes as one part of soft power diplomacy in the world. Since the first Confucius Institute was set up in Seoul, South Korea, in 2004, the Confucius Institute has flowered worldwide and developed beyond the extraordinary pace, its growth rate is amazing. Until December 31, 2017, 525 Confucius Institutes and 1113 primary and secondary school Confucius Classrooms have been set up in >146 countries.^[1]

Such highly popular overseas cultural communication caused the attention of all circles of China and foreign media, research institutions, experts, and scholars around the world. Some

stated that the Confucius Institute may increase China's soft power;^[2] nevertheless, critics argued that China disseminated "its ideology of patriotism for the Communist Party and China, autocratic culture, and nationalism."^[3] China brainwashes students overseas through the Confucius Institute. There are obscurities and disagreements on what Confucius Institutes are and what the goals and purposes. Thus, it needs to make clear about the Confucius Institutes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data of this article mainly focused on the secondary data. In addition, secondary data were collected from journal articles, newspapers, website pages, and online resources. To make the results clear and effective, the author referred to the official website of Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), which provided the sufficient information for this study.

Address for correspondence: Xia Nan, School of International Education, Chengde Medical University, 067000, Chengde, Hebei, China. Tel: (+86) 13673249354. E-mail: flyforever2008@hotmail.com

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are two parts in this section, in the first part, it discussed the introduction and nature of the Confucius Institute. Then, the relations between cultural diplomacy and the Confucius Institute were examined.

Introduction of the Confucius Institute

The Confucius Institutes are non-profit public institutions which aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. It is not a general sense of the University, but educational and cultural exchange constitutes for foreigners with the purpose of training and promoting Chinese, disseminating Chinese culture. One of the most important works of Confucius Institute is to provide the main and formal channel for the people who want to learn Chinese around the world and provide the normal and authoritative modern Chinese textbooks.

All Confucius Institutes are under the authority of Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) which is composed of representatives from 12 ministries and commissions within the Chinese central government.^[4] The Ministry of Education carries the main responsibility among the 12 ministries.

According to the statistics of the Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), by the end of 2017, there had been 525 Confucius Institutes and 1113 Confucius Classrooms in 146 countries and regions, with 118 Confucius Institutes in 33 Asian countries and regions, 54 in 39 African countries, 173 in 41 European countries, 161 in 21 American countries, and 19 in 4 Oceania countries; with 101 Confucius Classrooms in 21 Asian countries, 30 in 15 African countries, 307 in 30 European countries, 574 in 9 American countries, and 101 in 4 Oceania countries.

The operation models could be divided into three types such as Wholly operated by China, with local partners as joint ventures, and “wholly locally run offices licensed by Beijing.”^[5] The most common form is the joint venture structures which are cooperation projects between China and international partners. Usually, China offers teaching materials and sends language teachers, while local partners provide space, facilities, local staff, and so on.

The purpose of the establishment of the Confucius Institute is to develop the friendly relationship between China and other countries in the world, enhance people's understanding on Chinese language, and culture and provide excellent and convenient study condition for Chinese learners worldwide. The Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) will set up the Confucius Institute which main activity context is to carry out Chinese teaching in the countries that have the demand.

According to Hanban's website, the Confucius Institute has seven functions which are as follows: To make policies

and development plans for promoting Chinese language international under the directions of Hanban; to support Chinese language programs at educational institutions of various types and levels in other countries; to direct the Council of the Confucius Institute Headquarters and establish Confucius Institutes; to draft international Chinese teaching standards and develop and promote Chinese language teaching materials; to draft international Chinese teacher certification standards and provide training, as well as select Chinese teachers and teacher volunteers active overseas and certify their skills for teaching Chinese as a foreign language; to draft guidelines for establishing an international Chinese teaching network, create a platform for that network, and provide resources; and to develop and propagate Chinese language examinations of all types.^[6]

Cultural Diplomacy and the Confucius Institute

Xu Lin, the director of Hanban said: “It is urgent to learn Chinese culture and understand contemporary China through learning Chinese. The Confucius Institute has become the embodiment of China's soft power of the brightest brand” and the Confucius Institute has become a “going out” symbol of contemporary China. To explain the cultural soft power role of the Confucius Institute, the first step should clarify the meaning of soft power.

Nowadays, peace and development have become the theme of today's world; each country has entered the era of the “soft power” contest. Joseph Nye defined soft power “is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” and it arises from “the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideas, and policies.”^[7] In other words, soft power is “the ability to shape the preferences of others.”^[8] To exert soft power, it needs to use an instruction to attract other countries, which named the public diplomacy. Public diplomacy means an international actor's attempt to advance the ends of policy by engaging with foreign publics.^[9] According to Cowan, the public diplomacy can be divided into five elements among which the cultural diplomacy is one important part. In general, cultural diplomacy is “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their people to foster mutual understanding,” it is “an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad.”^[10]

Cultural diplomacy can be divided into different categories according to different standards. According to the main body of the behavior, it can be divided into official cultural diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. According to the property division, it can be divided into cultural diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. From the perspective of the performance of the form of cultural diplomacy, it can be divided into two categories of cultural sanctions and cultural cooperation.

