

# Western Perceptions on Confucius Institute Advancement of Chinese Language and Culture: A Narrative Review\*

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This study deeply focuses on the perceptions surrounding the operations of Confucius Institute (henceforth CI) in western countries. From the body of academia, intellectual groups and policy makers, CI cooperation with partner institutions are being criticized of hidden agendas through the application of soft power, interferences in host institutions academic work, funding of projects, teacher recruitments, and teaching and learning contents. The above stated issues of western researchers and policy makers have indeed created a negative perception against all CI centers and their operations. This research applied a narrative review of experienced and endowed researchers' works, associations' reports, conference and meeting reports, and media publications on CI operations in some western countries. A detail review was conducted on the diverse perceptions being held by these bodies. Eleven qualitative articles out of a 25 were covered due to its clarity and direct relation with the objectives of this review. These articles were found to be very representative with its coverage location. The findings of this review are presented in three parts as follows: Firstly, there are misrepresentations of perceptions on CIs as an arm of Chinese government soft power partner institutions influencing academic work. Secondly, there are contradicting opinions from host institutions and other stakeholders about the clarity of China's CI in other countries. And thirdly, an in-depth attention was given to the global objectives of all CIs in foreign countries, the extend of transformational changes taking place and possible recommendations that will foster a healthy future cooperation among CI, partner institutions, and respective countries government.

*Keywords:* Confucius Institute, perceptions, western countries, Chinese government, academic freedom

## Introduction

The over popularization of Confucius Institute (CI) program of Chinese language and culture advancement in western journal publications, committees report, and media submissions has led to the clarification of what it stands for and how best its concept can be best understood among researchers and opinion groups of different countries (Hartig, 2015; Xin, 2019). Language learning centers like the British Council of the United Kingdom is supported and constructed by the British government, Alliance Francaise by the French government, whiles CI is a Chinese government led non-profit educational organization affiliated with Ministry of Education (MOE) of China and committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide

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(Chao, Hakam, & Lin, 2016; Kiwan & Meinhof, 2011; Xiang & Huang, 2015). It is therefore administrated by its headquarters Hanban, a seat in Beijing, constituted by other departments of the China's public system (Xin, 2019). As part of the consistency of China's language and culture advancement in other countries both far and near, successive government from Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and currently Chairman Xi Jinping have continuously pursued the countries national agenda through the deepening of cultural exchange relations with other countries (An, 2019; Yue, 2013). The outstanding strategy of internationalization of Chinese language through CI has been describe by some researchers and overseas media as most wonderful and effective and sees its tremendous representation all over the world as surprising with many accepting to study Chinese as a foreign language (Xin, 2019; Zhao & Huang, 2010). Notwithstanding this, researchers are defining CI as an arm of Chinese government soft power diplomacy in host countries and also CI as an institution that infringe on host institutions academic freedom (Pan, 2013; Sahlins, 2014; Peterson, 2017; Novak, 2019). Considering the gravity of western perceptions and its impact on the operations of CIs across the globe, this review work is to help identify, align, and misalign western perceptions between researchers of some selected countries within the west on CIs operations in foreign countries.

As more institution across the globe partner with Chinese universities towards the establishment of CI centers in their local universities, the unfolding perception from the west is demeaning the importance of language advancement and collaboration. This study has helped to unearth the issues of western perceptions against the realities being portrayed under institutions context. It has also related on the suggestions made to stakeholders in creating a healthy partnership between local institutions and Chinese partners.

The perceptions about CIs have the possibilities of destroying relationship among institution, Chinese business organizations, and governments in the world. Hence, policies and agreements can be structure from findings and suggestions of this review in boosting international cooperation's and relationship with Chinese institutions, organizations, and governments, respectively.

## Literature Review

Following the pursuit of developed countries with language and culture learning centers in other countries, Chinese government after the opening era to the international community has been establishing the CI towards its national language and global image advancement (Xiang & Huang, 2015).

### CIs Centers

Researchers, association groups of higher education, and policy makers across the west (denoting countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Italy, Germany, France, and Spain) even though accepted the partnership of establishing CIs in their institutions, until recent years have started accusing CI centers (Yang, 2014). The above listed countries are not only considered as western countries for this review, but also their relationship with China and the number of CIs located within their prestigious universities served as some of the bases for their inclusion. Table 1 below depicts the current number of CI centers in these respective countries with some closed down.

