

China's Educational Soft Power through Confucius Institutes: A Case Study of South Africa

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Abstract

In recent years, China has been expanding its soft power in the international arena. Confucius Institutes (CI) are China's main agents in its augmentation of soft power overseas. Known for their role as China's cultural diplomats, CI's capacity as China's educational agent of soft power is often overlooked. By implementing document analysis, this article positions CI as China's emissary of educational soft power. It utilizes education as a soft power tool framework with an emphasis on education as a carrier of genuine values, a country's resources, and as a tool for certain policy goals. The case study of South Africa will be discussed in this article as it is one of China's biggest partners in Africa and home of the largest number of CIs on the continent.

Keywords: *China, soft power, education, Confucius Institute, South Africa*

1. Introduction

For the last couple of decades, China has enhanced its political influence, military presence, and commercial agreements in Africa. African countries have opened themselves up to Chinese investment in various fields in the hope this will advance their development. Meanwhile, China has benefited from these partnerships from their provision of raw materials to their contribution towards China's aim of becoming a global hegemon that could challenge the United States of America (Campbell, 2008). China's influence on the continent is growing rapidly as the African states have welcomed China's aid and investments. With low interest rates, or no interest at all, Chinese investment has become the conventional purveyor of capital into Africa (van Dijk (ed.), 2009). The main attraction for its recipient states is China's foreign policy of "no political strings", which is attached to these investments. Hence, China's presence has undermined the "Western" influence in the region as China has been Africa's largest trading partner since 2009 (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012).

China's economic might in Africa is tangible enough to be seen by the international community. As part of its hard power, China has already excelled economically in Africa, hence its title of the continent's largest trading partner (Anning and Vhumbunu, 2018; Gold and Devadason, 2018). With China's economic power in the spotlight, their other means of power, such as its soft power, has become a peripheral focus. Nowadays, however, a country's soft power is one of the most – if not the most – important attributes for a nation to represent itself internationally. Soft power is a country's ability to affect and attract other countries in order to to achieve its agenda without using economic and military means, which serve as their hard power (Nye, 2008). Today, with the change in the mechanism of world politics and the implementation of globalization, the importance of soft power is

paramount. Furthermore, the growth of interdependence and democracy in the world have made it harder for world leaders to exercise their hard power to achieve their agenda (Gallarotti, 2011). Therefore, China is trying to project its positive image to the African public through its agents of soft power.

The growth of soft power in international politics has initiated greater cooperation in the sphere of *low politics*, and opportunities such as cultural exchanges have progressively expanded. This offers more opportunities for cooperation in various areas such as education, which, along with culture, is the most effective tool of soft power. Therefore, cooperation through education, as well as culture, is crucial for China's soft influence on the international stage. Nowadays, it is seen that more and more countries make foreign policies that could help their neighbors and competitors develop (Karim and Chairil, 2016). Countries that would like to assume leadership in world politics today have to help their counterparts grow (Wang (ed.), 2011). Countries also have to fight for their right to determine their values in modern international politics. Thus, expanding their influence through the internationalization of education is pivotal in their journey toward world leadership. China is one of those countries and it has already begun its process of enhancing its educational soft power through its agents (Nye, 1990).

Confucius Institutes (CI) are one of China's agents for its worldwide expansion of soft influence. CI is a government-funded public education organization that teaches Chinese culture, with an emphasis on Mandarin, across the world. Since its establishment in 2004, China has started to expand its soft influence through education. China's efforts to enhance their political image in the international arena is through the augmentation of its soft power and CIs exist to improve the image of China to the international community (Ren, 2012), especially for its involvement in the African continent. South Africa is

one of China's biggest trading partners in Africa. Moreover, China's soft power agent, Confucius Institute, has already made an impression as South Africa has six CIs ensconced within their universities, which have helped establish cooperation between the two states. Be that as it may, there are also critics who question Confucius Institute as China's soft power agent.

The Chinese government stated that the existence of Confucius Institute is to further and enhance China's soft power in their host countries. However, many contradictions have also surfaced against the statement arguing that it is not soft power and it serves only as Chinese propaganda (Lee, 2010). There is ambiguity in CIs as China's agents of soft power because of the perception that CIs exist only for the benefit of the Chinese government. Concern and wariness come along with the establishment of CIs in the host countries. Instead of mutual understanding, China's CIs, which are State-orchestrated institutes, are seen as agents of cultural invasion (Ren, 2012).

