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**Balancing Soft Power:
Gaining Leverage with China through
Confucius Institutes**

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Balancing Soft Power: Gaining Leverage with China through Confucius Institutes

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Introduction

China's rise to prominence has been through a conscious effort by the country's national government to improve their domestic status and international relations. After the Mao era, the country began opening up to more western or liberal ideas and processes, albeit still highly controlled by the Chinese government, people in China are now experiencing more freedom than they've had before. The country's economy has improved rapidly and their performance has been deemed impressive by experts and observers of China. In the international community, China has tried to gain a more positive image through its various soft power initiatives. Being a late bloomer into the international modern community, China has been playing catch up with the development of other developed states, thereby adapting successful program models of other countries and Sinicizing it to fit into their culture, values, and goals. China's numerous soft power programs range from humanitarian aid to development investments to cultural and language learning institutions. This work will focus on one of China's soft power programs, which is the official language and cultural learning institute of China, the Confucius Institutes.

Since the opening of the first Confucius Institute in 2004, countless branches of the Chinese language learning institute have been established. Created with the goal of teaching people around the world the "right way" of learning the Chinese language, together with Chinese culture and values, the institute is frequently compared to France's Alliance Française or Germany's Goethe-Institut¹. As one of the channels of China's soft power, the institute has reaped positive results with regard to the outlook of foreigners towards China as a culture and as a country. Nevertheless, due to the actions of China in relation to sensitive issues with other countries, such as the maritime issues in Southeast Asia, concerns have been raised on the underlying implications of the goodwill programs by the country, therefore possibly risking negating all the soft power initiatives that are already underway. With that in mind, this work will seek to examine the development of the Confucius Institutes around the globe. It will then take a look at the American soft power model and other models of learning institutes by other countries then see how China has patterned the Confucius Institutes after these models. The criticisms and issues of the institutes will also be examined and then a proposal will be presented on the possible actions that states may take to utilize these institutes to achieve a counter current of cultural diffusion back into China in the hopes of using this as an additional soft power channel into the country.

¹ Regidor, A. (2015, October 13). Confucius Institute takes root at UP. Retrieved May 10, 2016, from http://www.upd.edu.ph/~updinfo/oct15/articles/Confucius_Institute_takes_root_at_UP.html

As a previous student of the Confucius Institute in the Philippines, I will include some personal observations from my stay in the institute, together with some exchanges I've had with the instructors and some Chinese scholars who have come to the Philippines to do some research.

Soft Power Models

Soft power was coined in the nineties by political scientist Joseph S. Nye. Jr., in 2004, he came out with a book called *"Soft power: The means to success in world politics"* which further elaborated on the power and importance of soft power programs to a country. He illustrates how the United States crafted its soft power programs around the world. Examples of such programs included the voice of America, Fulbright scholarships, university research grants, and other intellectual exchanges that were crucial in American soft power². Although some of these programs have been discontinued, scholarly programs have remained relevant to furthering the United States' soft power influence around the world. Furthermore, these exchanges provided valuable contact zones between future potential leaders of states who have been given the chance to learn and be immersed in the American culture and values, therefore imbibing American goodwill into their minds³. On the other side of the spectrum, other countries have also set up cultural and language learning institutes to be able to educate foreign countries about their local cultures. As previously mentioned, an example would be France's Alliance Française, that offers French language classes, language proficiency examinations, cultural exhibits, resource materials, and translation services. Similar institutes are Germany's Goethe-Institut, South Korea's Korean Culture Center, and Britain's British Council. These centers serve as their home country's source of cultural influence and point of cultural exchanges around the world. They are usually standalone institutes, not established within a local university or college, and are operating under the support of their country's diplomatic embassies. Given that, these institutes are usually utilized by the embassies to foster better relationships in their host countries through cultural events such as art exhibitions, cultural performances, travel fairs, film and food festivals. These cultural exchanges may seem to have a small effect but their influence is highly significant to a country's diplomatic efforts as these can influence the attitudes of the locals to be more positive towards them. As Nye expounded on soft power:

