China's Confucius Institute Project: Language and Soft Power in World Politics

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Abstract: Soft power is increasingly seen as an important asset for states to accomplish their goals and spread their influence in today's globalising world. Since the late 1990s, China has placed considerable emphasis on soft power in its foreign policy and international relations. In the Chinese view, the Chinese language is seen as an important source of soft power, and the promotion of Chinese language learning as a way of increasing and spreading China's soft power. The main way in which China promotes Chinese language learning is through the establishment outside of China of Chinese language and culture institutions called Confucius Institutes. Although there is an increasing number of studies of China's soft power, and some of them do mention Confucius Institutes, few attempts have been made to review the Confucius Institute Project and assess its contribution to achieving China's goals and increasing its influence in world politics. This paper aims to address this gap. It begins by defining soft power and how this concept is seen by China, then outlines the current scope and extent of the Confucius Institute Project. It argues that China has successfully established Confucius Institutes in an impressive array of countries and regions, but the actual influence and benefits China derives from this project are currently limited to shaping preferences in language learning and attitudes towards China.

Keywords: China, Chinese Language Learning, Confucius Institute, Soft Power

Introduction

China's goals in world politics are to create a peaceful international environment in which its economic development can continue and in which it can portray itself as a responsible and constructive power; to secure the resources required to sustain its economic development; to create a group of allies sharing its disdain for outside interference in a country's internal affairs; to convince others that it is a great power, possibly capable of becoming the USA's equal; and to isolate Taiwan (Kurlantzick, 2007, pp. 39-42).

China has enthusiastically embraced soft power as one means of accomplishing these goals and uses a variety of instruments to increase and spread its soft power (Cho and Jeong, 2008, p. 455; Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 61; Lampton, 2008, pp. 118-119; Wang and Lu, 2008, pp. 438-442).

The Chinese language is an important source of soft power, and China conducts various activities to promote Chinese language learning throughout the world, the main one being the establishment of Chinese language and culture institutions known as Confucius Institutes. This paper provides an overview of this aspect of China's soft power strategy. It begins by defining soft power and how this concept is seen by China then outlines the current scope and extent of the Confucius Institute Project. It argues that China has successfully established Confucius Institutes in an impressive array of countries and regions, but the actual influence
and benefits China gains from this project are currently limited to shaping preferences in language learning and attitudes towards China.

**Soft Power**

Despite some important changes and challenges brought about by globalisation, the international system is still largely based on sovereign states exercising power to achieve their goals and protect their interests (Gurtov, 2007, p. 13; Held, 2004, p. 6; Holton, 1998, p. 134; Jackson and Sørensen, 1999, pp. 262-267; Keohane and Nye, 2000, p. 19; Rourke and Boyer, 2006, p. 191). In the context of world politics therefore, power is usually defined as the ability to control or influence others and the outcomes of events (Griffiths and O’Callaghan, 2002, p. 253; Shimko, 2008, p. 79). Broadly speaking, there are three ways in which states may do this: coercion (the use of force and sanctions), inducement (the use of material rewards and payments) and attraction (Lampton, 2008, p. 10; Nye, 2004, p. 2). Nye (1990a, p. 166; 2004, p. 5) refers to attraction as soft power, and explains it as follows:

> A country may achieve its preferred outcomes in world politics because other countries want to emulate it or have agreed to a system that produces such effects. In this sense, it is just as important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics as it is to force others to change in particular situations. This aspect of power – that is, getting others to want what you want – might be called attractive, or soft power behavior. (Nye, 2005, p. 61 italics original).

Soft power therefore contrasts with the other two forms of power, or hard power, in the sense that others do what a state possessing soft power wants them to do because they perceive that state and its goals to be legitimate, not because they are forced to act, or rewarded for acting, in a certain way (Nye, 2004, p. 5; Öğuzlu, 2007, p. 83).

A state’s soft power derives from intangible sources such as culture, domestic values, policies and institutions and foreign policy (Nye, 2004, pp. 44-68; 2005, p. 61). When these are attractive to others, a state can achieve its goals without incurring the costs associated with coercion and inducement (Nye, 1990b, p. 182).

