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# China's Cultural Diplomacy: A Great Leap Outward with Chinese Characteristics? Multiple Comparative Case Studies of the Confucius Institutes

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# China's Cultural Diplomacy: A Great Leap Outward with Chinese Characteristics? Multiple Comparative Case Studies of the Confucius Institutes

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the prominent features of China's state-led campaign of cultural diplomacy. Through multiple comparative case studies of its flagship project of the Confucius Institute (CI), it aims to identify and contextualise the various variables affecting its effective operation. It finds that this dependent variable is mainly determined by the independent variable of the CI's ability to localise its product and process to suit different target audiences, along with a number of extraneous variables, including ideology, nationalism and the media environment in the destinations. People-to-people interaction is also an important mediator that contributes to facilitating mutual understanding. All the variables and the complexity of their inter-relations constitute the Chinese characteristics and are charted out in a diagram.

## Introduction

In today's world that is marked with economic globalisation, political multi-polarisation and cultural diversification, China wishes to re-establish its significance as a major cultural power in its ascent to global prominence through economic rise. A state-led campaign of cultural diplomacy was staged for this purpose. As the term suggests, cultural diplomacy involves both a dimension of 'culture' and 'diplomacy', and this strategy demonstrates changes in China on both fronts. Following the induction of the national strategy of 'Going Global' (*zou chu qu*) in the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan in 2001, the cultural front responded by announcing its own strategy of 'going global' in 2002: the mission of 'establishing a brand new image of China and building China into an international cultural centre' was expected to be achieved through 'infiltrating into mainstream international community and mainstream media' according to the then Chinese Cultural Minister Sun Jiazheng.<sup>1</sup> Then in 2004, culture was declared to be the third pillar of China's diplomacy after politics and economy.<sup>2</sup> The government rhetoric was quickly matched with significant investments into various high-profile initiatives and a series of milestone events that marked the fledgling of a 'cultural leap outward': from the debut of the 'Year of Chinese Culture' series in France, Italy, Russia, and Australia in 2003, to the opening up of the Confucius Institutes (CIs) all over the world since 2004; then from launching the 24-hour cable news channels and newspapers (*China Daily Asia Weekly* and *European Weekly*) overseas in 2010, to staging the Chinese image advertisement in New York Time Square in 2011.

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<sup>1</sup>Liyang Yang, 'Xinshiqi Zhongguo wenhua "zouchuqu" zhanlue de yiyi' [The significance of the 'going global' strategy of Chinese culture in the new era], *Renmin Luntan*, [People's Tribune], (11 August 2014), [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmlt/html/2014-08/11/content\\_1475959.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmlt/html/2014-08/11/content_1475959.htm) (accessed 15 June 2018).

<sup>2</sup>Chunyang Zhu, 'Zhongguo wenhua zouchuqu weihe kunnan chongchong?' [Why is the 'Going Global' of Chinese culture beset in difficulties?] *Zhongguo Wenhua Chanye Pinglun* [Review of Chinese Cultural Industry] 2, (2012), pp. 84–104.

On the diplomatic front, there was also a gradual evolution from the stance of 'keeping a low profile' in Deng Xiaoping's era to 'striving for achievements',<sup>3</sup> which was formally presented as the new strategy in Xi Jinping's speech at the foreign affairs conference in 2013. Although Deng's open-door policy that has propelled China's economic reform was acclaimed as the 'Great Leap Outward',<sup>4</sup> it was not fully applicable to the diplomatic front during his time. These concurrent changes taking place in both dimensions of 'culture' and 'diplomacy' mirror the shifts in China's self-identity and its drive to reshape its global cultural identity.

This article aims to explore the Chinese characteristics of this 'cultural leap outward' and discuss what makes it truly 'great' by examining the trajectory of China's global cultural footprints made through its recent expansion of the CIs. Since its first launch in 2004, there were altogether 525 CIs operating in 146 countries and regions around the world by December 2017.<sup>5</sup> Nine CIs were closed down or announced their decisions to do so between 2013 and 2018, receiving global media attention and triggering a lot of debates: apart from the Lyon Confucius Institute that was closed by Hanban in 2013,<sup>6</sup> the other eight decisions to terminate their renewable CI agreements were all made by the host institutions—Macmaster University in 2013, Chicago and Penn-State universities in 2014, Stockholm University in 2015, and most recently the University of West Florida, Texas A&M University, the University of North Florida and the University of Michigan in 2018. If we look at the sheer number of these closures, the tiny proportion of 9 out of over 500 may be rightfully considered a sign of the 'success' of the CI. However, if we look at their calibres and locations, we will note the fact that they were all hosted by prestigious universities in North America and Europe, the two most targeted areas that have received the largest CI spreads: the U.S. is home to the biggest number of CIs (110 in total) in the world, while Europe has the most concentrated coverage (173 in total).<sup>7</sup> If the sustainable and effective operation of the CIs is the dependent variable (DV), what is the independent variable (IV) that affects it? This article aims to identify it along with other extraneous variables (EV), and test the causation through multiple comparative case studies of the CIs.

## Data and method

The CI was selected to be the comparative case study based on two major considerations. Firstly, it represents the most watched effort of China's cultural diplomacy and is highly controversial. While its impressive speed of global coverage can be seen as evidence for its early success, it has also received its share of criticisms in the short time-frame of the rapid expansion, which can be found in both prestigious academic publications and influential media outlets. This made it a very illustrative case to show both the opportunities and challenges faced by China's cultural diplomacy and to explore its distinctive features.

The second reason is that despite the growing interest in the CI reflected in recent studies and media reports, only a handful of case studies have been done by academics so far, and they have only focused on CIs in one country, such as the US,<sup>8</sup> Germany,<sup>9</sup> Australia<sup>10</sup> and South

<sup>3</sup>Xuetong Yan, 'From keeping a low profile to striving for achievement', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7(2), (2014), pp. 153–84.

<sup>4</sup>Hang-Sheng Cheng, 'Great Leap Outward?' *FRBSF Weekly Letter*, (5 January 1979), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6458094.pdf> (accessed 8 September 2016).

<sup>5</sup>About the Confucius Institute/Confucius Classroom, *Hanban website*, (2017), [http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node\\_10961.htm](http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node_10961.htm) (accessed 3 May 2018).

<sup>6</sup>Christopher R. Hughes, 'Confucius Institutes and the University: Distinguishing the Political Mission from the Cultural', *Issues & Studies* 50(4), (2014), pp. 45–83.

<sup>7</sup>About the Confucius Institute/Confucius Classroom, *Hanban website*, (2017), [http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node\\_10961.htm](http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node_10961.htm) (accessed 24 May 2018).

<sup>8</sup>Amy Stambach, *Confucius and Crisis in American Universities, Culture, Capital, and Diplomacy in U.S. Public Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Jennifer Hubbert, 'The anthropology of Confucius Institute', *Society of East Asian Anthropology*, (5 May 2014), <http://www.aaanet.org/sections/seaa/2014/05/the-anthropology-of-confucius-institutes/> (accessed 1 September 2017).

