

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the first two decades of the 21st century, China has steadfastly cultivated their domestic growth and development, whilst carefully knitting their role in international affairs. China has a conspicuous presence in global economics. In 2014, as estimated by the International Comparison Program of the World Bank, China's economy has the ability to surpass the United States in size based on their purchasing power parity (PPP).¹ In addition, the Chinese currency, *renminbi* (RMB) is also placed to the ranks of leading countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).² Politically, China tends to remain in a passive and aggressive manner in dealing with its foreign and domestic affairs respectively, which will be explained in detail later in this thesis. There are explicit changes of China in handling international affairs by the current Paramount leader of China, Xi Jinping compared to his predecessors.

From a low-profile diplomacy principle coined by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1990s that sounds “韬光养晦” (*tao guang yang hui*, with the English translation “hide its capabilities and bide its time”) to a much more ambitious foreign policy.³ Such examples could be seen from China's initiatives in proposing

¹ Xiaoyu Pu, *Rebranding China : Contested Status Signaling in the Changing Global Order* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018), 4, <http://ezproxy.library.uph.edu:2069/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=1920656&site=ehost-live>.

² Xiaoyu Pu, *Rebranding China*, 1.

³ Xiaoyu Pu, *Rebranding China*, 4.

international institutions and hosting high-profile projects such as the Beijing Olympic Games, the Shanghai Expo, the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).⁴

As a rising power, President Xi has expressed his intention to contribute more to global development through his speech at the Summit Meeting for the BRI in May 2017.⁵ Despite China's relative growth in economy, political and military aspects, to pursue their national interest in global affairs, China needs to elevate their soft power. Borrowing the classical concept invented by Joseph Nye, there are three types of power: hard, soft, and smart power.⁶ Focusing on the concept of soft power, it is an ability to achieve one's goal through attraction rather by coercion or payment, and limited only through the security realm.⁷ The Chinese elite thinkers adopt Nye's soft power as a way to tackle this issue by promoting Chinese culture internationally.⁸

As S. Anholt noted in "Culture in International Relations: Defining Cultural Diplomacy", culture plays an essential role in enhancing a country's reputation and understanding about its values to its recipients. The origins of cultural diplomacy came from France through the establishment of *Academy Francaise* in 1883 with the aim of teaching and promoting the French language.⁹ Following that, similar institutions have been successfully promoting their language abroad for almost a

⁴ Xiaoyu Pu, *Rebranding China*, 2.

⁵ Xiaoyu Pu, *Rebranding China*, 2.

⁶ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, United States: Public Affairs, 2004), 136. EBSCOHost Ebook.

⁷ Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's New Diplomacy and Its Impact on the World," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 14, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2007): 1-7. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24590703>.

⁸ Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's New Diplomacy," 1-7.

⁹ Diana Stelowska, "Culture in International Relations: Defining Cultural Diplomacy," *Polish Journal of Political Science* 1 no. 3 (2015): 54. Academic Search Complete.

century, in the United Kingdom with British Council, and Germany with the *Goethe Institut*.¹⁰

Cultural diplomacy is a subset and often used, although not the same, interchangeably with public diplomacy.¹¹ In regard to China's soft power effort, Confucius Institute (CI) is created by the Ministry of Education of China, and under the auspices of Center for Language and Cooperation (or commonly called as 'Confucius Institute Headquarter' or '*Hanban*' in Chinese).¹² Thus, it falls into the category of public diplomacy which explicitly aims for foreign audience in a form of all 'higher culture', education, and information.¹³ Confucius Institute is a state-funded, non-profit educational institution that is devoted to the demands of people from other countries to learn and understand Chinese language and culture, as well as conducting cultural exchanges.¹⁴ *Hanban* is located in Beijing, China and acts as the regulatory body that provides guidelines for all the Confucius Institute worldwide since 2004.¹⁵ At the moment, the Confucius Institute has expanded globally and has placed 441 branches in all around Asia, Africa, America, Europe, and Oceania countries.¹⁶

One of the most prominent services of the Confucius Institute is to hold a 汉语水平考试 (*Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* or HSK) or Chinese Proficiency Test in

¹⁰ Diana Stelowska, "Culture in International Relations," 54.

¹¹ Simon Mark, "A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy," *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*, (April 2009): 11.

¹² "About Confucius Institute/Classroom," Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), accessed February 21, 2020, http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm.

¹³ Diana Stelowska, "Culture in International Relations," 65.

¹⁴ "Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes Chapter," Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), Accessed September 10, 2020. http://english.hanban.org/node_7880.htm.

¹⁵ "Constitution and By-Laws."