Table 1

#### *Countries and Number of CI centers*

Countries	US	UK	Canada	Australia	Germany	Italy	France	Spain
No. of CI	81	30	12	14	19	12	14	8

Source. Hanban, 2020.

According to Volpe and Qiuyang (2016), the first tension criticizing CI emerged in an article written by an anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in 2013 (Wang & Adamson, 2015; Sahlins, 2014). This was then echoed by other scholars in the United States. This gradually sparked the debate on activities of CI centers with more in the United States. Even though other scholars from other countries also criticize the publication of Marshall, it never ended there but continue to degenerate into higher dimensions leading to the closing down of some CI centers in the United States with more on the list being compelled to closed down or under renegotiation for new terms of corporation (Peterson, 2019; Sharma, 2019). This unprecedented new development has led to many perceptions and abrogation of CI contracts and partnership with Chinese universities and Hanban, the headquarters of CI in the world.

### **CI as Chinese Government arm of Soft Power**

The issues of CIs operation of Chinese language and cultural advancement has until recently being branded or associated with soft power diplomacy by Chinese government as a global potential hegemony with developed countries (Wang, 2020). There is the perception that, CI is an arm of Chinese government propagating China's agenda of soft power diplomacy in host countries and the world as a whole through its establishment in host universities (Zaharna, 2014; Hartig, 2012). As countries try to go global with the advancement of their language and culture towards creating a global image, the issue of soft power diplomacy arises. The perception associated with such viewpoint gives a different implication to the international community annexing some form of reactions from stakeholders. Nye (1990) has over the years expatiates on the transition of world order power that has dynamically been influenced by the unfolding global developments of human aspirations, shift from military power, disintegration of union states, economical advancements, educational and interdependence of nation states, globalization, and international network of collaboration (Suter, 2006). This has induced countries to be interdependent on each other with the idea of sharing resources towards contributing to the building blocks of their respective countries development. Furthermore, global power transition may have brought about changes in the knowledge of various countries following the exchange and cooperation of external human resources through governments investing in their nationals to study and acquire external knowledge needed to contribute to their countries development (Nye, 1990; Shoemaker, 2017). This level of educational exchange and interdependence may have resulted in human technological and organizational joint cooperation in projects. This has until recently turn up to become an issue of institutions, organizations, and country discourse.

Considering critics perception about CI as an arm of Chinese government soft power across the globe, little has been said about the fact that, other language learning centers of developed countries like the British Council and Alliance Francaise are all funded by respective governments (Li, 2012; Zhang, 2007; Li, Mirmirani, & Ilacqua, 2009). Hoare-Vance (2009) emphasized on this fact that language centers of countries are propelled and powered by their respective government and for that matter cannot be disassociated form the government. Nye (2004) explained soft power as ability of an organization, institutions, and states to respond to something that the partners wants without necessary being initiated by themselves or any application of force or payments. Thus, that is to say, organizations are indirectly doing something that their partners or financier wants but is also benefiting from it. The diplomatic way of exhibiting soft power is reflective in culture, ideology, and institutions operations with other parties. This goes to affirm the ideal that the strategic disposition of Chinese government arm of soft power using the CI is legitimate and very diplomatically

constructed (Hartig, 2012). Hubbert (2014) talked about how CI's educational exchange is being used to build on the strength of China's soft power. This was further substantiated with CI summer tour for some New Zealand's high school students' visit to China. This trip was seen as a way of introducing the students to Chinese traditional culture with successful achievements, learning and practicing of classic art and events that was really telling them of how China has become powerful in its activities to reckon with the worlds developed countries. The strategic plan adopted with the establishment of CI centers and classrooms is also highlighted by Schmidt (2013) as being well organized and powerfully orchestrated to put China into a flexible superiority position over others in its advancement of national language and global image.