**China’s View of Soft Power**

Many scholars and commentators have argued that soft power is increasingly important in today’s globalising world (see for example Aysha, 2005; Held, 2004; Nye, 2004; Öğuzlu, 2007; Pastor, 1999), and China has certainly been receptive to such views. In fact, according to Wang and Lu (2008, p. 426), the term soft power has become ubiquitous in academic and policy circles in China, especially since the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The Chinese view of soft power, as Wang and Lu (2008, p. 427) explain, is largely consistent with the definition put forward by Nye, in seeing soft power as “intangible, non-quantifiable, non-material or spiritual power” and “the ability to persuade others with reason and to convince others with moral principles”. However, there are some important differences in terms of the scope, applications and sources of soft power. As Kurlantzick (2006, p. 271) points out, China’s view of soft power is broader than Nye’s, encompassing “all elements outside of the security realm, including investment and aid”.

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In Nye's work, soft power applies only to the domain of world politics. Although Nye (2004, pp. 90-97) does say that a variety of non-state actors such as non-governmental organisations, organised religions, intergovernmental organisations and even terrorist organisations possess soft power, he discusses these groups within the context of world politics and the influence they can have on world politics. The Chinese view, in contrast, regards soft power as applicable to domestic politics, organisations and individuals as well as world politics (Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 427).

In terms of the sources of soft power, China emphasises different aspects of two of the sources Nye proposes, namely culture, and domestic values, policies and institutions. China emphasises its traditional culture – including language, literature, philosophy, Chinese medicine, art, architecture, cuisine and martial arts – as sources of attraction, rather than contemporary culture, which is the main focus of Nye's treatment. The emphasis in terms of domestic values, policies and institutions is on China's economic model rather than its political ideals. In particular, China's model of rapid economic development under firm state control is believed to be attractive to other nations, especially developing countries (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 20; Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 84; Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 428). As mentioned above, China also sees soft power as applying to domestic politics. In China's view, sources of soft power for domestic purposes include national coherence, regime legitimacy and science and technology, which are all seen as important for China's own internal national power, rather than making China more appealing to the outside world (Wang and Lu, 2008, pp. 428-431). China has therefore developed a view of soft power that draws substantially on Nye's original conceptualisation but also has its own unique characteristics.

China has embraced soft power for many reasons. Firstly, China's amazing economic development has instilled a new confidence that China can indeed become a great power and take on a greater role in world affairs. Many Chinese leaders, policymakers and academics have argued that this requires China to possess soft power as well as hard power (Kurlantzick, 2006, p. 271; Li, 2008, p. 299; Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 435). Related to this point, China believes that the real arena of competition in world politics today is soft power, rather than the hard power of military competition (Li, 2008, p. 301; Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 435). For example, many Chinese scholars have argued that the USA's soft power has declined considerably since the end of the Cold War and believe China is able to compete with it in these terms (Kurlantzick, 2006, p. 272; 2007, pp. 32-33). China has also carefully observed the attempts of other Asian nations, such as South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, to use soft power and does not want to be left behind, especially by Taiwan (Chey, 2008, p. 38; Wang and Lu, 2008, pp. 436-437). Soft power also has important similarities to certain strands of traditional Chinese thought, such as the work of Sun Zi and Mencius, further enhancing its appeal in China (Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 435).

Perhaps most significantly however, China's attempts at using hard power, such as sending warships to disputed areas of the South China Sea and launching missiles into the Taiwan Strait, only antagonised and alienated other countries while failing to achieve China's desired outcomes (Goldstein, 2003, p. 67; Kurlantzick, 2006, p. 271). China has indeed paid increasing attention to other states' reactions to its rise and sees soft power as an important tool for countering the 'China threat' idea (Garrison, 2005, p. 26; Li, 2008, p. 300; Wang and Lu, 2008, pp. 435-436). This combination of developments within China and its international relations has therefore resulted in China's adoption of a soft power strategy.
Based on a review of the Chinese discourse on soft power, Li (2008, p. 292) argues that culture is generally seen as the most important source of China’s soft power. As the next section will demonstrate, the Chinese language is accorded particular importance.