<sup>9</sup>Falk Hartig, 'Confucius Institute and the Rise of China', *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 17(1), (2012), pp. 53–76.

<sup>10</sup>Jeffrey Gil, 'Dragon in the room: who's afraid of Confucius Institutes?', *Asia Times*, (21 December 2017), <http://www.atimes.com/dragon-room-whos-afraid-confucius-institutes/> (accessed 20 May 2018).

Africa.<sup>11</sup> No comparative approach has been applied yet to examine this flagship project of China's 'going global' strategy—both its aim to improve China's 'global' image and the means through 'global' coverage make this comparative approach highly relevant and valuable.

Careful thought has been put into making a representative selection of the CIs and the case study was carried out in two phases. Five CIs from four different continents were selected in the first phase by taking cultural spheres in Huntington's terms into consideration: South Korea (SK) in the Confucian cultural sphere of East Asia; UK and France in the Western civilisation of Europe; Mexico in Latin America; and Morocco in the Muslim world of Africa. Nine people were interviewed during the summer of 2013, with seven of them from the Chinese home universities, and two from the host universities. Though the coverage offers a good geographical spectrum, no access to the same spectrum of data sources from each continent was available. Given the special nature of the CI as a partnership between home and host institutions, it would be ideal to interview both directors sent by the home institutions and those hired by the host institutions; similarly, it would gather more balanced views if teachers both seconded from China and those locally hired are interviewed.

Therefore, in the second phase, four different CIs were selected for field visits in 2014: two in SK and two in the UK, while four staff at the CI hosted by the author's university, including both directors from the host and home universities, one seconded teacher and one locally hired administrator, were also interviewed again in a year's time to compare notes. These selections were made with an intension to keep the contrasting angle between a generally East and West cultural perspective, while allowing both intra-country and cross-region comparisons to enhance validity of the research findings. On top of this, secondary data were collected for CIs based in the US, which hosts the biggest number in the world and saw five setbacks so far; observation also took place in the CI at the author's university to contribute to data triangulation.

In sum, the overall data profile of this research composes multiple sources of documents, including and Annual Reports of the CIs interviewed; *CI Annual Development Reports* and the *Confucius Institutes Magazine* published by Hanban; substantial literature review from both English and Chinese sources; observations carried out over a period of ten years from 2008 to 2018 at the author's university; and primary data collected from 27 interviews of five different roles sharing their insights and experiences at nine different CIs. [Appendix 1](#) lists all the codes, dates, venues and corresponding roles of the interviewees.

## Comparing and contrasting the cross-case data

As discussed earlier, both the aim of China's cultural diplomacy to improve its global cultural position and the means through global coverage of projects such as the CI give this endeavour a global nature. However, the world is not one monolith. It is marked by various boundaries: racial, social, territorial, political and cultural. By drawing on the triangulated data collected, the sections below will first examine how the interactions between the CI and its target audiences differ in different cultural spheres, then test the causation between the DV of the CI's effective operation and the IV of its ability to localise the product and process, along with other EVs including ideology, nationalism and media environment of the recipient country, as well as the mediating variable of people-to-people interaction.

### One mission statement, two different priorities

According to the CI's Constitution and By-laws, it is a non-profit public institution that aims to 'develop and facilitate the teaching of the Chinese language overseas and promote educational

<sup>11</sup>Falk Hartig, 'Cultural diplomacy with Chinese characteristics: The case of Confucius Institutes in Australia', *Communication, Politics & Culture* 42(Part 2), (2012), pp. 256–276, <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/bd8e4ha8e4t8z.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2016). ;Falk Hartig, 'The Globalization of Chinese Soft Power: Confucius Institutes in South Africa', *Confucius Institute and the Globalization of China's Soft Power* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2014).

and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other international communities'.<sup>12</sup> There seems to be an unanimous understanding of the CI's two-fold mission among all interviewees. However, a clear difference in terms of priority setting can be observed from the responses gathered from the UK and SK.

In SK, where the geographical vicinity, cultural closeness, economic and business connections with China mean that many people have been to China already, or have plenty opportunities to interact with Chinese people, language teaching was made a clear central task of the CI, as pointed by SKD2:

China is our neighbour, the closest country to us, historically we were heavily influenced by Chinese traditions, Chinese literature and other aspects, so Korean people nowadays are very interested in going to China for various activities, be it trade, educational or cultural exchanges, there are more and more people, both old and young, learning Chinese, we have tens of thousands candidates sitting the HSK tests every year, the largest group in the whole world.

In Hanban Director Xu Lin's own words, 'the launch of this program is in response to the Chinese language craze, especially in neighbouring countries'.<sup>13</sup> This may help explain why the very first CI in the world was established in Seoul, where the host organisation has started to promote the Chinese proficiency test (HSK) in SK since 1993. SK has been the number one source country of international students learning Chinese in China since 2000, with over 20,000 Korean students study in China every year and 120 universities offering Chinese degree courses in SK.<sup>14</sup> All the three directors interviewed are consistent in commenting that CIs in SK have focused a lot on selling HSK exams and offering scholarships to school students to study in China.

This priority of language teaching was echoed by a blunt statement from SKSC1 at teacher level: 'they (Korean students) are very pragmatic, not interested in the cultural aspects, they only care if they can master the language or not, and Chinese is now included as one of the subjects they can choose to sit in their entrance examinations to go to university'. SKD1 even commented that:

There is really not much need for the CI to 'promote' Chinese language and culture here, in fact, there is such a high demand and inner drive to master the language that more and more Koreans are voluntarily learning the language in the hope to use it as a tool to tap into opportunities offered by this next-door neighbour. As for culture, some of the traditional Chinese cultural practices were kept better in South Korea than in China.

Because of this, UKD4 mentioned that many CIs operating in Asia (especially in Japan, SK and Singapore) do not request operating funds from Hanban, but only apply for project funding. This forms a stark contrast to most CIs in other parts of the world that are attracted by Hanban's funding to nurture the language program, such as Mexico and Morocco, as well as the U.S.,<sup>15</sup> and the attraction for learning the language is a lot less in the UK in comparison. When commenting on the fact that the number of UK students choosing to study foreign languages at university level has been in steady decline for the past seven years, Worne,<sup>16</sup> Director of Strategy at the British Council, used 'can't, won't, don't' to sum up the British national view on speaking foreign languages. This was confirmed by responses received from the interviewees: UKLH2 commented that 'Chinese is not yet a language popular enough that would automatically attract students to learn, actually, it still has the reputation of one of the hardest languages to learn'. Therefore, in UKSC5's words, 'trips to China are the "appetiser", culture is the "main course", and language teaching is the "side order"'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes, *Hanban website*, (2017), [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7880.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7880.htm) (accessed 27 July 2017).

<sup>13</sup>Howard French, 'Another Chinese Export is all the Rage: China's Language', *New York Times*, (11 January 2006), p. A2.