"As we share intelligence and capabilities with others, we develop common outlooks and approaches that improve our ability to deal with the new challenges. Power flows from that attraction. Dismissing the importance of attraction as merely ephemeral popularity ignores key insights from new theories of leadership as well as the new realities of the information age."⁴

In recent years, cultural institutes have gained interest from locals in their host country through the improvement of communications technology and through social media. Whereby before, one would need to visit these institutes to inquire about programs or acquire resources, these days, one would only need to go online and check all the programs offered together with

² Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs. P45

³ Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs. P45

⁴ Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs. P134

online resources from the institutes. Apart from that reviews from those who have gone through these programs are now available, giving interested students a wide range of options and necessary information before going to these institutes. These established language learning and cultural institutes of other countries has become the model for China's version, which is the Confucius Institutes, which has aggressively established branches worldwide. The setup of the Confucius Institute is similar to other languages learning and cultural institutes. They have also successfully managed cultural events that celebrate China's main festivities, such as the Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival. The other language learning and cultural institutes continue to serve as models for China and remain to influence China's learning platforms. Having said that, there may be instances where learning and cultural institutes adapt each other's programs if they see it as successful or can easily be circulated. With this in mind, institutes such as these have continued to strengthen their countries' soft power and are thus highly noteworthy of attention and research.

Cultural diffusion through Confucius Institutes

In 2003, Hu Jintao announced that "Chinese culture belongs not only to the Chinese but also to the whole world,"⁵ a year later, the first Confucius institute opened in Seoul, Korea (November 21, 2004), initiating the push for China's cultural diffusion overseas. As of 2015, there are 465 institutes in 123 countries, with 97 institutes in the United States, more than 95 in Asia, 149 in Europe, and 38 in Africa⁶. Confucius Institutes were created as a way to spread Chinese language, culture, and values rapidly around the world. It became a major part of China's public diplomacy, with National People's Congress deputy Hu Yongqing mentioning that the promotion of Chinese culture and language can potentially increase China's global Influence. Hu also stated that "It can help build up our national strength and should be taken as a way to develop our country's soft power."⁷

Confucius Institute's goal is to seek for ways in which people could be attracted to Chinese culture similar to how South Korea's *Hallyu*, the new wave of pop culture that spread through music, television series, and movies, or Japan's *Anime*, gave both countries significant increase in interest from foreigners about Korean and Japanese culture. The institutes are created as a partnership between a Chinese university and a local university and thus are not standalone institutes like the branches of Alliance Française or Goethe Institut around the globe. Each branch of the Confucius Institute is opened with a grant from the Chinese government to help the setup with resources such as books, audio and visual teaching aids. The aim of the institute is to have 1000 institutes by 2020⁸ and at 465 institutes and counting, they seem to be on track to achieve that goal. The Confucius Institute in known in China as *Hanban*,

⁵ Kurlantzick, J. (2007). Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world. New Haven: Yale University Press.. P118

⁶ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) . (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2016, from <http://english.hanban.org/>

⁷ Kurlantzick, J. (2007). Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world. New Haven: Yale University Press. P67

⁸ Pan, L. (2006, October 02). Xinhua - English. Retrieved May 20, 2016, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-10/02/content_5521722.htm

it is governed by the Office of Chinese Language Council International and is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, their mandate is to provide Chinese language and cultural teaching services. The institute seeks to address the demands of foreign Chinese learners around the world and contribute to the development of multiculturalism and the development of a “harmonious world”⁹. The official description of their functions, as per their site, is:

“To make policies and development plans for promoting Chinese language internationally; To support Chinese language programs at educational institutions of various types and levels in other countries; To draft international Chinese teaching standards and develop and promote Chinese language teaching materials” – *Hanban/ Confucius Institute Official Website*