**Chinese Language as a Source of Soft Power**

In January 2000, Li Daoyu, then Vice Chairman of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC), announced that China would support Chinese language education outside of China and support schools run by overseas Chinese, stating that, “spreading Chinese is a task of strategic significance” (quoted in *People’s Daily Online*, 19/01/2000). More recently, an NPC deputy, Hu Youqing, was even more explicit about the role of the Chinese language in China’s soft power strategy when he said that the promotion of Chinese language learning “can help build up our national strength and should be taken as a way to develop our country’s soft power” (quoted in Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 67). These statements clearly demonstrate that China sees the Chinese language as an important source of soft power and the promotion of Chinese language learning as an instrument to increase and spread it.

The National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL), called Hanban in Chinese, is the main body for the promotion and spread of the Chinese language. Like the Goethe Institute, the Alliance Française and the British Council, NOCFL is responsible for a variety of activities aimed at promoting and spreading Chinese language and culture, such as sending volunteer and state-sponsored Chinese language teachers to other countries and running an international Chinese language competition (Gil, 2008, p. 118; Lampton, 2008, p. 156). The main focus of NOCFL’s activities in recent years however has been the Confucius Institute Project.

**The Confucius Institute Project**

In 2004, NOCFL began establishing non-profit education organisations outside of China known as Confucius Institutes, to teach Chinese language and culture. According to the *People’s Daily Online* (29/04/2006):

> Confucius institutes provide Chinese-learning-related courses and programs, such as Chinese language teaching at all levels, professional training for university, secondary and elementary school Chinese teachers, tests for a certificate of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, Chinese competitions, consultations for further Chinese studies in China and introductions to Chinese culture.

Confucius Institutes are coordinated through the Confucius Institute Headquarters in Beijing, which is responsible for formulating rules and regulations, assessing applications for establishing new institutes, approving annual programs and budgets and supplying teaching and management staff (*People’s Daily Online*, 10/04/2007; 13/12/2007). There are three types of Confucius Institute: those entirely run by the Confucius Institute Headquarters; those entirely run by the host country under license from the Confucius Institute Headquarters; and those run through a partnership between a Chinese university, a university in the host country and the Confucius Institute Headquarters. The third type is by far the most common due to
the advantages of sharing establishment and operation costs and the prestige derived from association with host universities (Chey, 2008, p. 41; Starr, 2009, pp. 70-71).

A variation on the Confucius Institute model focused on secondary education is the Confucius Classroom. Confucius Classrooms act as focal points for Chinese language learning and teaching by connecting secondary schools to the Confucius Institute network. Through the Confucius Classroom, these schools can benefit from the expertise and resources of the Confucius Institute network in establishing and delivering their own Chinese language courses. The UK’s Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Confucius Institute for example has five Confucius Classrooms attached to it, all intended to serve this purpose in their respective regions (Starr, 2009, p. 71, 74).

China has spent US$26 million on the Confucius Institute Project (People’s Daily Online, 11/12/2007; 12/12/2007) and in just a few short years has been able to successfully establish Confucius Institutes in much of the world. The latest statistics available at the time of writing indicate there are 256 Confucius Institutes and 58 Confucius Classrooms in 81 countries (People’s Daily Online, 12/03/2009; 13/03/2009a) across Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America and Oceania. A radio-based Confucius Institute and an online Confucius Institute have also been established and a television-based Confucius Institute is under development (People’s Daily Online, 06/12/2007).

China hopes to expand this project even further by establishing 500 Confucius Institutes by the year 2010 and 1000 by 2020 (People’s Daily Online, 02/10/2006; 02/01/2007; 12/03/2009; 13/03/2009b). Confucius Institutes are obviously one element in a “systematic effort to increase China’s attractiveness and influence through language and culture” (Lampton, 2008, p. 157), but just how effective has the Confucius Institute Project been in increasing China’s influence and helping it achieve its goals?

**Limits of the Confucius Institute Project**

It is widely acknowledged in the literature on world politics that the possession of power resources does not guarantee that a state will be able to achieve its goals (Hughes, 1991, p. 92; Nossal, 1998, pp. 96-97; Ray and Kaarbo, 2005, pp. 100-101; Rourke and Boyer, 2006, p. 194). Soft power resources are no exception to this rule and it can indeed be difficult to determine the nature and extent of their contribution to accomplishing goals (Ferguson, 2003, p. 21; Huang and Ding, 2006, pp. 24-25; Nye, 2004, pp. 15-18). It is also worth noting that, despite China’s enthusiasm for soft power, Chinese studies on the topic do not address the issue of how China’s soft power resources can be converted into the achievement of foreign policy goals or provide case studies on the effectiveness of specific soft power instruments (Li, 2008, p. 306).