Mckinsey Global Institute Report (2019) on China and the world reveals China is actually a global power to reckon with in some scale, but also challenges the power of China as not being reflective in all dimensions that can be translated into global integration as a super powerful nation (Meng, 2012). Consequentially, Shoemaker (2017) revealed that the display of Chinese government arm of soft power diplomacy among partner institutions may not be definitely the same with its outlets. Even though CI is found to exhibit some level of soft power, it has some internal challenges that make it practices unstable. For example, the perception of Chinese government soft power on Africa countries like Kenya and Nigeria as to Chinese language study and work opportunities has been found to be unequal. Whiles Kenya claims of not having job opportunities among Chinese organization in Kenya, because these organizations employed interpreters from China and brings them to work for them in Kenya. Alternatively, Nigerians are of the view that an opportunity is created for the local experts to work in Chinese organizations as interpreters and translators. Ding and Sanders (2006) based on researcher's publications from the US perceive that CI centers are Chinese government prospects of soft power towards the west and other countries but do not interfere in anything outside its core objectives with partner institutions day to day activities. This relates to review objective two on some publications against the negative perceptions of CI as interfering in host institutions academic activities.

### **CI and Academic Freedom**

The pursuit of academic excellence by higher education has led to collaboration with international organizations towards educational advancement. According to Zaharna (2014), CI establishment took into account the prestigious nature of partnering with well-endowed host institutions in affiliated countries towards educational partnership and collaboration. This practice made it extremely easy for them to establish a strong international exchange programs with the institutions. It also helps in the introduction of CI projects with its affiliate institutions at the lower level of the host countries educational system with Toronto District Board Schools having such partnership agreements for the public schools but this was ended as a result of community pressure (Wu, 2019). Wang and Adamson (2015) divulged more inside into some level of ambiguity in the operations of CI in other countries that makes these partner organizations to criticize and creates some perceptions of mistrust about CI in other countries (Sahlins, 2014). Australians researcher's perception on the establishment of CI's in Australians higher education is centered on the fact that Australian universities are benefiting financially from the Chinese government through its acceptance and running of a CI center (Kwok, 2018). Secondly, Australian researchers and committee reports are based on the argument that CI centers are interfering with academic freedom works of local universities on areas deemed no go for local universities by the Chinese government to teach in their course work of Chinese studies (Kwok, 2018). Within the media arena, there is the perception of CI through its headquarters Hanban, having a contract of agreement with host

universities that overrides local institutional regulations. Hunter (2019) demonstrated that local universities under contract with Hanban need to accept China's directives on CIs in some teaching specification but went further to reveal steps that have been taken to amend some kind of clauses in their agreement to enhance the host universities autonomy. This was supported with a quote on new agreements between Victoria University and Hanban (2019) as:

The institute must accept Hanban's assessment on teaching quality but adds if the teaching relates to a Victoria University award course the teaching quality must also satisfy Vitoria University's requirement.

There have been many indications of CI not really having direct influence or connection with host universities academic work, and therefore, the perception on interfering in academic freedom needs to be reviewed and where there exist, it should be considered in the interest of host institutions rules and regulations amidst all foreign institutional policies of meeting global standards.

### **CI Transformation in Cooperation**

Since the inception of CIs centers in foreign countries towards Chinese language and culture advancement, there has been some level of transformation in cooperation between institutions and organizations of respective countries. The transformation focus of CI has served as a vehicle and platform for joint collaboration of international exchange of student's faculty members and business organizations (Zeng, 2017; Hanban, 2018). The platform of CI helps in building a bridge between Chinese organizations and that of the host countries in projects and business cooperation's. For instance, the Business Confucius Institute (BCI) of Athens University of Economics and Business partnered with some Chinese business organizations in strengthen and building strong business relations (Athens University of Economics and Business CI Report, 2011). The gradual shift of CI center operations into the training of employees of organizations with Chinese language skills are generated by the local demand and global national advance of Chinese organization in the host countries. Y. Chang and M. Chang (2011) in the field of oceanographic study discuss how American and Taiwanese international exchange and cooperation help in the area of ocean physics leading to the exploitation of the impact of waves on the ocean and how typhoons affect the ocean. This cooperation lead to the exchange of students and faculty fellows to the United States in developing the local host knowledge and technicalities for future research relating to oceanography. Li, Mirmirani, and Ilacqua (2009) postulated on the deep implication associated with International exchange of human resources of faculty fellows and institutional leaders. The idea of sharing knowledge through such programs goes a long way to strength local countries human resources and their pillars of development in this globalized environment.