Although the main focus of the institute is on language learning, they offer special classes that can increase the awareness of foreigners on Chinese culture. Therefore, the Institute’s offerings include, but are not limited to, (1) Basic, Intermediate, Advance and Business Mandarin Chinese (2) Chinese History (3) Chinese Painting (4) Chinese Calligraphy (5) Taijiquan, and (6) Shaolin Kungfu. These class offerings vary per branch of the institute depending on the availability of instructors and the interest of the students. Some branches may have more art offerings while other may only have the martial arts classes in addition to the language classes. These offerings are determined by the school as the feasibility of such classes must also be considered. Apart from the classes, they also facilitate the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) examinations, which is the standardized Chinese proficiency examination for non-native Chinese speakers¹⁰. The HSK is highly valuable to those who wish to apply for further studies in China as some courses would need the applicant to reach a certain level of proficiency to be qualified for acceptance. There are also those who wish to work in China or to work as Chinese speaking officers in multinational companies, in those cases, the HSK certification would also be important to obtain. The institute furthermore hosts cultural activities such as film festivals, exhibits (books, photos, and paintings), speech competitions, composition contests, and special activities like paper-cutting or lantern-making. These activities are created so as to enhance the awareness and understanding of China, Chinese cultures, tradition and people. In some occasions, the Institute also organizes forums and symposiums on China related issues, in the case of the Philippines, these forums focus on maritime issues, Chinese aid, Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, One Belt One Road, etc.).

The expansion Confucius Institutes around the world have been seen in a positive light and has been accepted as a way for countries to get to understand the newly rising power and possibly find ways to build meaning partnerships with the Chinese people. According the official site of Confucius Institute:

“They have provided scope for people all over the world to learn about Chinese language and culture. In addition they have become a platform for cultural exchanges between China and the

⁹ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) . (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2016, from <http://english.hanban.org/>

¹⁰ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) . (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2016, from <http://english.hanban.org/>

world as well as a bridge reinforcing friendship and cooperation between China and the rest of the world and are much welcomed across the globe.”¹¹

In 2007, Joshua Kurlantzick wrote a book on what he dubbed as China’s “Charm Offensive”, where he took a look at China’s soft power initiatives to see how China has maximized these programs to gain favor in the international community. The Confucius Institutes came out as one of the focal channels where Chinese soft power was very attractive to foreign nationals. The increased prominence of China also meant the increased interest in learning the language and culture thus placing China in a good position to rapidly increase their Confucius Institute partnerships around the world. Kurlantzick acknowledged this as he emphasized that:

“Around the world, the Chinese government has launched several measures to increase the teaching of Chinese. Beijing now funds at least the first year of what it calls Confucius Institutes, Chinese-language and -culture schools created at leading local universities in countries from Kenya to South Korea to Uzbekistan to Australia..... If local universities that desire China studies beyond the Confucius Institute curriculum suffer from a lack of resources, they can call upon the Chinese Ministry of Education to lead intensive short courses for local Chinese-language teachers, or even to send Chinese teachers for a period of time.”¹²

This further illustrates that the initiative to spread the Chinese culture and language in foreign countries has gained traction and has been successful in that aspect. The Confucius Institutes have become a way for China to show the world who the Chinese people are, their values, characteristics and even nuances. It is through these institutes that countries can gain more meaningful relationships with the Chinese. It aims to clear the pathways of communication and further international goals whether bilaterally or multilaterally. There have been misunderstandings between China and other countries in the past and this will bridge the gap that is created with language and cultural barriers. These institutes also operate in the hopes to influence learners and create a positive perception about China. In 2014, President Xi Jinping stated that the Confucius Institute was “a symbol of China’s unremitting efforts for world peace and international relations [that] links the Chinese people and people of other countries.” and that it had an “important role... in enhancing understanding and friendship between Chinese people and people of other countries.”¹³ Today, collaborative researches and forums are being done by the partner Confucius Institute universities in China and abroad to create meaningful resources that may help the countries understand each other. Apart from that, more Chinese universities are taking an interest in understanding the opinions and views of foreigners about China and the Chinese people, thus sending scholars and researchers abroad to make some studies about this. These scholars get their connections and resources

¹¹ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) . (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2016, from <http://english.hanban.org/>