<sup>14</sup>The Evolution and Current Status of Chinese Teaching and Research in South Korea', *Education Office of the Chinese Embassy in South Korea website*, (2017), <http://www.chinaedukr.org/publish/portal109/tab5123/info92047.htm> (accessed June 10 2018).

<sup>15</sup>Marshall Sahlins, *Confucius Institute: Academic Malware* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2015).

<sup>16</sup>John Worne, Language learning in the UK: 'can't, won't, don't', *The Telegraph*, (27 January 2015), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/11369703/Language-learning-in-the-UK-cant-wont-dont.html> (accessed 1 April 2016).

Unlike SK, study tours to China are the highlight event for all the other CIs interviewed. They all mentioned the visitors' excitement or even shock to see 'the real' China with their own eyes compared to their imaginative impressions, which serves the very purpose of the CI as enunciated by UKLH3:

When the CI can offer opportunities like this to someone who does not have much expectation, or even some negative expectations of China, to see China with his own eyes and see the difference from media image, Hanban has already achieved its initial purpose. They gain one more person who likes China and wants to speak for China.

UKSC2's remarks explained the 'radiation effect' this can generate: 'then the CI can invite them as guest speakers as the effects are much better than a Chinese speaker. They are not blowing trumpets for China like propaganda, but have a very fair tone'.

The above appears to reveal a pattern of 'one mission statement, two different priorities' delivered by the CIs in different destinations: regional differences are clear and allow for localised priorities: language teaching is the core function of the CIs in the East Asian cultural sphere like SK, where traditional China enjoys a very respectable culture image and modern China offers new opportunities; while in Western countries like the UK and US, where vestiges of Orientalism and the Cold War mentality are amplified by the distances in culture and space, Chinese cultural introduction and enhancing local people's understanding of contemporary China is given more weighting, with trips to China as a particularly effective tool.

While this section shows that the CI's ability to localise its product to adapt and meet different needs of the target audiences should be the IV, it also reveals other EVs involved in this process that resulted in the 'two different priorities'. They will be examined in the sections below.

### ***See China and read China: first-hand knowledge vs. third-hand stories***

The study tours and scholarships for university students to learn China first hand may be an effective remedy in relieving the symptoms of holding misperceptions of China, but it does not address the root cause for such misperceptions, which needs to be understood in where do people get their pre-perceptions from. The example below from the author's direct observation shows how deeply-embedded pre-perceptions can be.

In a talk about *China, the New Land of Opportunities* given to a local British high school, the CI teacher asked if any students in the audience have been to China before, only one raised his hand. So the teacher said she would show them a two-minute video clip first called *China China*,<sup>17</sup> and then asked students to share their impressions of China with some key words after watching it. There is only one-word narrative 'China' in the video, repeating itself numerous times throughout the video with thousands of different snapshots from China, from varied landscapes to a wide variety of wild animals, from diverse food to different ethnic groups, wearing different costumes and following different life styles in rural and urban China, the message is quite strong and clear: This is *all* China, a country of vast diversity. Yet, when the floor was given to students, the first answer (not from the one who has been to China before) of the key word was 'communism'. Even the British teacher at present was surprised: where did he get that from? There is not even a glimpse of red flag during the video, nor any images of Chinese leaders or government.

So where do people get pre-perceptions from? As pointed out by Morley and Robins, 'we are all largely dependent on the media for our images of non-local people, places, and events, and the further the "event" from our own direct experiences, the more we depend on media images for the totality of our knowledge'.<sup>18</sup> Manzenreiter simply attributes the responsibility for people's

<sup>17</sup>China China, published on Youtube on November, 18, 2009, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_etl\\_qkelX0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_etl_qkelX0) (accessed 5 May 2016).

<sup>18</sup>David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity, Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 133.

misperception to the mainstream media that 'rather than preparing the space for a dialectic exploration of alternative modes and views, the media contribute to the reinforcing of national stereotypes'.<sup>19</sup> This can be seen from the common examples given in the interviews that even when people visit China, they tend to look for the more 'backward' side as the 'real' China that fits the stereotypes, despite that everything they see with their own eyes is already the real China. For example, UKD1 said the highlight of the trip to China was 'nights out on a bicycle to local areas'; a similar example was given by Hubbert in her recounts of the 'Chinese Bridge Summer Camp' that 'the night market with snacking on unidentified creatures roasted on a stick' was what they perceived to be a 'form of Chinese authenticity'.<sup>20</sup> Another British student commented that he found 'Beijing not as tense politically as imagined: I am not being watched, I can go to places freely and talk to people on the street freely'. These accounts and the ossified image of a communist China planted in that student's mind show the impact produced by Western media which 'arrogates to themselves the right to represent all non-Western Others, and thus to provide "us" with the definitions by which "we" distinguish ourselves from "them"'.<sup>21</sup>

Willnat and Metzgar's<sup>22</sup> research on *American Perceptions of China and the Chinese: Do the Media Matter?* is based on the content analysis of 886 news stories about China published in the *New York Times* throughout 2010 and a national online survey conducted in early 2011. The findings show significant associations between respondents' media use and their views of China's economic, political and military power. Their findings generally support the assumption that the American public is influenced primarily by media agenda setting and framing processes, and that 'respondents with more news exposure hold more negative perceptions of Chinese foreign and economic policies'. Another similar research done by a Chinese scholar Zhang<sup>23</sup> undertook a thorough analysis of the China-related reports in American mainstream media outlets including the NYT, Washington Post, Los Angeles Time and CNN, also found that the US press seldom constructed a favourable image of China, they tend to adopt a negative angle even in reporting developments achieved in China, such as the Olympic successes or breakthroughs China made in exploring outer space, the reporting is persistently constructed in an anti-communist frames and Cold War mentality.

This is supported by the author's interview findings, for example, UKSC2 commented that: 'for foreigners who have never been to China, their impression of the country is the one conveyed by the media, which is often tarnished in many countries'. As UKD1 put it:

Some people based their whole understanding of China on the only book they've read—Wild Swans; as for contemporary China, again, they based their knowledge on the one media report they've read or watched—about China's environmental problems.

UKLH1 elaborated this with an example:

Most people in the local community have a completely outdated knowledge and understanding about China, their image of China is a country where farmers work in the field everywhere with no modern buildings and modern lifestyle, very poor and backward. What is even worse is those who have never been to China but thought they knew a lot about China. Most of their perceptions of China are based on media reports, such as

<sup>19</sup>Wolfram Manzenreiter, 'The Beijing Games in the Western Imagination of China: The Weak Power of Soft Power', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 34(1), (2010), pp. 29–48.

<sup>20</sup>Jennifer Hubbert, 'The anthropology of Confucius Institute', *Society of East Asian Anthropology*, (5 May 5 2014), <http://seaa.americananthro.org/2014/05/the-anthropology-of-confucius-institutes/> (accessed 1 September 2017).

<sup>21</sup>David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity, Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 134.

<sup>22</sup>Lars Willnat and Emily Metzgar, 'American Perceptions of China and the Chinese: Do the media matter?' Paper presented at the 65th Annual Meeting of the World Association for Public Opinion Research, Hong Kong, (June 2012), <https://wapor2012.hkpop.hk/doc/papers/ConcurrentSessions/IB/IB-3.pdf> (accessed 1 October 2015).