Unlike the "mainstream" agents of soft power which are rooted in non-State actors and pop culture, CIs are completely State-run institutes which raise questions as to whether the institutes are actually soft power agents. While Chinese pop culture is notable internationally through sports, music and film, as well as world renowned figures in those departments such as Lang Lang, Yao Ming and Zhang Ziyi – though in the case of the entertainment industry it is still a far cry from the earlier Cantopop, Mandopop and Minpop cultures of Hong Kong and Taiwan in terms of themes and genres due not least to the heavy State ideological control and censorship in mainland China – China's international image nowadays with its policies on the Tibetans and Uyghurs does not help the perception of CIs – which are State-run – in host countries (*ibid.*). Kyoungtaek Lee's concept (2010) of SOFT power (liberal cultural exchange and mutual understanding) and soft POWER

(culture as a tool of power) explains the ambiguity of CIs' purpose and the perception of them in host countries whether they are the expansion of soft influence or merely instruments of propaganda for the Chinese government to impose its power on other countries.

Although there is this ongoing debate, the main focus of this paper will be the discussion on China's effort to expand their influence through CIs on their host countries with the case study of South Africa as an agent of China's educational soft power.

2. Education as a Soft Power Tool

Confucius Institutes are China's educational agents in host countries. However, past literature and scholars have rarely labeled CI as China's educational agent. In the journal article by Joe Tin-yau Lo and Suyan Pan (2016) entitled, "Confucius Institutes and China's soft power: practices and paradoxes", it is stated that China is planning to expand its soft power to the international community through Confucius Institutes. In short, to measure the soft power expansion of China, Lo and Pan examine Chinese resources and strategies and conclude whether the efforts made by China are generating the desired outcome. The intended outcome for China is the augmentation of its cultural diplomacy, where the attraction of Chinese culture and language are the main enticements. In this journal article, the authors focus more on CI as China's cultural diplomat and less towards it as China's education institution.

Following Lo and Pan's journal article, Ying Zhou and Sabrina Luk (2016) discuss Confucius Institute as China's soft power tool and how it is perceived by their host countries in their journal article titled, "Establishing Confucius Institutes: A tool for promoting China's soft power?". The journal article assesses the goals, implications, and challenges of CIs to promote China's soft power on the macro and micro

levels of analysis. Through these levels of analysis, the authors conclude that the host countries are skeptical toward CI because it is perceived as a propaganda tool of China. The corruption, the communist mechanism, and general lack of transparency has created distrust among the international community towards China, including CI as their agents (Zhou and Luk, 2016). Through interviews with CI stakeholders in South Africa, namely executives and students, Procopio (2015) found that CIs in South Africa are only partially effective as a Chinese tool for soft power.

The internationalization of education can be an effective tool for a country's soft power, especially in the case of China. Confucius Institutes, as China's agents of soft power and education, have been placed across the globe. The results of their implementation are leaning more towards suspicion from the public according to research. CI however has barely been covered in previous literature. An assessment of education and soft power is discussed by Aidarbek Amirbek and Kanat Ydyrys (2014), who claim that states are aiming to strengthen their prestige in the international arena, through foreign policy tools such as hard and soft power. However, after the fall of Soviet Union, the soft power approach is more favorable to obtain foreign policy goals, and education is part of the soft power concept developed by Joseph Nye in the 1990s. It found that the degradation of education within a country is synonymous with the degradation of the country as well as the educational system is one of the most important spheres (Amirbek and Ydyrys, 2014).

While most literature focuses on critics of CIs worldwide implementation, the depiction of CIs means as China's education institution and soft power agents without prejudice towards the country is still scarce. Therefore, this article is focusing on how CIs are expanding China's soft influence in South Africa through educational

cooperation. The framework for its elaboration is the soft power concept, with the focus on education. This is appropriate because it helps explain Chinese political actions through educational cooperation across the globe, especially in South Africa. Wojciuk, Michałek and Stormowska (2015) conceptualized the mechanisms on how education could produce soft power for a country in their journal article titled “Education as a source and tool of *soft power* in international relations”. According to the authors there are three mechanisms a country can use to produce soft power through education:

- a. Carrier of genuine values.
- b. Resources that countries possess.
- c. A tool in achieving certain policy goals.

