

Analysis of the Network Communication Approach to Public Diplomacy:

Case Study of the Confucius Institute at Carleton University

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Abstract

Since 2004, China has set up over 450 Confucius Institutes to promote its language and culture and thereby, to shape its image. The Confucius Institutes have been seen as a highly networked public diplomacy initiative, and appear to adopt a relational rather than an information framework. This research paper studies the Confucius Institute at Carleton University (CICU) and applies the network communication approach to test whether the CICU conforms to tenets of Zaharna's relational framework of public diplomacy. The research paper's findings offer a concrete model for building a network-based cultural institute.

Keywords: public diplomacy, network communication approach, the relational framework, China's soft power, Confucius Institutes.

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Introduction

With the development of China and its increasing economic and political importance in the world, more and more people are showing interest in this Asian country that has been always considered as mysterious. To shape a favorable image of China internationally, China has been opening itself and presenting opportunities for foreign publics to know better about the country, its people, and its culture through several major events, multinational trades, and international cooperation. However, benefits from these activities are limited as the global conversation continues to focus on China's politics (Nye 2006, Flew & Hartig 2014).

At the same time, as Wang (2008) described, the Chinese people have a misconception about their international image that if their nation is strong enough, then others will respect it. Nevertheless, its economic growth has given rise to varying degrees of fear and skepticism in different parts of the world, in spite of China's efforts to emphasize the peaceful nature of its rise for years (Zhao & Tan 2007).

Since the 1990s, western media and academia used the "China threat theory" to attack China's rise as being a destabilizing factor across the economic, political and military arenas (Zhao & Tan 2007, Wang 2008). Wang (2008) opines that this "China threat theory" has been the primary deterrent for advancing China's image internationally. To counter the "China threat theory", it is important that China rebuilds its image through public diplomacy and highlights its soft power rather than hard power (Zhao & Tan 2007, Wang 2008).

The advantages of this strategy are two-fold. Domestically, focusing on enhancing soft power will meet the internal demand for contemporary culture values and the demand for new social norms in a fast changing society. Internationally, this strategy is expected to help minimize misunderstandings due to the general ignorance about China (Zhao & Tan 2007).

Nowadays, the Chinese government has invested heavily in public diplomacy over the last decade through tourism, arts and cultural exchanges, educational exchanges, Confucius Institutes (CIs), and the creation of foreign language services for the China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International and the Xinhua News Agency (Wang 2008, Flew & Hartig 2014). Furthermore, the hosting of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and the 2010 Shanghai Expo were also seen as exercises to project China's public diplomacy to the world (Zhang 2008, Brown 2010, Wang 2011, Cull 2012, Flew & Hartig 2014).

The CI, as a very important China's public diplomacy initiative, has been discussed by many scholars. Modeled on institutions such as the British Council, France's Alliance Française and Germany's Goethe Institute, the China's CIs not only promote Chinese language and culture but also represent a means of enhancing Chinese soft power internationally. Yet by following the earlier examples, CIs have benefits from the experiences of earlier approaches. CIs can be expected to develop a range of additional programs designed to stimulate interests in studying Chinese society and language (Ngamsang & Walsh 2013). They also create stronger personal and institutional

relationships.

Since the first CI opened its doors in Seoul, South Korea in 2004, China has established 475 CIs and 851 Confucius Classrooms in 126 countries and regions by the end of the year 2014. After ten years, China now has the third largest number of national cultural institutes operating in other countries, after the United Kingdom and France (Flew & Hartig 2014). Despite the rapid worldwide growth of CIs, there is a lack of detailed analysis of their roles, purposes and functions. It is argued that these institutes increase China's soft power (Paradise 2009, Ngamsang & Walsh 2013) and are seen as instruments of China's public diplomacy to promote Chinese language and culture (D'Hooghe 2007, Rawnsley 2009, Wang & Lu 2008, Cull 2009, Hartig 2012). However, critiques perceive CIs as propaganda tools by the Chinese government (Fan 2008, Brady 2008, Leung & du Cros 2014).

This research paper applies the network idea to analyze China's CI as an instrument of China's public diplomacy. According to Zaharna, China's CI is "a highly networked public diplomacy initiative", appearing to adopt a relational framework of public diplomacy rather than an information framework (Zaharna 2010 p. 208). They operate primarily through face-to-face interactions rather than mass media communications (Zaharna 2010, Flew & Hartig 2014). It is believed that the rise of CIs is also associated with innovations within the field of public diplomacy (Flew & Hartig 2014). Meanwhile, this research paper aims to illustrate ways in which CIs facilitate message exchanges and information flows, and can demonstrate a networked

communication strategy in action, which involves the co-creation of credibility, mastering narratives, and identities by using rather than simply disseminating information (Zaharna 2010).

Drawing upon a case study of the Confucius Institute at Carleton University (CICU) in Ottawa (the capital of Canada), this research paper observes the network structure of the CICU, its network synergy, and its network strategy. The central question addressed by this research paper is as follows:

Whether public diplomacy practiced by the CICU conforms to the tenets of Zaharna's relational framework of public diplomacy?

This research paper has five sections. The first section has two parts. The first part begins with a description of the idea of soft power and the conceptual development of public diplomacy. The theoretical framework of this research paper is presented from Zaharna's relational framework and the network communication approach, to test whether the CICU satisfies as a network public diplomacy initiative. The second part introduces China's public diplomacy and the CIs. It explains the transformation in semantics of the term "public diplomacy" in China's diplomatic history. Culture as a major resource of China's soft power is also discussed. The second section provides the methodology used in this research paper. The fourth section analyzes the CICU based on the three dimensions of the network communication approach - network structure, network synergy, and network strategy. The final section is the conclusion.