<sup>23</sup>Jian Zhang, Meiguo zhuliu meiti shehua baodao fenxi [China-related report analysis in American main stream media], *Guoji GuanCha [International Review]* 1, (2007), <http://www.rcgpoc.shisu.edu.cn/c1/d4/c3504a49620/page.htm> (accessed 30 May 2015).



about China's one child policy and child trafficking, Tibet riots, etc, and use this as their judgement of the whole country.

According to Kunczik,<sup>24</sup> mass media and cultural exchange programs are the two strongest image shapers that influence public perceptions of a country in the modern world today. In terms of China, they work well hand-in-hand in most of the Asian countries, while in Western countries such as the UK and US, where fewer people benefit from direct experience in visiting China, both the geographical and cultural distances can expand the gap between first-hand knowledge and third-hand stories. Even when presented with an 'air of authority' such as mainstream media, and even when the reporter is reporting live or write the report in-situ, the audience can only see or read what is edited (intentionally or unintentionally) by the reporter, thus can be best classed as second-hand information, while editorials written by commentators with second-hand information can only be taken as 'stories' that may not enable the audience to get to know the whole truth. This is why UKD3 believed that 'China is a much misunderstood country', and the CI's role is to 'show them a China that is not shown in local media', and 'to provide a window into China, for those who would otherwise live with their prejudices and ignorance with China'. This was elaborated by UKLH3 who works in a different CI:

In advanced class, all our students have been to China, they are able to understand China in the Chinese way and more willing to accept the difference, and they would express the difference in a more respectable way. If people do not have the knowledge, they tend to take the opposite stand. ....Therefore, the scholarship we offer is a great thing, for foreigners to study and stay in China for a period of time. No matter how much we try to teach, or tell them about China here, it will never match the first-hand experience. After having a positive experience of China, the students would come back to talk up China, no need for us to make a painstaking effort. It is much more convincing than what we want to feed their mind.

However, research about the CI-related reports in the *New York Times*<sup>25</sup> found that 35.3% reports were negative, 31.4% were neutral and 27.5% were positive, which is on the whole consistent with Li & Dai's<sup>26</sup> research about the overall American media environment for the CI, sampling 33 media including newspapers, journals, TV, radio and websites, and concluded that 50% were negative reports, 15% were neutral and 35% were positive. There are many examples of selective news reports and selective interviews, even when there are people-in-the-know available with important first-hand experience of the CI, they are not fully engaged with as the media report can be an attempt to exploit pre-established assumptions.

In comparison, there were also similar researches done in SK both concerning China-related media coverage and CI-related specifically. One study was carried out in 2005 by Yoo,<sup>27</sup> who analysed 632 randomly selected articles from one of the major Korean newspapers, *Joong Ang Ilbo*, from January 2000 to November 2004, just before the first CI was set up. The study found that overall attitude of the newspaper towards China were neutral (54.7%), but 33.3% remained unfavourable. Another study done by Xu<sup>28</sup> focused on a case study of *Chosun Ilbo* from 2007 to 2008 and found that of the China-related reports, 59.4% were neutral and 20.5% were favourable, in other words, 79.9% of the reports were not negative, showing an overall friendly media environment towards China. In January 2015, a seven-episode documentary *Super China* was

<sup>24</sup>Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (Cambridge MA: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup>Yi Liu, 'Guojia wenhua shiyu xia de shehua yunlun yanjiu, yi Niuyue Shibao dui Kongzi Xueyuan baodao de neirong weilì' [Research on China-related media from the perspective of national cultural security—a case study of Confucius Institute Reports in New York Times], *Xueshu Jiaoliu [Academic Exchange]* 4, (2014), pp. 202–05.

<sup>26</sup>Kaisheng Li and Zhangzheng Dai, 'Evaluation of Confucius Institute's Media Environment in the US', *World Economy and Politics* 7, (2011), pp. 76–93.

<sup>27</sup>Yoo-hee Yoo, 'China News in Korean Media', *National Taiwan University Institutional Repository*, (27 November 2007), <http://ntur.lib.ntu.edu.tw/handle/246246/58325> (accessed 13 November 2015).

<sup>28</sup>Yulan Xu, 'Hanguo meiti zhong de Zhongguo guojia xingxiang, yi Chaoxian Ribao weilì' [China's national image in Korean media, a case study of Chosun Ilbo], *Renmin Wang [People's Daily online]*, (23 November 2010), <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/22114/206896/207970/13294052.html> (accessed 18 October 2015).

aired by KBS TV in SK, which completely shook China: even the Chinese media could not believe this was made by a 'foreign media': instead of showing the dark side of China ridden with environmental and human rights issues, it projected the 'superness' of China in a very positive light, so positive that many Chinese audiences commented that it had done a better job than China's own central television CCTV.

In the specific CI-related media research, Jin sampled five mainstream newspapers and three TV channels, namely KBS, MBC and SBS,<sup>29</sup> and collected their reports of the CIs from November 2004 to November 2012. Jin's research found that:

Owing to the far-reaching influence of Confucian thoughts in South Korea, and the homogeneous nature of Confucian culture in Korean society, the fact that the CI was identified as a tool of enhancing Chinese soft power did not lead to more criticisms or oppositions of it; instead, they are more focused on the revelations this may have for South Korea.

It is thus not surprising that the 2015 Pew reports has found that 'overall, despite historical and territorial frictions, Asia-Pacific publics tend to view their regional neighbours in a positive light', and 'Asia-Pacific views of China are far more positive than the perception held by Americans'.<sup>30</sup> This shows different media environments in different destinations function as one of the EVs that justify the different foci at different CIs: more on language teaching in East Asia as the historical connection and cultural influence, geographical vicinity and people exchange help achieve the aim of enhancing mutual understandings; while in Western countries such as the UK and US, a better understanding of China and Chinese culture is considered as important as, if not more than mastering its language, and offering first-hand knowledge is used as an effective tool to combat third hand media bias. This helps explain the uneven distribution of CIs all over the world: 110 in the US (No. 1 in the world) and 29 in the UK (No. 1 in Europe), while 649 out of the 1113 Confucius Classrooms (over 58%) in the whole world are located in these two countries alone.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, in the whole of Asia (118 CIs and 101 Confucius classrooms in total) where the demand for Chinese language learning is arguably stronger, and the whole of Africa (54 CIs and 30 Confucius Classrooms in total) where the demand for Hanban funding in expanding Chinese provision is arguably stronger, their stronger desire and interest only made them less prioritised target destinations of the CI, because the Chinese government wants to use the CI to 'correct misunderstandings of China',<sup>32</sup> which are more prevalent in those areas dominated by Western media.

This section discusses the media's role as an EV in shaping or even solidifying people's perceptions, thus affecting the media environment where the CI operates in, but what underpins the media framing? The next section will probe it further to trace the root cause by revealing another EV.