¹² Kurlantzick, J. (2007). *Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world*. New Haven: Yale University Press. P68

¹³ Wang, Y. (2014, September 27). Xi backs Confucius Institutes' development on anniversary - Xinhua | English.news.cn. Retrieved May 10, 2016, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-09/27/c_133677094.htm#

about a foreign country through the educational links made within the Confucius Institute system. At the same time, Confucius institutes regularly offers programs and scholarships for foreign students to learn the Chinese language in China. This is to further entice learners to immerse themselves fully in the Chinese culture and more thoroughly improve their Chinese speaking, reading, and writing skills. Furthermore, those who wish to teach Chinese language are given the opportunity to take up coursework in China on teaching Chinese as a second language. Graduate and doctoral level degree scholarships in China are also offered to foreigners in an effort to attract more students into the country¹⁴. So far, they have been able to gain a handful of foreign students to study in China through the Confucius Institute Scholarship; most popular is the language program that may range from 6 months to a year. China has not been able to reach the levels of the United States or other European countries when it comes to being the top of mind country to take further studies in, but through their consistent offerings and through the increased relevance of mandarin as a language important for business, their foreign student count has continued to increase through the years.

Attracting foreign students to learn the Chinese language and culture in China also proves to be a positive experience for Chinese schools as the schools also get to be exposed to different cultures from different countries. As Kurlantzick stated:

“While promoting Chinese studies in other nations, Beijing also has tried to lure more foreign students to China. The Ministry of Education has done so by advertising Chinese universities abroad, creating new scholarship programs for students from the developing world, loosening visa policies for foreign students, and increasing spending to lure elite foreign scholars from the West to teach in China, thereby upgrading China’s university system.¹⁵”

Given that, as Chinese schools aim to be more at par with international standards, these exchange programs through the Confucius institutes may help update school policies and curricula, further demonstrating the benefits of setting up these institutes. Having said that, it is not crucial that China continues to support the inflow of foreign students in China through scholarships and a wider range of programs.

Lack of transparency in Confucius Institutes

Given the development and increased presence of Confucius institutes around the world, there have been criticisms regarding the institute that have led some universities to raise concerns about the continued partnership with the Chinese language learning and cultural or the possible opening of new branches. Some of the issues raised are that it is not transparent enough and that it is not open to ideas that may contradict with theirs. These issues have led some universities to rethink their positions about the institute while some have eventually closed their branch of Confucius Institute in their University, such as the University of Chicago and Penn State University. The institute can project a certain rigidity to their mode of instruction that turns away possible learning cooperation with the universities that they are

¹⁴ Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) . (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2016, from <http://english.hanban.org/>

¹⁵ Kurlantzick, J. (2007). *Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world*. New Haven: Yale University Press. P69

partnered with. The institute also controls the hiring process, independent of their partner universities and they usually hire their instructors from China, as they deem that mainland Chinese would know best the “right way” to teach the Chinese language. Having said that, the branches still do hire from the local community, in relation to that, they also provide training modules and certification to individuals who wish to teach the Chinese language to interested learners. Nevertheless, the fact remains that their teaching pool is never absent of mainland Chinese teachers who are on contracts to teach the standardized modules around the world. The branches also have a Chinese director that oversees all the courses offered in each branch.

In light of the current structure of the institutes, issues have been raised in the past years regarding self-censorship being enforced in the institute as discussions on sensitive issues concerning China, such as the matters on Taiwan’s independence, Tiananmen Massacre, Falun Gong, Tibet, poverty, and human rights are taboo or given state approved answers for the instructors to follow, which usually means redirecting the question to a more palatable topic such as China’s impressive economic growth or distinct culture and traditions. Interviews done by the institutes’ directors are also highly controlled as questions usually need to be screened beforehand; any statement that may be perceived to put China in a negative light is to be edited out¹⁶. The restrictiveness on academic freedom has become a concern of university faculty members as they believe that the institute’s purpose of fostering cultural exchanges has been overshadowed by China’s drive to send out propaganda to foreign countries. China’s has been pushing their agenda through the Confucius Institutes, as they’ve acknowledged that this would help the world understand them better, but the receivership of information is lacking. There are many issues that other countries may deem important but may be not as important to China or is a topic that they would rather avoid, China must be able to address these issues head on, as other countries have done so in the past.