CIIs working as Chinese educational institutions, as well as soft power agents, in South Africa will be analyzed through these mechanisms.

2. Methodology

This research uses the qualitative approach where the study design is provided through evident occurrences and interpretative approach. China's historical data, China-South Africa relations, and educational related data are all examined to analyze China's educational soft power. The document analysis method was utilized for data collection. By using this method, data through media tracking, journal, books, media websites, official government websites, and government reports will be collected. Therefore, this research will be able to gather data through past evident occurrences and behaviors for this research analysis.

The primary data source includes publicized official documents and official statements from the Chinese and South African governments, for

instance, China's and South Africa's Ministries of Foreign Affairs, China's embassies, Hanban website, Xinhua News Agency and *China Daily*. For secondary data sources, the data were also gathered from analyzing corresponding institutions, independent institutions, and academic observations such as Confucius Institutes' websites of their respective host countries, the BBC, *The Guardian*, various journals, as well as the opinions of individual academics

The first phase of the data collection process – media tracking – was conducted from various news agencies regarding China's soft power in Africa. The process of media tracking includes collecting, analyzing, and categorizing data. After a clearer picture of China's soft power in Africa emerged, the research was narrowed down to South Africa. In the second stage, empirical data was collected on how China is spreading their soft influence in South Africa. After these two stages, it was found that CI is playing a major part in China's soft power expansion in South Africa.

In the third stage, literature studies were conducted related to Confucius Institute, China's soft influence, and South Africa. After the literature review, the anomaly, or absence of study, on how CI, as China's educational institution, helps expand China's soft power in South Africa was discovered. The purpose of this article is to fill the existing analytical gap on China's educational soft power through CI in South Africa. This research proceeds to implement the concept of "education as a soft power tool", whose framework will be the focus of this research on how CI is expanding China's soft power through educational cooperation.

3. Chinese and South African Diplomatic and Educational Relations

In 1997, both the Chinese and South African governments established diplomatic relations. They both signed the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations, in which the South African government agreed to abide by the “One China” position. After recognizing the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as “One China”, both governments further officialized their relationship with each other by establishing official diplomatic relations on 1st January 1998. Furthermore, in April 2000, President Jiang Zemin visited South Africa. During the visit, the two heads of state signed the Pretoria Declaration on Partnership, which gave birth to the Bi-National Commission (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2004). This declaration formally established Chinese-South African partnerships in various areas such as politics and economics. The Bi-National Commission (BNC) consists of regular meetings between top officials of both countries in order to further the partnership between the two states. The Commission has become the principal structure for government-to-government coordination and it is a high-level convocation between the two countries as it is often officialized at the presidential level.

China and South Africa have further strengthened their relations with each other. After the establishment of the Bi-National Commission, they continued to look for other areas of cooperation. Consequently, in 2006, then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council visited South Africa to sign the Program of Cooperation on Deepening the Strategic Partnership between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa. Essentially, the purpose of this program is to intensify the high-level mechanism by promoting exchanges and cooperation in all areas (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2009).

Further cooperation has occurred as China and South Africa signed the comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in 2010. In that same year, South Africa was invited to be a part of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) grouping, and was able to join BRIC (which later became BRICS) at the behest of China (Masters *et al.* (eds.), 2015). In addition, because both countries hold each other in high esteem, China designated 2014 as “The Year of South Africa” and South Africa responded with inducting 2015 as “The Year of China”. BRICS and G20, among many others, are examples of international organizations which both China and South Africa are a part of. They share multilateral platforms which echo their similarities in the pursuit of their goals in the international arena. As developing countries, China and South Africa’s relationship has to be coherent in order to achieve their international objectives. They have worked closely together to achieve their goals, such as the pursuit of an equitable international order, the reform of the international financial system, and more favorable trading conditions, especially for African countries.