In order to assess the Confucius Institute Project this paper therefore follows Nye’s (2004, p. 34) proposition that for soft power to be helpful in achieving a state’s goals, “the objective measure of potential soft power has to be attractive in the eyes of specific audiences, and that attraction must influence policy outcomes”. In this case, for the Confucius Institute Project to contribute to achieving China’s goals, the Chinese language must be attractive to policy makers in other countries and this in turn must lead them to develop and implement policies in line with China’s goals.

As China sees its relations with the world’s major powers and its neighbours in the Asia Pacific region as important and has in recent years taken steps to improve these relations
and further its own interests within them (Cheng, 2001, p. 296; Zhang and Tang, 2005, pp. 51-56; Zhao, 2004, pp. 146-148), this section will examine a selection of China's relations with major powers and neighbouring countries possessing Confucius Institutes — namely the USA, Japan and Australia — in an attempt to ascertain whether the Confucius Institute Project has helped China achieve its goals. In each case it will describe which of China's goals feature in these relations and evaluate whether they have been furthered since the establishment of Confucius Institutes.

**China's Relations with Countries with Confucius Institutes**

Because the USA is currently the world's sole superpower, China will need its cooperation to achieve its goals in world politics. This will involve working to modify the international system to its own liking, while avoiding negative reactions to and interference with such efforts from the USA (Deng and Wang, 2005, pp. 4-5; Harding, 1992, pp. 359-360; Lampton, 2001, p. 10; Liu, 2008, p. 555). Soft power is therefore a useful asset for China to deploy in attempting to convince the USA to comply with its goals. However, while China and the USA have a range of common interests, many contentious issues remain in this relationship (Bergsten et al., 2006, pp. 124-125, 161; Harding, 1992, p. 359; Kornberg and Faust, 2005, p. 147; Lampton, 2001, p. 360; Liu, 2008, p. 555), which would seem to indicate that the more than 50 Confucius Institutes established in the USA (Hanban website a) have had little influence. Most significantly, the USA continues to support Taiwan militarily and in other ways, diminishing China's chances of isolating it (McDougall, 2007, p. 139; Sutter, 2005, p. 88). China has also experienced difficulties securing resources in its dealings with the USA. In mid-2005, for example, some members of the US Congress threatened to take action against a take-over bid from the largely state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) for major US oil company Unocal. These threats ultimately led CNOOC to withdraw its bid (Huang and Ding, 2006, p. 40; Liu, 2008, p. 555; McDougall, 2007, p. 136).

Despite significant economic ties, China's relationship with Japan, a country with over 10 Confucius Institutes (Hanban website b), is difficult and somewhat ambiguous in many issues such as mutual concerns over military modernisation, suspicion of each others' intentions, territorial disputes and Japan's relations with Taiwan (Bergsten et al., 2006, pp. 142-144; Cheng, 2001, pp. 280-285; Lampton, 2008, pp. 197-199; Roy, 2004, pp. 89-91; Sutter, 2005, p. 140). Managing this relationship well is therefore essential to a number of China's goals, not the least of which are a peaceful international environment and the isolation of Taiwan. Soft power is thus useful to co-opt Japan to China's goals; however, events of recent years seem to indicate this is not happening. The long-standing disputes over the demarcation of the East China Sea and sovereignty of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands have continued to flare and despite several high level meetings no resolution has been reached, let alone one completely in China's favour (McDougall, 2007, pp. 152-153; Przystup, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c).

Like the USA, Japan also officially accepts the one China policy, but continues to maintain economic and other links with Taiwan (McDougall, 2007, p. 151). China's main concerns are with the 1996 US-Japan Joint Security Declaration and Japan's involvement in theatre missile defence, both of which seem to indicate that Japan may become involved in a China-Taiwan conflict (McDougall, 2007, p. 151; Roy, 2004, p. 97). Rather than steadfastly adopting China's position on the Taiwan issue as China would like, Japan has instead continued to take an ambiguous position on the nature and extent of its potential involvement in a crisis.
over Taiwan in the years since the establishment of its Confucius Institutes (Przystup, 2008b; Roy, 2004, p. 91). In this relationship, then, the Confucius Institute Project seems not to have contributed to furthering China’s goals.