¹⁶ "About Confucius Institute/Classroom."

english.¹⁷ HSK is part of the requirement for international students to apply into Chinese universities, especially classes that are conducted in Chinese language. The Confucius Institute adopts flexible teaching patterns to adopt local conditions, other than teaching Chinese language, they also actively promote the Chinese culture in schools, communities, enterprises by building their offices near the universities who agreed to have cooperation.¹⁸

In the year 2009 alone, the total enrollment of Confucius Institute classrooms reached 260,000 members with 7,500 cultural exchanges with over 3 million levels of participation.¹⁹ *Hanban* provides an annual budget for each Confucius Institute to purchase all of the items that are needed and pay the salaries of the Chinese local teachers that are appointed in the host countries.²⁰ In the reports of the Sixth Plenum of the 18th Party Congress, the former Paramount leader Hu Jintao, described the ambition to increase China's soft power should be understood as public diplomacy with Chinese characteristics that are embedded in socialist culture.²¹ Many of the prominent political leaders and President Xi were seen actively using the Confucius Institute as a diplomatic platform, demonstrating the importance of the Confucius Institute programs.²² Especially regarding the

¹⁷ "About Confucius Institute/Classroom."

¹⁸ "About Confucius Institute/Classroom."

¹⁹ "About Confucius Institute/Classroom."

²⁰ Ying Zhou and Sabrina Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes: a tool for promoting China's soft power?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 25 no. 100 (2016): 631. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1132961>.

²¹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, *18th CPC National Congress*. China Embassy, http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/18th_CPC_National_Congress_Eng/t992917.htm.

²² Zhou and Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes," 629-630.

awareness and strengthening the ‘One China Policy.’²³ Thus, the Confucius Institutes can be regarded as an observable agent of China’s foreign relations.

In reality, some argued that the Confucius Institute’s presence in promoting China’s soft power does not produce any significant effect. Many pointed out the conflicting internal and external issues, which pictured the inconsistency of China’s domestic issues with the benign image that they wanted to project internationally.²⁴ Empirically, the role of the Confucius Institute should be inferred through the similarities of the Confucius Institutes abroad. Therefore, even with its minimum publicity as China’s soft power instrument, the Confucius Institute’s operation worldwide and its affiliations with host countries remains as an important issue to dissect the blueprint of China’s foreign policy strategy in Xi Jinping’s administration. I will encapsulate this research with Neo-Realism theory and concepts of power, public diplomacy, and national interest to analyze the research question below.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the preliminary information that is mentioned above, I suggest the following research questions.

1. What are the contributions of the Confucius Institute to China’s foreign policy strategy?
2. How does the Confucius Institute play their role as China's soft power?

1.3 Research Objective

²³ Zhou and Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes," 637.

²⁴ Zhou and Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes," 641-642.

The objective of this research question is to find and analyze the direction of China's foreign policy strategy through the soft power means by using the Confucius Institute as its tool. In addition, specifically explained how the Confucius Institute plays their role as China's soft power. This research will describe the findings of the Confucius Institute in the host countries, particularly in terms of language acquisition, cultural exchanges, educational and political relations with China.

1.4 Research Contribution

The result of this research paper will provide a deeper insight on the component of China's influence as the emerging power, through the Confucius Institute as their instrument of soft power. This research is significant to the International Relations major as the topic discusses the functionality of Confucius Institute as the direct instrument for cultural exchanges, proliferation of the Chinese language, exhibitions, and other events and becoming the representation of China in the host countries. Moreover, the result of this writing presents the understanding and giving insight of China's strategy in exercising their power under the umbrella of the Confucius Institute and contributing to the field of International Relations in identifying and recognizing one instrument of China's soft power. It also highlights how diplomacy evolves around the correlativity of coercive tendencies and soft power, and argues its effectiveness to complement China's foreign policy strategy.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

The first chapter, the introduction, presents the information about the background of the thesis topic, research question that will be addressed, the objective of the research, and the significance of the research.

The second chapter, the theoretical framework, presents the compilation of the literature review of sources that are related to the thesis topic. Which is the Confucius Institute, China's foreign policy strategy, cultural and language institute in general, China's soft power, and China's public diplomacy. Sequentially, credible books and article journals for the international relations theory and concepts that will be used as the framework to analyze the contribution of the Confucius Institute to China's foreign policy strategy, and how does the Confucius Institute play a role in China's soft power. It comprises the theory of Neo-Realism and the concept of power, public diplomacy, and national interest that is vital in understanding this research.

The third chapter, the methodology, presents the description of the research approach, research method, data collection technique, and data analysis technique that will be used to gather and process the data and information for this research.

The fourth chapter, the analysis, presents all the data gathered to analyze the contribution of the Confucius Institute to China's foreign policy strategy, and how it partakes its role in China's soft power. This chapter will be proceeded systematically, starting from the general to specific scope using the afro-mentioned international relations theory and concepts used. The result of this analysis can be used to address the research question of the thesis. Lastly, the fifth chapter, which

is the conclusion, summarizes the analysis and findings of the previous chapters to answer the research questions, and presenting the significance of this research.

In regards to this chapter, Chapter I has outlined the necessary information through the background of the thesis, research question that will act as the backbone of this thesis, research objective, research contribution, and lastly, the structure of thesis that consist of bits of each content of the chapters. As mentioned in the structure of the thesis, the following chapter will provide further information to construct the foundation and framework with literature reviews of the related topic of the thesis, theory and concepts that are suitable to analyze the research questions.