The close partnership between China and South Africa has political aims and benefits. For instance, during South Africa’s temporary membership in UNSC, they voted against condemning the Myanmar government with regards to its treatment over Rohingyas, and intervening in North Africa and the Middle East about Arab Spring. This action was seen as South Africa’s appeasement to China (*ibid.*). Furthermore, refusing an entry visa for the Dalai Lama to enter South Africa has strengthened the perception of the political influence of China in the Republic of South Africa (*The Guardian*, 4th September 2014).

Aside from political relations, the more noticeable and trending news about China and South Africa is their economic relationship. International engagement in organizations such as BRICS and FOCAC has helped boost the two country’s trade and investment partnership.

China is South Africa's largest trading partner at US\$9.6 billion which accounts for more than 10 percent of South Africa's total exports, followed by Germany (US\$7.5 billion) and the United States (US\$6.3 billion) (Workman, 2020). China has also given significant financial development aid to South Africa through its state-owned banks, such as the China Development Bank. These economic partnerships are just one of China's effort in expanding their influence in South Africa, and Africa as a continent as well.

As noted above, China and South Africa have a long-standing relationship in the sphere of *high politics*. Nevertheless, the pattern of international relations has shifted towards a more contemporary direction, which does not focus on high-political issues only. Therefore, both nations continue to augment their partnership in the low-politics area and this effort is best exemplified by their partnership on cultural education exchanges.

China and South Africa established their educational relations in 2003 after they signed an agreement on higher educational cooperation. Since then, both nations have continued to enhance their educational partnership for the better. They have an equal partnership in many areas of education such as inter-school exchanges, language teaching, and academic research. For instance, China's diplomatic university is adding African languages to their courses and one of them is Ndebele, the native tongue of South Africa (Erard, 2017). As China is trying to expand their culture and language in South Africa, China is also implementing courses on South African language to their universities. The educational cooperation between the two countries is on an equal footing as both countries contribute to one another.

In a speech by South Africa's then Chinese Ambassador H.E. Lin Songtian, it was elaborated how this partnership in the realm of education is crucial and he also listed their accomplishments throughout

the years of their joint efforts. As part of the BRICS group, a framework for cooperation within higher education has been established called BRICS University Alliance. Twenty-three Chinese and five South African universities have conducted joint research, and another eleven Chinese and twelve South African ones have participated in several areas of priorities. Furthermore, Confucius Institutes have also played an important role in inter-school cooperation and exchanges which are hoped to enhance the mutual understanding and partnership of both nations (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa, 2019).

Compared to other African countries, South Africa has the highest number of Confucius Institutes. The first one in South Africa was founded in 2004 and the number has continued to grow throughout the years and there are now six CIs across the country. They are at Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, Rhodes University, Durban University of Technology, the University of Johannesburg, and the University of Western Cape. CIs were founded by China to expand and spread their culture and language across the globe. By implementing CIs in the country, enhancement of friendship, cultural exchanges, and educational cooperation are expected. The mechanism of the cooperation is that each CI implemented in universities will result in a partnership with the appointed partner Chinese universities. These host universities are teaching Mandarin, Chinese culture, as well as hosting Chinese cultural events.

4. Analyzing Education Cooperation and Confucius Institute in South Africa

China is promoting soft power as it seeks to establish itself as one of the world's major powers. To accomplish such a goal, China uses its

resources towards building its soft power, which is a means of persuasion so that other nations willingly adopt the same goals. Culture, education, and diplomacy are the main sources of a country's soft power. Therefore, China recognizes the critical importance of its higher education prowess and internationalization, as well as its rich cultural heritage for the projection of their soft power. Hence, Confucius Institute is the embodiment of the Chinese goal in expanding their projection of soft power to the world. CIs are institutes that teach Mandarin and Chinese culture. They are linked with universities all over the world and are named after the Chinese philosopher who lived from 551 to 479 BCE. Through the teachings of Mandarin and Chinese culture, CI have become China's main agent in its efforts of expanding international influence and its governance model (Yang, 2010).

By implementing a number of CIs, South Africa is committed to furthering their cooperation with China, as well as giving opportunities to local people, especially students, to learn about Chinese language and culture. Furthermore, seeing as China is a crucial partner for South African development, CIs have become channels for people in South Africa to learn more about China. To explore Chinese efforts in expanding its soft influence through the means of education, this article will analyze it by utilizing three mechanisms of education as a soft power tool, which explains how China, through CIs, augments their soft power in South Africa.