In contrast to its relationship with Japan, China has a generally positive political and economic relationship with Australia (Lampton, 2008, p. 175; Mackerras, 2004, p. 15), which now has Confucius Institutes in Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane (Hanban website; The University of Sydney Confucius Institute website; Queensland University of Technology website). China is particularly interested in Australia’s natural resources, but must compete with other Asian states such as Japan, South Korea and India for access to them (Lampton, 2008, p. 175; Mackerras, 2000, pp. 195-196; Wesley, 2007, p. 77), making soft power useful for China to realise its goal of securing the resources it needs to sustain economic development. While there has certainly been much trade in natural resources with China, the Australian government recently expressed deep concern over Chinese state-owned companies investing in and potentially owning significant stakes in Australian resources companies. Indeed, Australia has been reluctant to allow such investment and ambiguous about the terms on which it will do so. For example, Minmetals’ bid for 100% of OZ Minerals was rejected on security grounds because the Prominent Hill mine, a major OZ Minerals asset, is located in the Woomera Prohibited Area weapons testing range. The Australian government indicated that it would only reconsider its position if this mine was not included in the deal. In another case, Hunan Valin was granted permission to take a 17.55% stake in Fortescue only under strict conditions relating to its appointee to Fortescue’s board, while the government has so far delayed its decision on Chinalco’s US$19.5 billion bid for an 18% stake in Rio Tinto due to concerns regrading provisions allowing Chinalco to appoint board members, Chinalco’s close links to the Chinese government and control of key mining assets which would result from the deal (The Australian, 17/05/2008; 07/07/2008; 28/03/2009; 31/03/2009; 03/04/2009; 17/04/2009). This would seem to indicate that, even in positive relationships, the Confucius Institute Project has had limited impact.

While the Confucius Institute Project, like many of China’s other soft power instruments, is relatively new and may still have an effect on policy outcomes in the future (Chey, 2008, p. 41; Huang and Ding, 2006, pp. 32-33; Li, 2008, p. 288), these examples of China’s international relations, although far from exhaustive, suggest that the Confucius Institute Project is not currently influencing policy outcomes. To put it another way, the Chinese language is not sufficiently attractive to the governments of other nations for them to acquiesce to China’s goals. Where then does this leave the Confucius Institute Project?

Shaping Preferences in Language Learning and Attitudes towards China

In a study of Japanese soft power in East and Southeast Asia, Otmażgin (2008, p. 75) argues that the benefits Japan gains from the popularity of its music, movies, television programs, computer games, comics etc. is confined to shaping cultural markets and creating a positive image of Japan. In other words, the attractiveness of Japanese popular culture helps determine what products are available to buy and contributes to consumers of such products developing positive attitudes towards Japan, but does not result in Japan having any actual influence or control over the policies and actions of the states of the region (Otmażgin, 2008, p. 97).

A similar situation would also seem to apply in the case of China’s Confucius Institute Project. Although it may not be influencing governments and their policy decisions regarding
China, Chinese language learning is undoubtedly popular the world over. According to the Chinese government, there are currently 30-40 million people learning Chinese and this is expected to increase to 100 million by 2010 (People’s Daily Online, 10/03/2006; 19/09/2006; 29/12/2006; 13/03/2009c). The increasing number of people taking the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (Chinese Proficiency Test or HSK) in recent years also demonstrates the popularity of Chinese language learning. In 2005 for instance, 26% more foreigners took the test than in 2004, resulting in a total of 117 660 test takers (People’s Daily Online, 17/01/2006a; 17/01/2006b).

The Confucius Institute Project is likely to have contributed to shaping preferences for learning Chinese through making it a more conspicuous option and providing opportunities to do so through the services offered by Confucius Institutes. Wang and Higgins (2008, p. 92, 95), for example, list NOCFL’s activities as one of the main reasons for the recent expansion of Chinese language teaching in the UK and argue that the country’s Confucius Institutes play an important networking role between teachers, learners and the education system. Similarly, Gary Sigley, director of the Confucius Institute at the University of Western Australia, described the Confucius Institute’s role as that of a “bridge” to Chinese language learning. As a result of establishing a network with the general public, this Confucius Institute is able to “get to know more clearly what kind of courses are welcomed by which group of people, so that we can better arrange the courses and attract more learners” (quoted in People’s Daily Online, 10/12/2008). Many courses and other services have indeed been provided by Confucius Institutes around the world. According to Chinese Education Minister Zhou Ji, Confucius Institutes have run a total of 6000 classes with over 120 000 learners and 2000 cultural activities attended by more than one million people. In addition, the radio-based and online Confucius Institutes have brought Chinese language learning opportunities to learners in 149 countries (People’s Daily Online, 10/12/2008; 14/02/2009; 12/03/2009; 13/03/2009a).