Considering China's massive investment in Africa, the need for building African human resources capabilities became important to Forum on China-Africa Cooperation with CI serving the course of developing African human resources with Chinese language skills (King, 2014). In addition, partnership between host institution and China's CI partner institutions are done alongside areas of special interest (Hartig, 2015; Paradise, 2009). Moi University in Kenya partnership with Shanghai based Donghua University has a common interest in textile engineering and fashion design. This is believed to satisfy their interest towards research cooperation and joint collaboration on projects of mutual benefit (Confucius Institute at Moi University, 2015). As this cooperation is not only based on Chinese language and culture studies, the transformational cooperation among these institutions serve as a bridge between Kenyan's and Chinese textiles business community.

### **Methods**

The unfolding perception of researchers in some western countries surrounding CIs has led to the stated objectives and the topic of interest. Following Green, Johnson, and Adams (2006), this review work is based on researcher's publications relating to some keywords (such as "CI," "Chinese government," "perceptions," "soft power," and "academic freedom") deemed very essential in unearthing various views presented in writing about CI. An extension of search also had a construction linked to some western countries specifically US, UK, Canada, Australia, Italy, Germany, Spain, and France.

A systematic approach of getting insightful publications was conducted using online data base with scholarly articles, associations, conferences, and committees of higher education reports, from special research sites, such as Web of Science, Sage, and Google Scholar. Conference and committee's reports, such as Americans Association of University Professors (AAUP), National Association of Scholars (NAS), and reports from policy makers in some countries were deemed very influential in this review work. Since they are representation of intellectuals involved in higher education and their opinions are considered very important in these institutions decision making. This search strategy helped in reading the abstract easily and whenever relevant sources were found, full content was assessed. The second strategic search guide was publications over the past decade as the issue of perceptions on Chinese government and CI can be said to have started from early 2010 till date.

As a way of increasing the efficiency of this review work, the perceptions, main focus of authors and reports of associations closely related to higher education presented in the selected articles were aligned with the objectives set across in this paper. Notwithstanding, these strategic steps, some limitations relating to presentation from some of the denoted western countries were not enough due to language barrier in retrieving more articles from different countries. But other writings reviewed are a representation of western researchers and professional bodies of higher education. Narrowing down to the western countries denoted, 11 articles of keen interest were selected from the 25 articles due to its consistency and broad expressions of the writer's findings on the themes adopted in this narrative review. These 11 articles were considered and analyzed with findings and conclusions presented to facilitate institutions and policy maker's decision making.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of this review was done based on common practices of paper review and the personal understanding and reflection of interpretation given by other researcher's considered in this narrative review (Hammersley, 2001). As the review work is centered on perception from the west, the selected areas of coverage were adopted based on the presence of CI centers in their prestigious universities. This helped in understanding the perception of other researchers within the west relating to the presence and operations of CI within higher institutions in their respective countries. The essential aspects of these articles relating to this narrative review were classified into two different tables. Table 2 shows the basic information of selected articles (author, title of the article, country of coverage, year of publication, and the main focus presented in the abstract). Table 3 displays the collection of the key component of this review, being the perceptions presented by the authors depicting the mindset of the researchers, policy making groups, higher education committees, and associations in these respective countries about the partnership of CI and host universities. The author also tried to deduce the relevant findings of the topic and some conclusions or recommendations towards the perceived ideas about CIs.