China’s soft power programs can still, and in some cases already have, backfire on them as press releases and other sources from China have been strictly controlled by the Chinese government. These usually seem to although the Chinese government has denied that they’re propagating propaganda through various media channels, most of the information that comes from China puts the country in good light, so much so that some events that were deemed atrocious and condemned by other countries, have been given new backgrounds, the events are recognized, but the gravity of the issue is not as it was when it happened. An example was the Tiananmen Massacre in June 1989, now known as the June 4th Incident, the event is now rarely talked about in popular media in China, it is inquiries on the matter are also frequently redirected to focus on the more positive side of China. Although the depth on which information from China has become romanticized is unknown, mistrust on Chinese sources has arisen due to their likelihood on being simply part of Chinese propaganda. China has tried to address this through continued assurances of their transparency. However, due to their difficulty on providing full autonomy to researchers regarding the events and current business concerns, China researchers and observers still maintain that there is an apparent lack of

¹⁶ Sudworth, J. (2014, December 22). Confucius institute: The hard side of China's soft power. Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30567743>

transparency about China and these concerns are reflected through the reception of foreign countries to China's soft power programs and institutes such as the Confucius Institutes.

Since Ju Jintao's declaration of China's "Peaceful Rise", which was later changed to "Peaceful Development" as the former was perceived as a little threatening to other states, there have been qualms on the intent of Chinese soft power programs. Even as China continues to assure that their outward reaching programs mean no underlying intent to coerce any nation to make decisions in China's favor, states remained cautious in accepting or allowing the entry of new soft power programs from China. As Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao said in his speech in 2004 about "Peaceful Rise":

"At its core Peaceful Rise meant that, unlike past emerging powers whose new might had caused shock waves across the world, China would threaten no nation, even as it becomes a global power. China's rise "will not come at the cost of any other country, will not stand in the way of any other country, nor pose a threat to any other country,"¹⁷

Nonetheless, there are concerns that China's "Peaceful Development" through its soft power programs may be mixed with hints of China's hard power. As Kurlantzick suggested: "it can sometimes be difficult to separate elements of soft power and elements of hard, military or security power. In China's case... Beijing sometimes uses its soft power to assist in harder goals."¹⁸

This may be due to the lack of clear cut lines as to which soft power and hard power is defined as "for the Chinese, soft power means anything outside of the military and security realm, including not only popular culture and public diplomacy but also more coercive economic and diplomatic levers like aid and investment and participation in multilateral organizations¹⁹". There may be times when major power aspirations came out in discussions regarding culture or traditions. Therefore the issues raised regarding Confucius Institutes may be a way for universities and observers to communicate to China that their soft power program is somehow evolving into a harder form of power and that China should be wary of this.

Given the current issues and concerns that states may have, the Confucius Institute remains as China's main channel for cultural soft power to the world. The demand for Chinese language learnings centers remain high as China is rapidly developing as a major power in the world, which also contributes to the increased number of universities still interested in opening a branch of the institute, regardless of the issues that they institutes are facing. There are also countries in developing nations that have specified interest in opening a branch of the institute due to the generous grant given by the Chinese government in doing so. The appeal is very high as developing countries struggle to gain financial resources in adding new course offerings.

¹⁷ Kurlantzick, J. (2007). Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world. New Haven: Yale University Press. P 37-38

¹⁸ Kurlantzick, J. (2007). Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world. New Haven: Yale University Press. P6

¹⁹ Kurlantzick, J. (2007). Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world. New Haven: Yale University Press. P6

Nonetheless, China needs to be able to figure out ways to address sensitive issues through these institutes as this may help deepen mutual understanding between nations and within multilateral institutions that involve these states.