Cultural diplomacy plays a very important role in the development of bilateral relations, which is conducive to creating a good

atmosphere for a country's overall diplomacy. In the development of relations among major powers, cultural diplomacy plays a unique role; in the development of relations with neighboring countries, it rose to dispel doubts; in relationship with developing countries, it can stabilize and strengthen the relations.

In the form of cultural exchange about the Confucius Institute, it can be said to be very rich. Like Zhouji who was the former Chinese Minister of Education said, "the Confucius Institute has been widely recognized by the international community as a place of learning Chinese. In addition, it was regarded as the window to understand the contemporary Chinese including information, as a platform for exchanges and cooperation in education, culture, economy, trade and others."^[11]

The Confucius Institute has built a bridge between China and the world, which has promoted people's understanding of China. The Chinese government makes his effort to promote the Confucius Institute with the purpose namely to enhance understanding and communication among countries. The purpose of the Confucius Institute is to enhance people's understanding of the Chinese language and culture, develop friendly relations between China and foreign countries, promote the development of world culture, and contribute to building a harmonious world.

There are two Confucius Institutes in Malaysia, which are Kongzi Institute for the Teaching of Chinese Language at the University of Malaya and Confucius Institute at SEGI University. The operation model is joint ventures. Kongzi Institute for the Teaching of Chinese Language at the University of Malaya was the first Confucius Institute in Malaysia which was set in 2009. It is the joint venture of University of Malaya and Beijing Foreign Studies University. Confucius Institute at SEGI University was set up in 2014, which cooperate between the SEGI University and Hunan Normal University.

Malaysia is a multiethnic country. Malaysian society comprises three major ethnic communities, namely the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians. In 2016, total population of Malaysia was estimated at 31.7 million, of which 28.43 million (89.7%) are Malaysian citizens. Among Malaysian citizens, ethnic Bumiputera (the Malays and other indigenous groups) recorded the highest percentage with 68.6%, followed by Chinese (23.4%), Indians (7.0%), and others (1.0%).^[12]

To promote the mutual understanding and friendship between China and Malaysia, the Confucius Institute was set up to propagate Chinese cultural according to the actual situation of Malaysia. Confucius Institute's vigorous development makes it become the representative of the Chinese business culture

and get the recognition and welcome of Malaysia and many other countries; it has become China's "international brand."

CONCLUSION

We can see that the Confucius Institute not only conforms the need that China government promotes the Chinese language in the world, drives other countries to have a comprehensive understanding of China, and promotes cultural exchanges and prosperity but also promotes oversea people's need who wants to know China through learning Chinese.

The set and propaganda of Confucius Institute in line with China and Malaysia interests and it promotes the mutual understanding and friendship of the two countries. The objective of Confucius Institutes is to promote the communication of multicultural. Confucius Institutes are the tools of China's cultural diplomacy rather than the conspiracy.

REFERENCES

1. Hanban. Confucius Institute Annual Development Report 2014, 2017. Available from: http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node_10961.htm.
2. Paradise JF. China and international harmony: The role of confucius institutes in bolstering beijing's soft power. *Asian Surv* 2009;4:647-9.
3. Yuan M, Fei L, Robin K. Beijing Chinese Language Schools Brainwash Students Overseas. *The Epoch Times*; 2009.
4. Hartig F. Confusion about Confucius Institutes. Paper presented at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Adelaide. 2018.
5. Starr D. Chinese language education in europe: Confucius institutes. *Eur J Educ* 2009;1:65-82.
6. Ren Z. The Confucius Institutes and China's Soft Power. *Institute of Developing Economies*. 2012.
7. Nye JS. *Soft Power-the Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs; 2004.
8. Nye JS. Public diplomacy and soft power. *Ann Am Acad Pol Soc Sci* 2008;616:94-109.
9. Cowan G, Nicolas J. Public diplomacy in a changing world. *Ann Am Acad Pol Soc Sci* 2008;1:6-8.
10. Cull NJ. Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and histories. *Ann Am Acad Pol Soc Sci* 2008;1:31-54.
11. Jian M. *The Confucius Institute: The Exchange Platform between China and the World*. Beijing: International Talent Exchange; 2006.
12. Malaysia DO. *Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2014-2016*. Department of Statistics Malaysia, Official Portal. 2016. Available from: https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=155&bul_id=OWlxdEV0YlJCS0hUZzJyRUcvZEYxZz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License.