### ***Culture and ideology, the two entangled 'Otherness'***

As discussed above, the media influence means communism still appears to be the lens that China is envisioned today. Compared with the line of 'cultural superiority and inferiority' carved by Orientalism, more antagonist camps of 'friends or enemies' were created by communism, which was thought to be the other end of binary opposition to freedom and democracy, thus resulted in China being regarded as the 'ideological other' based on the perpetuated polarisation mind-set.

<sup>29</sup>Xianggui Jin, 'Hanguo meiti Guanyu Kongzi Xueyuan de baodao yu pinglun' [Media reports and commentaries concerning the Confucius Institutes in South Korea], In Zhang Lihua, ed.; Zhongguo Wenhua yu Waijiao, [*Chinese Culture and Diplomacy*] (Beijing: zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2013).

<sup>30</sup>Pew Research Centre, 'How Asia-Pacific Publics See Each Other and Their National Leaders' (2015), <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/09/02/how-asia-pacific-publics-see-each-other-and-their-national-leaders/> (accessed 3 May 2016).

<sup>31</sup>About the Confucius Institute/Confucius Classroom, *Hanban website*, (2017), [http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciousinstitutes/node\\_10961.htm](http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm) (accessed 24 May 2018).

<sup>32</sup>Joe Tin-yau Lo and Suyan Pan, 'Confucius Institutes and China's soft power: practices and paradoxes', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 46(4), (2016), pp. 512–32.

China's cultural diplomacy tries to serve the purpose of reshaping China's image away from being the 'cultural other' and 'ideological other', but the CI is meant to only focus on the cultural dimension as specified in its mission statement. However, the mixed nature of culture and ideology in that the latter is 'part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defence of patterns of belief and value'<sup>33</sup> has rendered the two 'Otherness' of China a complex whole over time, making its separation a one-sided wishful thinking. For example, UKD4 stated that 'our understanding of the name Confucius is purely cultural-related, but in the West, it was interpreted as ideological infiltration, and that means brainwash'. UKD2 used himself as an example to retort such assumption:

I do not think the CI is trying to sell political ideology, I myself am not even a Communist party member. It is not listed as a criterion to select the CI directors or teachers. What we want to do is cultural promotion, and in today's information era, it is impossible to brainwash people, local people have full access to a wealth of information.

Despite the CI's repeated efforts to separate its cultural promotional role from anything to do with ideological infiltration, it could not stop such criticisms and worries, which was exacerbated by some Chinese government rhetoric, such as the 2011 speech given by Wang Gengnian, Director of China Radio International: 'we should quietly plant the seeds of our ideology in foreign countries, we must make good use of our traditional culture to package our socialist ideology.'<sup>34</sup> Such worries have led to a number of investigations into the CIs and the resulted close-downs in the US,<sup>35</sup> where dual accusations were made against the CI for both 'political censorship' when the CI teachers avoided discussing contentious topics, and 'ideological infiltration' when those issues were discussed.

Hubbert's research also found that because China is routinely imagined as politically repressive, the purposefully apolitical nature of CI's pedagogical materials and classroom practices sometimes works counterproductively, as this 'political absence' is interpreted as 'authoritarian presence', thus 'reinforcing perceptions of a repressive Chinese government apparatus'.<sup>36</sup> All of her interviewees recognised that Hanban's 'attempts to depoliticise the classroom had this paradoxical effect', which was supported by Lueck et al.'s research finding that despite the CI's self-proclaimed role focusing only on Chinese language and culture, the narrative of the CI reports in the *New York Times* defined it as 'a tool that was being used by the Chinese government to favourably influence American perceptions of China's domestic policies and international actions. Contributions of the CI to Americans' knowledge of China's language and culture went largely unreported'.<sup>37</sup>

The common speculations of the CI's goal as ideological infiltration rather than just cultural promotion suggests that ideology is an important EV that could work hand in hand with the media and have fatal effects on the DV of CI's sustainable development. If this variable tends to be more related with CIs operating in a less friendly media environment, the next section will look at another EV that affects CIs operating in a more favourable media environment: nationalism.

### **Soft cultural boundary and hard nationalism boundary**

According to Duara, 'every cultural practice is a potential boundary marking a community. These boundaries may be either soft or hard'.<sup>38</sup> Groups with soft boundaries between them do not view

<sup>33</sup>Lloyd Fallers, 'Ideology and Culture in Uganda Nationalism', *American Anthropologist* 3(4), (1961), p. 677.

<sup>34</sup>Marshall Sahlins, *Confucius Institute: Academic Malware*, (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2015), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup>Elizabeth Redden, 'More Scrutiny for Confucius Institutes; One to Close', *Inside Higher ED*, (6 February 2018), <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/02/06/more-scrutiny-confucius-institutes-one-close> (accessed 5 May 2018).

<sup>36</sup>Jennifer Hubbert, 'The anthropology of Confucius Institute', *Society of East Asian Anthropology*, (5 May 2014), <http://www.aaanet.org/sections/seaa/2014/05/the-anthropology-of-confucius-institutes/> (accessed 1 September 2017).

<sup>37</sup>Therese Lueck, Val Pippas and Yang Lin, 'China's Soft Power: A *New York Times* Introduction of the Confucius Institute', *Howard Journal of Communications* 25(3), (2014). pp. 324–49.

<sup>38</sup>Prasenjit Duara, 'De-constructing the Chinese Nation', in Unger Jonathan, ed. *Chinese Nationalism* (New York: An East Gate Book, 1996), p. 49.

mutual boundary breaches as a threat, while communities with hard boundaries tend to privilege their differences, and develop an intolerance and suspicion towards other cultures. They mark members off from non-members in a similar way to the identity creation ability of nationalism, which 'describes the creation of an ideology that serves to celebrate and emphasise the nation as the preeminent collective identity of a people',<sup>39</sup> thus divides the world into 'us' and 'them'<sup>40</sup>. What is under-discussed is the relationship between nationalism and cultural boundaries.

In contrast to the territorial and national boundaries, the most important attribute of cultural boundary is that it is always in flux: soft boundaries can harden, and hard boundaries can soften as well. It is dynamic in nature as a relative concept that must have a reference object. In the frame of reference for this research, China's cultural boundaries with SK and the UK are at different marks in the spectrum as evidenced by the cross-case data presented in the above sections: the level of cultural understanding, historical connections, people exchange, and media influence as well as their relative positions in the global cultural terrain all contribute to the differences. Duara used the example of changing cultural boundaries between the Manchu and Han in Chinese history in his book, while the author believes this narrative has contemporary and global relevance when mutual transformations can find perfect demonstrations in looking at China's cultural boundaries with SK and the UK respectively.