The state of Confucius Institutes in the Philippines – “Enhancing Friendships between the two peoples”²⁰

There are currently four Confucius Institute branches in the Philippines, the first branch opened in October 2006, as a partnership between the Ateneo De Manila University and the Sun Yat Sen University, the second opened in February 2009, a partnership between Bulacan State University and the Northwest University. The third was opened in January 2010, with Angeles University Foundation partnering with the Fujian Normal University, and the latest branch was opened in October 2015, as a partnership between the University of the Philippines and Xiamen University. Each branch operates independently, but the major Confucius Institute events are coordinated with the first branch that was opened in the Ateneo de Manila University. The Ateneo de Manila University also began an undergraduate degree on Chinese studies which was crafted in partnership with the Confucius Institute. In addition to these, to complement the regular language classes that the institute offers, the Ateneo branch recently started a Chinese speaking club, where students can practice their Chinese speaking skills with each other. Additional programs such as these keep students in the institutes for longer periods of time as there are new program offerings and activities.

Not all branches that have opened have been met with acceptance by the Philippine university’s staff, the latest branch to open in the University of the Philippines, the country’s top public university, has been met with criticism especially by the university’s department of linguistics. The department of linguistics has been in charge of teaching foreign languages in the university since it was formed and their courses included basic Chinese classes, having another institute teaching the same courses did not sit well with the staff. The institute in the University of the Philippines has been a product of a long negotiation process between the Confucius Institute and the university, and when it was finally inaugurated in 2015, the university President, Alfredo E. Pascual stated that the Confucius Institute in University of the Philippines Diliman, “represents the need for greater mutual understanding, respect and appreciation between our two cultures, our two peoples,”²¹ and that “the need for mutual communication cannot be overstated,” as various issues beset the country’s relations with China.²² reiterating the need to further seek cooperative research to strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries as it has been affected by the ongoing maritime issues concerning the west Philippine sea. The University of the Philippines department of linguistics continues to stress that the establishment of a Confucius Institute is a threat to the university’s academic freedom as the

²⁰ Confucius Institute at University of the Philippines Diliman inaugurated. (2015, November 3). Retrieved May 10, 2016, from http://english.hanban.org/article/2015-11/03/content_623297.htm

²¹ Granali, R. (2015, October 27). New UP institute eyes more PH-China exchanges. Retrieved May 10, 2016, from New UP institute eyes more PH-China exchanges

²² Granali, R. (2015, October 27). New UP institute eyes more PH-China exchanges. Retrieved May 10, 2016, from New UP institute eyes more PH-China exchanges

institute is funded and supervised by the Chinese government. They've also reiterated that the establishment of a foreign institute within the state university is prohibited. Thereby calling on the university to stop or close the branch of the institute immediately²³.

China has been consistent in their hopes to strengthen bilateral relations between the Philippines and China. Through the Confucius Institutes, they have held various forums and symposiums concerning issues such as maritime disputes, environmental protection, and humanitarian assistance. Although there have been concerns that these forums usually involve Chinese officials and scholars pushing for their country's agendas, these have been good areas where Philippine and Chinese scholars get to exchange ideas and debate on certain issues. These events still need to increase in frequency and there is a strong need for support from Philippine universities as interest for these kinds of forums is still very low. Although the Confucius institutes are successful in attracting Filipinos to learn the Chinese language and culture, this does not translate into interest in scholarship on China or Philippine-China relations. Currently, there are only a handful of China scholars in the Philippines it is difficult to attract more scholars into the field as resources on China are limited mostly to language and cultural resources. Although those are the main focus of the Confucius institutes, it could be an area of possible improvement in the institutes as Confucius Institute libraries barely have resources regarding Chinese economy, governance, international relations, and socio economic development.

So far, the Confucius Institutes in the Philippines have gained acceptance in their local university community, except for the last branch opened. The fate of the branch in the University of the Philippines is still hanging as they have yet to offer classes and is still under scrutiny by members of the university staff. Regardless, the other branches of the institute continue to operate and offer language and cultural classes to those who wish to avail of it.