4.1. China's Cultural Values

China's is well-known for its rich heritage of cultural values. These play a major part in influencing a country's identity and China has maintained its cultural values for many centuries now. Culture is a complex term which covers the values of knowledge, belief, customs, morals, and law,

all of which helps mould the identity of a nation as well as becoming an intrinsic part of its heritage (Shi, 2001).

Nowadays, culture is receiving much greater attention in the international agendas of many countries. Culture itself is a fundamental instrument that has to be preserved for the construction of states' national identities. In turn, national identity is a tool for the development of a country's soft power (Barr, 2012). Therefore, a national identity, which derives from the culture of a country, is an important factor for a nation in order to establish both its domestic and foreign policies (Karim, 2020). In the case of China, its rich heritage and culture makes them a unique and attractive entity for foreigners, especially in South Africa where China is viewed as a crucial partner. Most people in South Africa believe that China's global growth has a positive impact on their country as an emerging market (Busse *et al.*, 2016; Kurlantzick, 2007). Due to these positive public views, the people of South Africa would be amenable to the Chinese presence in their country, including the implementation of China's culture through Confucius Institutes.

Confucius Institutes are a non-profit public organisation that aims to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. It also aims to further the cooperation with its host countries through cultural and education exchanges. In South Africa, six CIs are operating in universities. Though they have the same purpose, the activities and the courses being taught in each host university varies. However, they also serve as tools for Chinese soft power expansion. Through them, the People's Republic of China is trying to build a positive image in the host countries, especially as a response to substantial criticism from other countries for its engagement in Africa. Therefore, cultural courses and activities have been introduced through CIs as a strategy for the Chinese Government to broaden their influence on the international stage (Paradise, 2009).

Generally, the CIs that are operating in South Africa have the purpose of teaching Mandarin to students in the host universities. However, CIs have more functions than just teaching language; they also immerse their culture into the curriculum. Each CI in South Africa has different cultural activities and courses. The CI at Stellenbosch University, for example, offers *T'ai Chi Ch'üan* which is a traditional Chinese martial art. In addition to *T'ai Chi*, the CI at the University of Cape Town offers exercise classes such as *Ba Duan Jin* and *Yi Jin Jing*, as well as Chinese calligraphy. The CI at Rhodes University offers “Understanding China” courses and accommodates students at their Chinese Cultural Center. Similarly, the CI at Durban University of Technology offers Chinese martial arts courses in addition to Chinese Music classes. A type of Chinese martial arts, Wushu, is offered at the CI at the University of Johannesburg, while, the CI at the University of Western Cape has a traditional Chinese Medicine course. These extra courses are all embedded in the respective Confucius Institutes of South African universities along with the teaching of Mandarin.

Chinese cultural acceptance through Confucius Institutes in South Africa could be explained through these “extra” courses and activities provided by the respective CIs in their host universities. The cultural values of China are not only being transmitted through the teachings of Mandarin, but also through these cultural activities and courses that will make the students of Chinese Studies acquire a better understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. Therefore, CIs in South Africa act as a vehicle of Chinese cultural values in a foreign land to further China's soft influence.

4.2. Quality and Internationalization of Chinese Education

The outstanding quality of a country's education is one of the factors for its enhancement of soft power. However, for a country's education to

generate soft power, it has to be able to attract the attention of people outside its own country. In this era of knowledge-based modernization, education has become an important aspect in which a country can develop (Chabbott and Ramirez, 2000). Modernization and technological advancement are the results of a country's educational enhancement (Landes, 1998). China has been growing its education influence in the international arena, and it has been continuously promoting international exchanges and educational collaboration (Gill, 2018; Rezasyah *et al.*, 2017). An emphasis on the quality of an education system is also a crucial aspect when soft power expansion is the goal. Thanks to globalization, international student mobility is booming nowadays, which allows for each country's educational agents – universities – to attract foreign students into their country. Therefore, augmentation of the country's education is a necessity to promote soft power (Wojciuk *et al.*, 2015).