Table 2

*Basic Information of Selected Articles*

S/N	Author's	Country's of coverage	Article title	Year	Main focus
1	Hartig F.	Germany	Confusion About CIs: Soft Power Push or Conspiracy?	2010	It focuses on the linkage between CI and the concepts of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and propaganda.
2	Wu T.	Canada	Canadians Perceptions of CI: Culture Experience or Political Propaganda?	2017	It focuses on revealing the cognitive obstacle between China and Canada relations from cultural field.
3	Kwok Jackson	Australia	Is There a Problem With ... CIs in Australia?	2018	Its focuses on Australian education system to be prepared for the global pressure of critics against CI cooperation on universities campuses.
4	Wang D. & Adamson B.	China and USA (Review is based on USA)	War and Peace: Views of CIs in China and USA	2015	It tries to compare the views held by media, academicians, politicians and other interest parties within China and USA on CI activities.
5	Kwan Y. W. C.	Canada	Cultural Diplomacy and Internationalization of Higher Education: The experiences of three CIs in Canada	2013	It focuses on the host universities perception of CI as China's cultural diplomacy and soft power.
6	US Senate Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations Report	USA	China's Impact on the US Education System	2019	Its focus is critiquing CI operations on US higher education with the full support of Chinese government. The issues of CI Transparency with host institutions and countries as a whole.
7	American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Report	North America	On Partnerships with Foreign Governments: The Case of CI	2014	It focus on the issue of CI emulating the principle of cultural ambassadorship and its associate programs like the others (British Council, Alliance Francaise, etc.) but is relatively connected to imperial past, geopolitical agendas and soft power objectives.
8	Volpe M. & Quiyang L.	Italy	Image of CI in Italian Media Discourse	2016	It focuses on the international debate of china's strategic expansion and global image and the corresponding aims of the CI.
9	Peterson R. (National Association of Scholars Report)	USA	Outsourced to China: CIs and soft power in American Higher Education	2017	It focuses on how Chinese government has planted CI to offer Chinese language and culture courses in colleges and university across the world with more in the US.
10	Conservative Party Human Rights Commission Report	UK	China's CIs: An Inquiry by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission	2019	It tries to explore allegations on CIs in British Higher Education as a positive or negative influence.
11	Whittaker S.	Review is based on USA	China's Rise and the CI: Chinese and American Perspectives	2013	It tries to understand and explores how CI is perceived in the eyes of American critics of Chinese government influencing American educators in restricting academic freedom.

Table 3

*Perceptions, Findings, and Way Forward*

S/N	Review article title	Perceptions	Some related findings	Some related recommendations or conclusions
1	Confusion about CIs: Soft Power Push or Conspiracy	The financial and organizational linkage of CI with the Chinese government has created the assumption of CI as a propaganda tool of Chinese government.	CI obeys and operates by the local laws of its host and respect local cultural exchanges. There is no interference of CI headquarters (Hanban) on content of study materials.	CI is serving the purpose of cultural diplomacy for international environment to know more about China's achievements. CIs do not tell lies or half-truth but when it comes to some topics, they are silent or quiet.
2	Canadians Perceptions of CI: Culture Experience or Political Propaganda?	It argues that, CI act as an arm of Chinese government. As an educational institution, CI cannot abide by the principle of independence from governmental interference.	Canadian researchers and groups have divergent understanding of CIs as a political structure by the Chinese government. CI is being used by Chinese government in host institutions to influence academic freedom of what to teach and learn.	China insist on its establishment as strictly aiming to help foreigners learn Chinese language and culture as a way of building mutual understanding of china and the world. The benefits associated with China's CI are currently limited to shaping preferences in language learning attitudes towards China.
3	Is There a Problem With ... CIs in Australia?	It follows global perception of CI being used as a political propaganda purposes and undermining of academic freedom as critique by other countries intellectuals.	Australian perception about CI has no solid foundation of real situations but based on critiques views. Stating that allegations overstate the degree of influences by CI. General preparation against intellectual pressure is envisage from visiting scholars from aggressive countries against CI.	Australian universities should re-examine its contract, increase supervision of CI activities and enforce stringent measures to safeguard academic freedom of expressions. Strict internal assessment of CI review by a neutral board without CI Directors to help straighten and manage the activities of the institute. University education should never be subjected to any government or political organizations peril.
4	War and Peace: Views of CIs in China and USA.	The wide spread of CI is an issue of controversial role and ideological identity with the potentiality of spreading Chinese government propaganda and authoritarianism.	China-USA Chinese language advancement came into place after it was listed under the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) by the President of United states in 2001. The fast development of China in global matters is casting growing fear on the US with China's soft power of cultural hegemony, and of threat of academic freedom posed by the presence of CI on university campuses.	The rising wave of Chinese popularity has a great commercial viability due to China's economic and political strength but if China should lose this, the desire to study Chinese will fall or decline. The proposal for the transformation of CI from ambiguous cultural institute into an international research center and quality Chinese teacher education center will boost its practicability and sustenance.
5	Cultural Diplomacy and Internationalization of Higher Education: The experiences of three CIs in Canada	The CI is a construction of China's cultural diplomacy and soft power strategy.	There is really little knowledge about CI organization and administration with partner institutions. The model of CI is a little different from the western counterparts.	There are symbiotic relationship benefits of hosting or partnering with a Chinese university through a CI. The sustainability of the CI in the future is not justifiable unless a critical review is done.