Chinese language learning may in turn result in learners developing positive attitudes towards China and the Chinese people. Research into second language acquisition does in fact suggest learners may develop a deeper appreciation and empathy for the speakers of the language and their society as a result of the learning process (Ellis, 1994, p. 198; Moran, 2001, p. 109). For example, Higgins and Sheldon (2001, p. 114) report that children studying Chinese at an English secondary school had largely positive attitudes towards China, describing it as “beautiful”, “big”, “busy”, “rapidly modernising”, “hi-tech”, “increasingly important in the world”, and having “interesting history and culture” as well as “good food”.

This does of course raise the question: why has China invested considerable resources and effort into shaping preferences in language learning and attitudes towards China when there is little if any evidence at this stage to suggest that China has increased its influence in world politics as a result of the Confucius Institute Project?

**The Confucius Institute Project as a Long Term Strategy?**

Garrison’s (2005, p. 25) argument that “China is a patient power and a savvy strategist” could provide an answer to this question. According to this view:

China is willing to move forward like water – with patience it will eventually wear down its challengers. China is also willing to tolerate some ebb and flow within immediate interests and share the pie, as it looks forward to its long-term goals and increasing
its overall influence. The water analogy is particularly relevant because paradoxically, nothing is softer or holds greater potential strength. The danger comes with being lulled into a false sense that the status quo will never evolve or change. China’s strategy is to hoard its resources and contain its adversaries rather than destroy them. It subtly can carve out a sphere of influence in East Asia and beyond (Garrison, 2005, p. 29).

Through the Confucius Institute Project, China could, over time, potentially create a large number of sympathetic people dispersed around the world as learners are encouraged to take up Chinese language learning and their attitudes towards China are changed as a result. To give an example, Confucius Institutes teach Chinese as it is spoken and written in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which means teaching putonghua, the PRC’s standard variety of Mandarin, simplified characters and the pinyin romanisation system. Teaching materials also portray PRC views and perspectives, which means learners are likely to be more influenced by PRC views rather than those from other sections of the Chinese-speaking world, especially Taiwan (Chey, 2008, p. 40; Ding and Saunders, 2006, p. 21; Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 18).

The benefits of shaping preferences in language learning and attitudes towards China in this way should not be underestimated, especially as some of the current cohort of Chinese language learners may one day be in positions of power and influence. China has already achieved such results through training foreign students in China. Citing figures from China’s Ministry of Education, Lampton (2008, p. 155) says that over 30 former students who undertook studies in China have ministerial positions in their own countries, more than 10 have served as their country’s ambassadors to China, 30 have high level positions in their country’s embassies in China, 120 are associate professors or professors and hundreds more serve in cultural, economic and trade entities involved with China. Those who have studied in China will have a greater understanding, appreciation and openness to China’s views and interests in world politics (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 19; Shambaugh, 2005, p. 25). China’s intention is therefore likely to be to create the same results amongst students studying Chinese language through Confucius Institutes around the world.

The Confucius Institute Project then, while not appearing to have any immediate impact, may well turn out to be a significant factor in China’s international relations in the future.

**Conclusion**

China’s enthusiasm for soft power has been a key characteristic of its foreign policy and international relations in recent years. The promotion of Chinese language learning throughout the world, conducted primarily through the Confucius Institute Project, is an important aspect of China’s soft power strategy. Since this project began in 2004, Confucius Institutes have been established across much of the world and look set to expand further. The influence and benefits China gains from this project are nevertheless currently limited to shaping preferences in language learning and attitudes towards China rather than policy outcomes. However, the potential long term results of the Confucius Institute Project could have significant implications for China’s relations with other nations, and further studies will be needed to describe, analyse and interpret such implications.
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References


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