The early stages of Chinese educational soft power were difficult and unfruitful, and it was still far behind the quality of their Western counterparts. The difficulties were a result of the country's "closed door policy" which prevented the enhancement of Chinese educational prowess. It was not until the "open door policy" was introduced by Deng Xiaoping that education policy was able to be advanced. This policy introduced a fundamental change to Chinese education as China was able to bring back its massive student exchange program (Li, 2007). Since then, China has been gradually reforming their education system with the introduction of various projects to turn Chinese universities into "world class universities". *Project 985* was one of the educational reform projects which was implemented during the Jiang Zemin presidency. The project involved the national and local government allocating their funding toward certain universities to boost the overall development of Chinese universities' (Rhoads *et al.*, 2014).

After this reform, Chinese universities began to make their mark in the international arena. Although they are still not considered on a par with the most recognized Western institutions, China's educational development is certainly improving, and their higher education performance has already become one of the best in Asia. According to QS World University Rankings, at least two Chinese universities are rated in the top 100 in the world. They are Peking University and Tsinghua University. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has a university in the category as well (University of Hong Kong) (Wojciuk *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the average number of papers from the universities that are included in the *Project 985* and covered by the Science Citation Index (SCI) and the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) increased from 240 in 1998 to 1,200 in 2007 (Fu and Ho, 2013).

Confucius Institutes that are implemented in host countries have bridged a partnership between the host universities and Chinese universities. For each CI that is embedded within the host universities, a Chinese counterpart is included in the package. As elaborated above, South Africa, which has the largest number of CIs in Africa, has six Confucius Institutes within their universities along with their Chinese institutions. Chinese universities that are partnering with South African universities have a different status or recognition, and are assessed by the QS World University Rankings.

As can be seen from Table 1, Chinese partner universities that are involved with the implementation of Confucius Institutes in South African universities have varied rankings (according to QS World University Rankings). Universities such as Stellenbosch, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Rhodes are partnered with Chinese universities which are ranked from #200 to #700 in the world. In addition to that, those universities are listed in the top fifty in the People's Republic of China rankings. As for Zhejiang Normal University and Fujian Agriculture and

Table 1 Rankings – CIs' Chinese Partners of South African Universities

No.	South African University	Chinese Partner(s)	World Ranking for Chinese University	Country Ranking (Mainland China)
1	Stellenbosch University	Xiamen University	#432	#23
2	University of Cape Town	Sun Yat-sen University	#263	#8
3	Rhodes University	Jinan University	#601-650	#47
4	Durban University of Technology	Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University	-	-
5	University of Johannesburg	Nanjing University of Science and Technology	#701-750	#40
6	University of Western Cape	Zhejiang Normal University; Zhejiang Chinese Medical University	-	-

Forestry University, they are not ranked by QS World University Rankings. However, according to other sources, they are ranked #985 and #2,117 respectively (CWUR, 2020; uniRank, 2020).

As mentioned above, Chinese higher education institutions are still ranked behind the better Western universities. Nonetheless, China's education system is still growing as they only started after the "open door policy" in 1978 implemented by Deng Xiaoping. CIs are playing a major role in boosting recognition of Chinese higher education, as South African Minister of Education Angie Motshekga and then China's Ambassador to South Africa Lin Songtian highlighted during "Chinese Language Teaching in South African Gala Night" on August 2019. Studying in China has become increasingly popular for South African students, with the number studying in China increasing from just 400 in 2014 to more than 3000 by the end of 2018 (*IOL*, 6th August 2019).

International exchanges are a key part in strengthening a country's soft power, and having a large number of foreign students is one of the most visible effects of international education exchanges. The internationalization of education is a necessary condition for higher education institutions to become well-known and respected in the international arena (Wojciuk *et al.*, 2015). The internationalization of education can be achieved by international student mobility, staff mobility, and internationalization at home (Knight, 2012). There are various means to attain these three aspects of internationalization, such as student exchanges, international conferences, study trips, scholarships, and language training.

Hanban, the most notable for the Confucius Institute program, providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide, has channeled programs of internationalization to students at the host universities. China Studies Program, International Chinese Language Teachers (Confucius Institute) Scholarships, and Chinese

Bridge are the programs offering an international experience that are provided through Confucius Institutes worldwide. Under those programs, there are many choices of subprograms that students can choose according to their needs and desires (Figure 1). By offering these programs, Hanban took measures to further internationalize Chinese language, culture, and education. These programs are directed toward foreign participants in the host countries of Confucius Institutes.