(Table 3 to be continued)

6	China's Impact on the US Education System	CIs are not strictly a cultural institute but are organizations of Chinese government.	CI setup in US educational system is propagating China's economic strength and poses a security threat. CI operations in US institutions have non-disclosure provisions and adherence to both China and US law.	US institutions should insist on CI centers to remain transparent and open to all level of operations and be independent of Chinese government control to be a non-governmental organization (NGO). US institutions should continue to partner with Chinese universities but should never under anyway compromise academic freedom.
7	On Partnerships with Foreign Governments: The Case of CI	The non-adherence by foreign institutions and organizations to the professional bodies standards and practices (Employment by partner institutions within local context).	The CI is to educate Americans to know more about China than political regimes of any deviance. Tries to request CI for openness and transparency in all its dealings with institutions and country as a whole.	Informing all American agency dealings with CI to ensure America first. China should demonstrate that, CIs are not engage in espionage, surveillance, propaganda or censorship.
8	Image of CI in Italian Media Discourse	A response to global debate of CI aims and the truth about its operations against political propaganda and the threat to academic freedom.	There are counter expressions by some intellectuals within the Italian education system about CI as Chinese government political propaganda and academic freedom issues in partner institutions.	Italian intellectuals, CI exhibits a partial view of Chinese world and stress on the importance of CI being an international platform for cultural exchange and the maintenance of academic freedom
9	Outsourced to China: CIs and soft power in American Higher Education	CI is a part of Chinese government overseas propaganda efforts as weapons of soft power.	Chinese government is using CI to whitewashed, censored and entice partner institutions with financial and funding support in Chinese language and culture advancement.	Should end all contracts with Hanban and not renew expiring contracts. Register CI as international agency and be subjected to transparency and declaration of all financial dealings with partner institutions.
10	China's CIs: An Inquiry by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission	Responding to allegations raised by certain researchers and groups on CI about freedom of expression among students, Chinese government security system on students and CI as propaganda setup of Chinese government.	They welcome and encourage the acceptance of teaching and learning of Chinese language. The current status of CIs constitutes an academic treat with freedom of expression and a representation of the Chinese Communist Party to spread propaganda and suppress critics.	A call for all current British universities, schools and other educational institutions to review all current agreements. A suspension of all further agreements until such review is generally accepted. Transparency and inclusion of all curriculum related issues to enhance independence, holistic and balance discussions of diversity of topics including no-go areas (Tibet, Taiwan, and Tiananmen Massacre).
11	China's Rise and the CI: Chinese and American Perspectives	CI is center for political propaganda and threat of academic freedom on university campuses.	China's search for soft power may be driven by its desire to counter negative western opinion. CIs are undoubtedly soft power initiatives directed by the Chinese government, but their primary activities are educational rather than political.	American policymakers should focus less on the CIs as a source of a soft power controversy between the United States and China. Chinese government needs to reconsider its language and culture advancement policy to conform with a non-governmental educational organization

**Discussion**

Considering the method adopted, analysis and findings made, three main constants revolving around CI in some western countries were observed. In addition to the most occurring perceptions across the various articles, some revelations make these discussions important for all stakeholders. Also, there are possible

recommendations being put across for institutions, intellectual groups, and policy makers to consider in strengthening their partnership with local institutions, organizations, and government. In response to the review aims, the perceptions around CI establishment in foreign countries have been captured in Table 2 and its being presented alongside my personal findings as a broad response of this discourse under the following themes:

### **Perceptions on CI and Chinese Government**

The literature and submissions on this topic has one main perception of great concern to all authors and groups. Chinese government support and involvement in the setup and operations of CI in foreign countries is being captured as the bedrock of all other perception. Most of the articles used in this review see the presence of Chinese government through the CI as a government propaganda tool, soft power manipulation using cultural diplomacy with institutions of higher learning. And that, Chinese government is using the CI to get its way through other countries higher education system, organizations, and governmental institutions (Wang & Adamson, 2015; US Congressional Research Service Report, 2019; Kwan, 2013; AAUP Report, 2014; Volpe & Quiyang, 2016). The general and broader objective of CI program as Chinese government foreign policy is to advance China's national language and global image across the international community (Wu, 2017). This perception of Chinese government interference and authority over the CI makes the acceptance of China's CI as an International NGO within the educational system of other countries, such as the US, UK, and Australia very difficult. This has resulted in the rise of the current abrogation of contracts and the closing down of CI operations with some of their prestigious Institutions (Peterson, 2017; US Congressional Research Service Report, 2019; Kwok, 2018). As most of the authors and groups argue against Chinese government presence in institutions of higher learning hosting CI, they are of the view that Chinese government is using financial provisions as a strong point of coercing the institutions of higher learning in accepting the partnership deal of hosting CI in their campus (Peterson, 2017). Another aspect of great concern by some critics is that, Chinese government by their act of soft power diplomacy has manipulated institutions of higher learning to accept their terms without considering into details the legal background of its host countries and its infringing on some educational rights of higher education, such as academic freedom and freedom of expression (US Congressional Research Service Report, 2019). But Wu (2017) argued that CI serving as the Chinese government propaganda tool, the adoption of cultural and soft power diplomacy strategy in foreign countries should be considered as a normal order of economically strong and powerful countries ideology of reaching out to the other parts of the world. China is aiming at helping foreigners to learn Chinese language and culture as a means of building mutual understanding and cooperation between China and the world (Wu, 2017; Hartig, 2012; Conservative Party Human Rights Commission Report-UK, 2019). The over emphases of this perception makes it extremely necessary to address the issue of the CI within the global context as an international educational NGO like Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other foundations, such as Fulbright foundation of the United States and Norway (Peterson, 2017). To what extended can an educational organization like CI be free from government support if its due objective is to promote its country's image and language internationally, it absolutely impossible especially when its sources of funding is still coming from the government. Like British Council and Alliance Francaise, Goethe Institute and all other language learning centers, their source of funding definitely is coming from their respective countries government (Hughes, 2014). JICA and KOICA operating globally as agencies in developing countries helping in the education sector also have their funding support from their government. Its

therefore necessary for researchers and intellectual groups to acknowledge the presence of Chinese government in CI activities, however, it should be seen that the level of autonomy by CI headquarters from governmental influence matters a lot in the eyes of the international community and educational organization. Therefore, international exchange and educational cooperation is accepted to be void of political manipulation of any sort.

### **Perception on Strategic Location of CIs**

Unlike all other language learning centers, such as the British Council, Alliance Francaise, and Cervantes Institute operating as a standalone from any higher institution of learning, Chinese government in pursuance of its language and culture advancement coupled with its global image established CI on the campus of prestigious universities in foreign countries (Kwan, 2013). Using three approaches with the first being established as a standalone culture center, it had only one of this type established in Paris as a Chinese culture center and also the only of its kind globally that is similar but a little different from the ones established by the European countries. As the latest model of language and culture advancement across the globe, China's move of partnering a local university and a Chinese university under the arrangement of Chinese Language Council International is undoubtedly great and strategic with its project location. The institutions of higher learning have indeed created a strong recognition for the CI and caused a drastic increase in CI across the globe. This has also orchestrated an increase in the number of registered students in the CI around the world with more students enrolling into the study of Chinese language using the institute and Confucius classrooms. Having located itself strategically and gaining great recognition in higher education, it has become a focus of discussion among researchers and policy makers. The perception of CI influence on academic freedom of host institution is indeed crippling the total acceptance of CI by some western universities (Volpe & Quiyang, 2015; US Congressional Research Service Report, 2019). But with little substantive or no evidence of CI influencing host institutions academic work, it is necessary for all to consider its educational functions as a top priority before its criticisms of institutional interference since the CI is a minute unity of an entire university academic setup. In addition, CI strategic location in higher education is believed to be addressing human resources needs of local countries towards future demand of language experts (Brecht & Davidson, 2013; King, 2014). As more universities students adopt the study of Chinese language as a major program, they acquire the language skills that enable them to help bridge the gap between the Chinese and local business. Special training is organized in such institutions for national and organization workers of host countries towards building a healthy relation with their international partners.