The cultural boundary between China and the UK is arguably a harder one of the two as Europe is where Orientalism was bred and the UK was in a different ideological camp from China during the Cold War era, so China has been held as both a 'cultural other' and 'ideological other' in the past. The recent economic rise of China in the globalised era, along with the trans-border exchanges and people mobility has helped generate and stimulate an interest in understanding China, and common national interests in working together has created an agent in softening the traditional boundaries. For example, the news headline of 'Cameron hails UK as 'best partner in west' as he signs £40bn China deal'<sup>41</sup> during Xi Jinping's visit in 2015 to kick off the 'golden era' indicates a softening of ideological stance by economic interests, and 2015 also launched the first UK-China Year of Cultural Exchange. Then in January 2018, against the backdrop of Brexit, Theresa May visited China with the largest business delegation ever and signed an education deal that will 'enable more children and more young people than ever to share their ideas about our two great nations'.<sup>42</sup>

Oommen<sup>43</sup> applied the contradictory trends of 'isms' to describe the changes in today's world:

It is a world of 'endisms' (end of history, ideology, nation, geography), 'postisms' (postindustrial, postcapitalist, postmodern) and 'beyondisms' (beyond the nation-state, beyond the Cold War). Endisms represent the disappearance of boundaries, postisms signify the emergence of new boundaries and beyondisms allude to the elongation of boundaries.

He then concluded that the construction and deconstruction of different types of boundaries, including cultural boundaries, make up the very story of human civilisation and of contemporary social transformations. We can see the new knowledge of 'not the end of history' and 'beyond the Cold War' and the people flows across established boundaries facilitated by cultural diplomacy can help move the relatively hard cultural boundary between China and the UK towards the softer side.

Meanwhile, the role nationalism plays could potentially move the relatively soft cultural boundary between China and SK towards the harder side as well. Its ability to create a sense of national

<sup>39</sup>Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural nationalism in colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>40</sup>Umut Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, A Critical Engagement* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

<sup>41</sup>Phillip Inman, 'Cameron hails UK as "best partner in west" as he signs £40bn China deal', *The Guardian*, (21 October 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/oct/21/china-and-britain-40bn-deals-jobs-best-partner-west> (accessed 12 November 2015).

<sup>42</sup>Theresa May unveils education deal at start of China visit', BBC News, (30 January 2018), [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-42865133](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-42865133) (accessed 1 February 2018).

<sup>43</sup>T. K. Oommen, 'Contested Boundaries and Emerging Pluralism', *International Sociology* 10, (1995), pp. 251–68.

identity is constructed against 'the other', thus entails cultural resistance and sensitivity to cultural invasions. Robinson has commented on cultural nationalism in colonial Korea that:

As the idea of nationalism rose among Korean intellectual at the turn of the century, the Confucian tradition came under attack as an obstacle to the creation of a strong national identity. Subservience to foreign ideas and cultural norms inhibited the development of a unique, self-conscious Korean identity. Nationalist, therefore, work to exhume the Korean past as a repository of nationalist symbols smothering under a mantle of excessive veneration for Chinese culture.<sup>44</sup>

This indicates a delicate balance to strike for the CI as explained by SKD4:

There are aspects of *Sadaejui*,<sup>45</sup> or admiration and worship of China from history; there are also components of contempt. Because Korea had been a tributary state to China for thousands of years in history, that some of the Confucian traditions or rituals that we carry out here in South Korea was already extinct in China, for example, our wedding and funeral ceremonies are more particular about rituals; and we never say 'Traditional Chinese Medicine' here, it is known as 'Traditional Korean Medicine'.... Actually we (the CI) are being very careful in using the word 'introducing' Chinese culture instead of 'promoting' it, we always have to clarify that we are only providing opportunities, not serving the Chinese interests.

Jin's research of CI-related media reports in SK has found that 'when the general public reads reports revealing the huge national interests of China behind the CIs, such reports tend to stimulate the rise of nationalism'.<sup>46</sup> The carefulness in avoiding the wording of 'promoting Chinese culture' was also shared by SKD1 from China, saying that 'the Koreans are very sensitive to "cultural invasions" from China, they would accuse you of doing this if you do too much'. Meanwhile, a number of scholars<sup>47</sup> have observed the increasingly assertive Chinese nationalism that emerged out of the domestic discourse from the 1990s onwards, and commented on the Sino-centric tendency towards the distinctness of Chinese identity. This has given its Asian neighbours mixed feelings. On the one hand, these countries are familiar with Confucianism and Confucian values, which carry universal significance in this region. On the other hand, China's cultural diplomacy needs to tread a fine line between not appearing as too imposing when promoting the traditional aspects of its culture, and not too aggressive when showcasing the recent rise of China. For example, SKLH mentioned the distaste of local people when seeing Chinese national flags dotting around their city centre squares for CI's China Day events, giving them a feeling of 'Chinese takeover'. Another example given by SKD4 was the difficulty in selling traditional Chinese dance performances: 'they are not exotic enough for the Korean audience, we're very familiar with these art forms, and we also have *our* own folk dances'. If Orientalism may be blamed for the lack of popularity of such performances in Western countries such as the UK and US; in East Asia, it was regarded as crossing the boundary that they wish to maintain as their own. It is fair to argue that in countries of the same Confucian cultural sphere, the cultural boundary is more carved by cultural nationalism, which 'aims to regenerate the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people's cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened'.<sup>48</sup> While

<sup>44</sup>Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural nationalism in colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), p. 161.

<sup>45</sup>*Sadaejui* (lit. "serving-the-Great-ism," Hangul: 사대주의, Chinese: 事大主义) is a Korean term which evolved in the mid-20th century from a more widely used historical concept. According to Wikipedia, *Sadae* literally means 'dealing with the great' or 'serving the great' and interpreted as 'loving and admiring the great and powerful'; *Juui* means 'ideology' and it is conventionally translated as 'ism'. The Chinese term is sometimes translated as Flunkeyism in English, I think it is more accurate to keep the Korean expression here.

<sup>46</sup>Xianggui Jin, 'Hanguo meiti guanyu Kongzi Xueyuan de baodao yu pinlun' [Media reports and commentaries concerning the Confucius Institutes in South Korea], Zhang Lihua, ed., *Zhongguo Wenhua yu Waijiao* [Chinese Culture and Diplomacy] (Beijing: zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2013), p. 239.

<sup>47</sup>Andreas Forsby, 'An End to Harmony? The Rise of a Sino-Centric China', *Political Perspectives* 5(3), (2011), pp. 5–26; Mingjiang Li, 'Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity and Prospect' in: *RSIS working paper, No. 165*, (2008); S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University; Xuotong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>48</sup>Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural nationalism in contemporary Japan: A sociological enquiry*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1.

cultural nationalism provides the driving force for China to pursue its dream of national rejuvenation, it also offers defence in the recipient countries in protecting their own national identities.

In summary, a soft cultural boundary may coexist with a hard nationalism boundary and vice versa, which means that the CI has to navigate very carefully with these EVs in consideration, drawing on the different attractions of its offerings. This explains why despite the centralised input from Hanban and the globalised outreach of the CI, no standard 'recipe' can be found for all the nine CIs interviewed, and stark differences can be observed in their day-to-day activities. Localisation is essential here, as the same message sent would be received and perceived differently in the process of interacting with different ideologies, cultural spheres, historical contexts and media environment of the destinations. In a way, cultural boundaries reconfigure themselves and become more dynamic in the process of cultural diplomacy, during which the 'end products' have to be tailored to each destination rather than having one unified model as a fit for all.