Figure 1 Hanban’s International Programs

China Studies Program	International Chinese Language Teachers	Chinese Bridge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint Research Ph.D Fellowship • Ph.D in China Fellowship • "Understanding China" Fellowship • Young Leaders Fellowship • International Conference Grant • Publication Grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships for Doctor, Master, and Bachelor in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages • Scholarships for One-Year, One-Semester, and Four-Week Study • Cooperative Scholarships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students and Secondary School Students

Naturally, all those programs apply to students of South African Confucius Institutes as well. Aside from Hanban’s programs, each CIs in South Africa have their own international programs that are offered to the students. For instance, CI at the University of Cape Town offers winter and summer camps in China thus giving their students the opportunity to travel to China’s big cities for historical and cultural visits (Confucius Institute at the University of Cape Town, 2020). Rhodes University has a similar called China Study Tour as well as a student

exchange program with Jinan University as their partner (Confucius Institute at Rhodes University, 2020).

The means of internationalization for Chinese education has been delivered through their agents, which are the Confucius Institutes. Every CI students, including those in South Africa, has the opportunity to utilize learning Chinese language to further their studies in China. Moreover, CIs in host countries also take part in boosting the internationalization effort by implementing their own programs, such as in the cases of the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University in South Africa. Conducting internationalization of education through Hanban and Confucius Institutes is China's way of expanding their soft influence throughout the world, as seen in South Africa.

4.3. Achieving Policy Goals through Education

Education can serve as a tool for achieving a country's certain policy goals. Through education, a country can further their cooperation with other countries. Furthermore, as mentioned before, development of a nation's education system could generate and further enhance their soft influence in the international arena. Thus, many countries, including China, have continued to evolve their educational policy. One of China's foreign policy goals is to expand their soft influence through their Aid Policy and Chinese as a Foreign Language Policy. This section will explain how Chinese education is contributing to the attainment of this policy goal.

Nowadays, China is known for its substantial foreign aid contributions to many countries across the world. The policy of foreign aid started in 1963 when then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited numerous African countries. During his visit, he introduced China's eight principles of foreign aid which are: mutual benefit, no conditions attached, the no-interest or low-interest loans would not create a debt

burden for the recipient country, to help the recipient nation develop its economy, not to create its dependence on China, to help the recipient country with project that needs less capital and quick returns (*China Daily*, 13th October 2017). Befittingly, today, China's international aid is focused on the Africa. Almost half of China's International Aid Funds go to the continent (Gill and Reilly, 2007), and this foreign aid is mostly aimed toward economic development, which includes financial, and technical aid.

China has implemented its foreign aid policy mostly in Africa, especially in the sphere of economic development. In addition, China has developed its aid in Africa in other areas as well, such as education. The main international framework for China-Africa cooperation in education is the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Under the FOCAC framework, China has been enhancing its foreign education aid in Africa. This forum has developed numerous incentives for educational cooperation between China and African countries. For instance, in 2005, under the framework of FOCAC, there was a Sino-African Education Minister Forum. This was a forum of respective countries' high officials of education. This forum has generated policies such as an increase in scholarships and the establishment of Confucius Institutes. Furthermore, the Beijing Action Plan 2007-2009 was implemented as well. In this plan, China pledged to build more Confucius Institutes and schools, as well as provide training to Africans.. Since then, under the framework of FOCAC, China and African countries have continued to further their cooperation in education. China continues to increase the incentives of education aid to African countries, such as scholarships and Confucius Institutes.

The spread of Chinese languageor, more specifically, Mandarin to the world has been a part of the PRC's policy for a long time. The Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) policy is one of China's long-

term foreign policy goals. The PRC's Ministry of Education stated that "teaching Chinese as a foreign language is an integral part of China's reform and opening up drive" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2009). The Ministry continues to emphasize that CFL policy is China's effort in popularizing Chinese language and culture worldwide to enhance friendship, mutual understanding, as well as elevating China's influence in the international community (*ibid.*). In short, China is trying to increase their soft influence in the world by promoting their language and culture across the globe. Needless to say, English is an international language that most parts of the world already familiar with, and China is attempting to do a similar thing with Mandarin in order for it to also become an international language, which is summed up by the statement "Chinese needs foreign languages; the world needs Chinese" (Gil, 2008). Thus, the formation of Hanban and its Confucius Institutes is a key part in pursuing the CFL policy by the PRC's government.