### **Perception on CI Partnership With Prestigious Institutions**

Normally, CI are considered to be the same as the European Language Learning Centers, unfortunately the model of CI establishment and partnering with institution of higher learning has been found to be extremely different and has specific agenda of purpose aside the idea of language and culture advancement. It has some special adherence of technicalities between host institution and its Chinese Partner Institution paired by its headquarters Hanban. Hartig (2012) explained that arrangement of partnership between the two universities have some sort of project cooperation's dwelling on the strength of the various institutions.

For instance, the CI of London School of Business and Political Science cooperates in the area of Business, the CI at Waseda University cooperates in research whiles the University of California CL focuses on Health and Medicine. (Paradise, 2009)

Aside the joint venture cooperation, ownership of CI establishment is done by the two parties with both

sides contributing in both physical structures, material, and human resources needs towards the completion of a project center in the host university. The CI then serves as platform for bridging cooperation's between the two parties in areas of international exchange, research, and projects cooperation's. The perception of CI influences its establishment in host institutions brings the question of CI management within international establishment. Upon the establishment of a CI, dual leadership system is created with oversight responsibility and control lying in the hands of heads or chancellors of the host institutions (Hughes, 2014). The checks and balance leadership system is in total fulfillment of institutional structures in making the administration open and void of manipulation.

The advancement of Chinese language and culture like any other powerful country language needs global attention. Higher educational institutions definitely play an important role and therefore need to be given a free hand in playing its role of meeting the human resources needs in this era of a globalized educational function. The development of countries human resource needs research cooperation, international exchange of students, faculty fellows and sharing of knowledge from its higher educational institutions. Again one can definitely acknowledge the succession plan of ownership associated with the Chinese model of the CI with host institutions. The training of host institutions personnel and students with the needed language and administrative skills of becoming Chinese language experts in teaching and managing the centers in case the Chinese resource personnel's return back to their country is seen as unique and a strong way of sustaining this project through the higher education system of foreign countries.

### **Conclusions**

By summing up the general position of CI in foreign countries concerning Chinese language and culture advancement through host institutions and local government, Chinese government foreign policy geared towards spreading its national language and creating a global image for China is face with global challenges of diverse perceptions from the west. Through the CI project, Chinese as a foreign language of study has yielded a positive result within the shortest time frame. Even though its acceptance has transcended very well among institutions of higher learning and gaining the status of major area of study for a bachelor degree, it is faced with the negative perceptions that has the potential of derailing the core objectives of the institute if not repackaged to suit the new global demand as a strict non-governmental educational organization. In addition, the perception of CI entrenching on host institutions academic freedom on international grounds through its partnership with local educational structures should not be considered a serious issue of concern since local educational institutions has the power to accept or reject any conditions deemed to be infringing on their institutional academic freedom.

There is lack of understanding of China's model of language and cultural advancement with institutions of higher learning within the international community. This is attributed to lack of openness to information to stakeholders and policy makers, it is therefore necessary for CI headquarters and Chinese government to reconsider the establishment and existence of the CI from the foreign perspective in making the necessary changes deemed beneficial for the evolution of Chinese language and culture advancement across the globe.

Finally, as the second mostly influential language in the field of business and now gaining maximum attention in the field of academia, it is indeed prudent for the world to acknowledge its importance in creating a healthy global atmosphere for future cooperation. It is also very necessary for CI headquarters, Chinese universities partnering with foreign institutions to re-examine its policy contractual agreements on the

international arena to be able to thrive in its global advancement else it becomes an economic failure which may lose its great presence across the globe. A more open and non-governmental educational institution will go a long way to clarify misconceptions associated with the establishment of a CI and its operations in foreign countries.

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