### ***People-to-people interaction as a moderating variable***

Aside from all the above variables, there is a very crucial moderator in this process as described by Ed Murrow: 'the real crucial link in the international exchange is the last three feet, which is bridged by personal contact, one person talking to another'.<sup>49</sup> In the case of China, the phenomenal increase of people-to-people contact is supported by equally unprecedented growth in the two-way traffic: hugely improved international mobility of Chinese citizens, evidenced in the year-on-year sharp increase of Chinese students, tourists and entrepreneurs venturing abroad; reciprocated by substantial increase of the number of 'foreigners' coming to China, attracted by its generous offer of scholarships, its booming economy and business opportunities, as well as proliferating international forums and conferences. It is only reasonable to argue that China is now in a better position than ever before to close the cultural encounter to the 'last three feet'.

What the CI offers can considerably contribute in this aspect: by bringing teachers from China to the host institutions, facilitating student exchange programs between the two partner institutions, organising study tours, and providing scholarships and chances to study in China. All these help correct some of the mystified or imagined 'knowledge' about China, like the example given by UKLH1: 'one primary school pupil said to her parents that the teacher told them "Chinese people eat dogs". Kids at that age never question what the teacher says, but now they have got a Chinese teacher to double check'. She said quiz is used as an effective means of knowledge transfer at schools: 'the "true or false" statement would help to some extent dispel the common misconceptions by explaining the correct answers'. If the discourse in a classroom implicitly either mainstreamises or marginalises certain ideas or values, by being there and telling its own stories, and influencing students with people-to-people contacts, the CI would be able to create a ripple effect elaborated by Xu Lin:

The CI sends over 10,000 tutors and volunteers a year abroad, each of them would teach a minimum of 200 students, and there are another 200 families behind these students. Through them, foreigners would see the amazing changes taking place in China, and the good qualities of Chinese people.<sup>50</sup>

On its tenth anniversary, the CI received a congratulatory letter from Xi Jinping, who has commended its contribution to creating 'people-to-people, heart-to-heart communication'.<sup>51</sup> In a way, everyone involved in cross-cultural communications can be considered informal ambassadors in cultural diplomacy, as people-to-people interactions can help combat the unbalanced media

<sup>49</sup>George Clack, (ed), *Edward R. Murrow: Journalism at Its Best* (Washington DC: Department of State, 2006), <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/media/pdf/books/murrow.pdf> (accessed 12 May 2015).

<sup>50</sup>Yi Wang, *Wenhua de kunjing zaiyu buzhi bujue, dujia duihua guojia hanban zhuren, Kongzi Xueyuan zong ganshi Xu Lin*, [An exclusive interview with Xu Lin, Director of Hanban, 2014], *Jiefang Ribao*, [Jiefang Daily], (19 September 2014), [http://newspaper.jfdaily.com/jfrb/html/2014-09/19/content\\_17605.htm](http://newspaper.jfdaily.com/jfrb/html/2014-09/19/content_17605.htm) (accessed 3 October 2014).

<sup>51</sup>Jinping Xi, 'A Letter to Congratulate the Confucius Institute on its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the First Global Confucius Institute Day', (25 September 2014), *Confucius Institutes Magazine*, Special Issue, 35, (2014), pp. 12–13, <http://www.confucius-institute-magazine.com/revistas/english35/> (accessed 10 January 2015).

influence and enhance mutual understanding, thus constitute a moderating variable that can contribute to the CI's effective operation.

### Prominent features of China's cultural diplomacy

Based on the multiple comparative case studies, three statements are summarised as the prominent features of China's cultural diplomacy. A comparative perspective plays a critical role in this process, the words of 'Western' and 'Eastern' countries are used below as 'tools to think with',<sup>52</sup> and historical, political and cultural constructs rather than a geographical one.

- (1) China's cultural diplomacy faces different challenges in different cultural spheres.
  - In Western countries with relatively hard cultural boundaries, China's cultural diplomacy was staged with Orientalism in the background, and anti-communism in the foreground, giving it a dual aim of correcting China's image as being the 'cultural other' and the 'ideological other';
  - In Eastern countries with relatively soft cultural boundaries, the softness can be hardened by the double-edged nature of nationalism, which provides the driving force for China to launch its campaign of cultural diplomacy domestically, and the defending force for the recipient countries to safeguard their national cultural identities.
- (2) The challenges faced by its flagship project of the CI show that the separation of the dual mission is hard due to the entangled nature of culture and ideology and the state-led approach to implementing cultural diplomacy, whose sponsorship, censorship and presence on the foreground has a paradoxical effect of taking on an ideological overtone when it wishes to separate it from the cultural dimension.
- (3) The globalised outreach of the CI is sustained by a centralised input with localised practice in setting different priorities to adapt to different target audiences: focusing on Chinese language teaching in destinations with relatively soft cultural boundaries, and understanding China in destinations with relatively hard cultural boundaries.

In sum, China's cultural diplomacy was launched while carrying the shadows of being the 'cultural other' and 'ideological other', when it is delivered in a trademark state-run method, coupled with its long-established party-state and propaganda system and a political ideology vastly different to the dominant Western model, it would only make the classic suffix of 'Chinese characteristics' indispensable for an accurate understanding.

Although these features are drawn from the comparative case study of the CIs, they also apply to other forms and fronts of cultural diplomacy, such as internationalisation of the Chinese media and artistic exchanges to name a few. Different fronts may face different challenges, but it is the same contested terrain that China's cultural diplomacy is launched into, and by similar state-led approach that features concentrated state power: at the word of government command, national level resources are allocated in a campaigning style to create a sensational effect, and it is the number that is used as measurement to show the implementer's political achievements. Barr has commented on 'the extent to which it attempts to overtly quantify its culture power'<sup>53</sup> as a feature of China's approach to cultural diplomacy.

In the case of the CI, the goal of letting Chinese culture 'go global' is set by the central government with abundant financial input channelled down to Hanban as the implementer at the forefront, who once translated the goal into a target of establishing 1,000 CIs by 2020 to overtake the

<sup>52</sup>Stuart Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', In Bram Gieben and Stuart Hall, ed., *The Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies: An Introduction, Book 1* (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd and The Open University, 1992), pp. 185–225.

<sup>53</sup>Michael Barr, 'Chinese cultural diplomacy: old wine in new bottles?' In Kerr, ed., *China's Many Dreams: Comparative Perspectives on China's Search for National Rejuvenation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 187.

Alliance Française. What Paris has managed to realize in 130 years will be achieved by Beijing in less than two decades. This is reminiscent of those slogans in the Great Leap Forward during Mao's time when 'great' was measured by a blind pursuit of speed and scale with little attention paid to actual effects. The number and speed driven mentality risks renders the CI into a kind of vanity project. During the interviews, Chinese directors both in SK and the UK have mentioned it as a 'box to tick': the Chinese university wants the CI as a proof of 'internationalisation' and university prestige. As UKD2 disclosed, 'the home institution only cares about this result to show their achievement and get the ¥200,000 matching fund, but does not care much about the process and quality of the end product'. There are also cases of setting up a CI to simply please the Ministry of Education as disclosed by UKD4: 'in a way, we were entrusted with such a task by the Ministry and are obliged to carry it out as a way of supporting the Ministry's work'.