The principal aim of CIs is for non-Chinese in other countries to get the opportunity to learn Chinese language and culture. More and more people worldwide are learning Mandarin and the growth of CIs is following the same trend. In 2009, Hanban estimated that in 2010 there will be 100 million people learning Mandarin and by 2020 the number of CIs will reach 1,000 institutes and it will continue to grow (Zhao and Huang, 2010). As of 2019, there are 541 CIs implemented in most parts of the world (Hanban, 2020). A report from China Daily in 2017 stated that 100 million people are learning Mandarin worldwide (*China Daily*, 13th October 2017). Although there is a miscalculation on the estimation made by Hanban, this number is still growing each year through PRC's efforts in the CFL policy.

CIs are taking part in the CFL policy by providing Mandarin courses that are divided by level of difficulty, and also accommodating

students that want to test their proficiency in Mandarin through HSK tests. South African CIs are no different from other CIs elsewhere. Each CI that is embedded in the host university in South Africa offers Mandarin courses to the students. The Mandarin courses may go by different names in each CI, but their essence is the same which is to teach Mandarin from beginner until advanced level.

All of the CIs in South Africa's host universities provide Mandarin courses for their students. As stated above, the names of the courses vary but their purpose and function are still to teach Chinese language to foreign students. In the case of University of Western Cape, their CI is Chinese Medicine (CICM) focused. However, Xinhua stated that Chinese language teaching will still be available for students to study in University of Western Cape's CICM (Xinhua, 13th September 2019). CICM is the newest member of the South African CI family and there is still little detail about their activities or courses because they have no specific website or webpage. Nonetheless, CIs in South Africa contribute to China's CFL policy by being the main agents of the spread of Mandarin. The recognition of Chinese language and education across the world through CIs will also contribute to the enhancement of Chinese soft influence in their respected host countries, including South Africa (Zhao and Huang, 2010).

Confucius Institutes play a major part in promoting China's educational soft power in South Africa. Through the introduction of Chinese cultural values, its promotion of student mobility to China, and to achieve its foreign policy goal through China's Aid Policy and CFL policy, Confucius Institutes have established themselves as China's main soft power agent in the educational sector. China is South Africa's largest trading partner and they are looking to further their relationship together. Instead of using coercion or hard power, China is utilizing Confucius Institutes to further its soft influence in South Africa.

5. Conclusion

China and South Africa have established a long and lucrative relationship from China supporting the oppressed black community during apartheid to becoming South Africa's largest trading partner. The friendship between the two countries is entrenched through continuing cooperation, be it bilaterally or multilaterally. Aside from cooperating in high politics, they also collaborate on low-political issues as well, such as cultural exchanges and education. Confucius Institutes are China's main agent in the aforementioned fields. South Africa has six CIs in its country, making it the country with the largest number of established CIs in Africa. CIs are Chinese public education institutions and also China's soft power agents as they teach Chinese languages and cultures not only to South Africa but to the world as well.

Based on the research conducted for this article on China's methods of expanding their soft power in South Africa through education cooperation, it was found that Confucius Institutes play a major role. By utilizing "education as a soft power tool" framework, this article assesses how CIs contribute to China's effort to expand its soft power in South Africa through educational endeavor. The teachings of numerous Chinese cultural values are conveyed in all six CIs in South Africa. Chinese education is a resource that generates soft power, and CIs offer international programs and a competent education system. CIs offer many programs to aid student international mobility along with Chinese recognized "competent" higher education institutions, some of which are South African university partners through CIs. To achieve certain policy goals such as China's Education Aid Policy and Chinese as a Foreign Language, CIs also contribute and take part in them. CIs are one of the results or realization of China's education aid policy in Africa. Furthermore, in CFL policy, CIs are the main actors as they are the centers for Chinese language teaching. Through the framework of

education as soft power tool, this article has focused on China's mechanisms to promote its soft power in South Africa and found that Confucius Institutes are its main agents of soft power expansion.

Notes

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