Confucius Institutes as a channel for counter cultural diplomacy

Earlier this year, a few scholars went to the University of the Philippines with the intention to setup cooperative research networks between Philippine and Chinese universities. I was invited to a dinner fellowship with them, and although the conversation began with simple exchanges about research interests, they asked if Filipinos viewed China negatively due to the maritime disputes between the two countries. The Philippine side told them that such kinds of opinions do not represent the opinion of the majority; most Filipinos have neutral to somehow positive views on China due to the economic relationship between the two countries. Most negative opinion comes from those who observe and follow the issue as it unfolds. Then we were asked if the United States, Japan, or South Korea had a strong influence on the Filipinos views about China, it was a peculiar question considering that we were discussing relations between China and the Philippines, but we understood at that moment that China still sees the Philippines as operating under the strong influence of the United States. We could not

²³ Madrona, M. (2015, October 22). UP Diliman Linguistics Department slams establishment of Confucius Institute. Retrieved May 10, 2016, from <http://www.filipinoscribe.com/2015/10/22/up-diliman-linguistics-department-slams-establishment-of-confucius-institute/>

stress the Philippines' sovereignty enough to make them believe that the Philippines operates and makes decisions on its own, not under the influence of other developed nation or major power. Exchanges such as these help in educating scholars from both countries on the Chinese perception of the Philippines and the Philippine perception on China, be that as it may, whether we've succeeded in influencing each other's views about each other remains to be seen in future opportunities for scholarly exchange. This exchange also reminded me of Nye's take on soft power influence, that:

"Preaching at foreigners is not the best way to convert them. Too often political leaders think that the problem is simply that others lack information, and that if they simply knew what we know, they would see things our way. But all information goes through cultural filters, and declamatory statements are rarely heard as intended. Telling is far less influential than actions and symbols that show as well as tell.²⁴"

It is possible that we were trying to provide insight into each other's concerns, but what our intention may have been received differently due to cultural differences and variations in sentence structures. This is why the language centers such as the Confucius Institutes are highly important. Having said that, it shouldn't stop with Filipinos learning how to communicate with China; the Chinese also need to learn how to communicate effectively with the Filipinos. Since developing countries, such as the Philippines, rarely have language and cultural learning institutes similar to the Confucius Institutes, they can use Confucius Institutes to influence the Chinese people about their language and culture, thus, creating a counter cultural diffusion, allowing the Chinese people to learn how to communicate effectively with people from other cultures. With this in mind, given that Chinese teachers from mainland China are on rotational contracts to teach the Chinese language in different countries, a program for local cultural learning must be established by the host countries to be able to fully maximize their presence.

Conclusion

China's soft power programs, such as the Confucius Institutes have been gaining traction around the world through the increasing interest and importance of learning mandarin for economic, political, and other possible reasons. These institutes have been received with mixed feelings as countries would like to learn the language and culture but are wary of the intentions of such institutes as they sometimes show the more propagandistic and restrictive side of the country. Some universities that have opened a branch of Confucius Institute have chosen to push through with the partnership and continue to provide the learning services while some have chosen to close down their branch of the institute. Some countries have taken advantage of the institutes to further promote cultural exchanges between China and their country, but these exchanges need further support from their partner universities. Countries with Confucius Institutes should also take advantage of the presence of Chinese scholars and teachers in their country and educate them on the local culture and language. In doing so, they would be able to discredit misconceptions about each other and decrease miscommunication due to cultural and language differences.

²⁴ Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs. P111

In the grand scheme of things, the ultimate goal of the countries involved should be to effectively understand each other and cooperate in such a way that does not only benefit one party, but all parties involved. All things considered, China's possibly underlying intentions in setting up Confucius Institutes around the world can be seen as an opportunity to build up one's country to be more favorable in China's eyes. For a small country such as the Philippines, which is lacking in resources, the possibility of being able to spread its culture overseas is highly limited; it is only through these windows of opportunity that we get to do so. In cases such as that, a counter cultural diffusion would be a highly realistic and doable.

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