The number-driven mentality is also evident in the evaluation criteria: both the *Methods of Evaluating a Model CI in Europe* and *CI of the Year* set a series of numerical thresholds: How many students were enrolled? How many students sat the HSK test? How many people participated in the China Day/CI event? These quantifiable measures of outputs tell us little about the impact: Does the student enrolled in a taster session continue to study Chinese? Does the number of candidates doing HSK show better understanding of China? Does participating in a China Day mean any internalised knowledge? Obviously, the answers cannot be found in those specious numbers, but as told by UKLH2 during the interview, 'I think Hanban is still number-driven, they just want to know how many activities have been carried out in how many schools'. UKD2 also expressed his concern that the CI tends to go a bit 'too far, too fast', because 'this suits the taste of the Chinese decision makers: they want to see things happen quickly'. When there were comments about CIs being exported faster than China's high-speed trains, Liu Yandong, Vice-Premier and Chairperson of the Council of the CI Headquarters, simply adopted the new nickname of 'soul high-speed train' in her speech commemorating the CI's tenth anniversary. This analogy was actually used by Shambaugh<sup>54</sup> in criticising China's unsophisticated approach to cultural diplomacy as constructing high-speed rail—by investing money and expecting to see development. After all, the greatness of a cultural leap outward needs to be measured not by how big the stride is or how extensive the footprints are, but by how deep the footprints are and how long-lasting the impact is.

## Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy is not a one-way dissemination but a two-way interaction between two sets of identities: the sender's view of China and the audiences' perception of China. The multiple CI case studies show contrasting pictures between different cultural spheres: In East Asia where shared cultural roots underpin the relatively soft cultural boundaries, the national identities are shored up through cultural nationalism; whereas in Western countries with relatively hard cultural boundaries to China, the disputes that the CIs have caused serve as a reminder that language teaching and cultural activities can be ideologically charged. Soft or hard, cultural diplomacy does not necessarily cross cultural boundaries intact, but has the potential to soften hard boundaries.

This research has found that there are a number of variables at work in this process, and each variable also contains internal dynamics and there are intertwining interactions going on between these variables, and thus there is simply no way to delineate and reflect this complexity with one static diagram. However, the diagram below represents an attempt to chart them all out in action.

The DV of the CI's effective operation is mainly determined by the IV of its ability to localise its product and process to suit different target audiences, meanwhile, a number of EVs also play important roles, including ideology, nationalism and the media environment in the destinations. In addition, since we now live in an age where human movements across national borders are

<sup>54</sup>David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global, the Partial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).



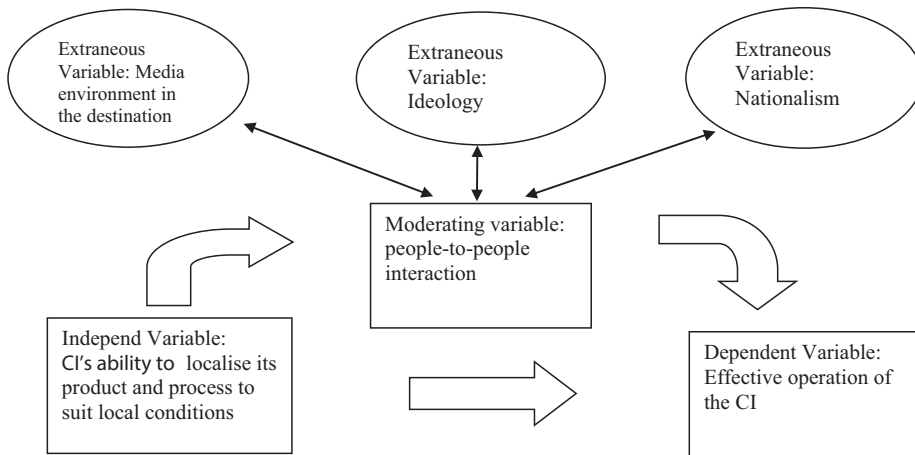


Figure 1. Chart of variables.

happening on an unprecedented scale, people-to-people interactions become an important mediator that enables cultural diplomacy to play a more subtle role in facilitating mutual understanding. All the variables and the complexity of their inter-relations contribute to the Chinese characteristics of its cultural leap outward.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes on contributor

*Xin Liu* is currently a Senior Lecturer and Chinese Course Leader at the School of Language and Global Studies, University of Central Lancashire, UK. She received her PhD in China's Cultural Diplomacy and MBA in Change Management in the same university. Her research interest lies in the multidisciplinary area covering public diplomacy, cultural studies, international relations, media and communications.

## Appendix 1. Interviewee information grid

Code	Role of the interviewee	Nationality	Date of interview	Venue of interview	Language of interview
UKD1	CI Director from the British host university	GB	06/06/13 03/07/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKD2	CI Director in the UK from the Chinese home university	CN	06/06/13 27/06/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKD3	CI Director from the British host university	GB	09/07/14	Host university in the UK	English
UKD4	CI Director in the UK from the Chinese home university	CN	14/07/14	Home university in Beijing	Chinese
SKD1	CI Director in SK from the Chinese home university	CN	16/07/13	Home university in Shandong	Chinese
SKD2	CI Director from the SK host institution	SK	22/07/14	Host university in SK	Chinese
SKD3	Retired CI Director from the SK host institution	SK	22/07/14	Host university in SK	Chinese
SKD4	CI Director from the SK host university	SK	23/07/14	Host university in SK	Chinese
FRD	CI Director in France from the Chinese home university	CN	29/07/13	Home university in Beijing	Chinese
MOD	CI Director in Morocco from the Chinese home university	CN	29/07/13	Home university in Beijing	Chinese
MXD	CI Director in Mexico from the Chinese home university	CN	29/07/13	Home university in Beijing	Chinese
UKSC1	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	07/06/13	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKSC2	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	07/06/13	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKSC3	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	04/07/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKSC4	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	23/06/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKSC5	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	26/06/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
SKSC1	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	22/07/14	Host university in the SK	Chinese
SKSC2	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	23/07/14	Host university in the SK	Chinese
SKSC3	CI secondee from the Chinese home university	CN	23/07/14	Host university in SK	Chinese
UKLH1	CI administrator locally hired by the host university	GB	10/06/13 26/06/14	Host university in the UK	English
UKLH2	CI administrator locally hired by the host university	GB	03/07/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKLH3	CI teacher locally hired by the host university	GB	23/06/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
UKLH4	CI teacher locally hired by the host university	CN	27/06/14	Host university in the UK	Chinese
SKLH	CI teacher locally hired by the host university	SK	22/07/14	Host university in SK	Chinese