Literature Review

The idea of soft power

In 1990, Joseph Nye published *Bound to Lead*, which first introduced the term “Soft Power”, the ability to get what you want through attraction and persuasion (Nye 1990, 2004). Nye believed that the United States had reserves of power and influence that were separate from military force projection (Nye 1990).

Nye (2004) describes power as the ability to affect others to achieve one’s desired outcomes by such means as threats and inducements, seduction and attraction that makes others want to follow you. The former is attribute of hard power consisting of a state’s military and economic, while the latter is the defining factor of soft power. In *soft power: the means to Success in World politics* by Joseph S. Nye published in 2004; he gives a definition of soft power as follows:

“[It] is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced (Nye 2004 p. x).”

Soft power is not merely the same as “influence” but a kind of “attractive power” or “co-optive power”, the ability to change and shape one’s preferences by the attractiveness of one’s culture and values, or agenda setting (Nye 2004 p.6). In contrast, hard power is more like ‘command power’ to change what others do through coercion

or inducement. Soft power rests primarily on three resources: “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye 2004 p. 11). Nye (2004) suggests using polls or focus groups to measure whether a particular asset is soft power, but the gap between power measured as resources and power judged as the outcomes of behavior is ineluctable.

Soft power is a means to achieve one country’s policy objectives because “when you can get others to admire your ideas and to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction (Nye 2004 p. x).” Theoretically, if a country is attractive, others are more willingly to follow. In other words, if a nation’s soft power, namely, its culture, political value, and foreign policies, are seen as attractive, legitimate, and credible by others, it costs less to accomplish its diplomatic goals in the international community.

Throughout the post 9/11 period, public diplomacy in the international arena has become increasingly linked to discourses of soft power or how to influence others through persuasion or engagement rather than force. Public diplomacy has been seen as an instrument governments use to convert soft power resources into government policies (Nye 2008).

Conceptual Development of Public Diplomacy

The practice of public diplomacy has a considerably longer history than the

research on it. In fact, public diplomacy was practiced long before the term had even been invented. The term “public diplomacy” was coined only in 1965 by Edmund Gullion when he established the Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy at Tufts University in the United States. In one of its earlier brochures, public diplomacy was described as influencing public attitudes on the “formation and execution of foreign policies”. In this context, central to public diplomacy is the “transnational flow of information and ideas¹”.

Cold War Era

During the Cold War (1945-1989), both superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union relied heavily on public diplomacy to spread their respective ideologies across the world (Leonard, Stead & Smewing 2002). In 1987, the U.S. State Department defined public diplomacy as “government sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries” and the chief instruments of public diplomacy are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television in *Dictionary of international relations terms* (DIRT 1987, p.85). This definition of public diplomacy covered non-traditional diplomatic activities undertaken by the United States Information Agency for foreign publics, including information campaigns, international broadcasting, education exchange and cultural activities etc. These activities also distinguished the goal of public diplomacy from traditional diplomacy, the latter being to directly influence foreign governments.

Besides these, public diplomacy was discussed broadly among scholars during this

¹ The Murrow Center. <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy>, (access April 12, 2015).

era. Malone (1985) described public diplomacy as “direct communication with foreign peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking and, ultimately, that of their governments” (Malone 1985 p. 199). In summary, during the cold war, public diplomacy was a one-way flow of information focusing on persuasion to inform or influence public opinion in other countries (Auer & Srugies 2013).

Post-Cold War to Pre 9/11

By the end of cold war, the discussion of public diplomacy among scholars was changing because of the evolving worldwide structure. Tuch (1990) defined public diplomacy by way of “a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies” (Tuch 1990 p. 3). Public diplomacy had been described as a communication process implemented by governments to obtain empathy and understanding from foreign publics (Auer & Srugies 2013).

Signitzer and Coombs (1992) argued that public diplomacy was “the way in which both governments and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government’s foreign policy decisions” (Signitzer & Coombs 1992 p. 138). In their perspective, the initiators of public diplomacy were not limited to states but also are non-state actors. Frederick (1993) specified the content of public diplomacy as “activities directed abroad in the fields of information, education, and culture, whose objective is to influence a foreign government, by influencing its citizens” (Frederick 1993 p. 229).

When it came to the functions of public diplomacy, Signitzer and Coombs (1992) divided them into political information and cultural communication, in accordance with the various purposes for practicing public diplomacy. The purpose of political information was to influence foreign publics through persuasion and to “explain and defend government policies” to them in the short-term (Signitzer & Coombs 1992 p. 140-141). The purpose of cultural communication was to seek understanding and cooperation among the international community for mutual long-term interests (Signitzer & Coombs 1992).

To sum up, non-state actors were involved to contribute and engage in the process of public diplomacy. Meanwhile, specific activities had also been part of the discussion.

Post 9/11 Period

Following the 9/11 attack, three new revolutions occurred in worldwide (Vickers 2004, Gilboa 2008). The first one happened with for international relations. Compared with military or economic measures, public diplomacy became more effective for resolving Anti-Americanism. According to Nye (2004), if a nation’s soft power were seen as attractive, legitimate, and credible by foreign publics, it would cost less to accomplish its diplomatic goals in the international community. The second was in politics. It had transformed many societies from autocracy to democracy, generating growing participation in political processes for the masses (Gilboa 2008). The third was in communication technologies. The increasing ability of individuals to access the Internet and social networks had led to dynamic interactions between initiators and foreign

publics, monologue to dialogue, even to collaboration (Cowan & Arsenault 2008, Gilboa 2008).

Post 9/11, Leonard, Stead and Smewing (2002) thought that public diplomacy was “about building relationships: understanding the needs of other countries, cultures and peoples; communicating our points of view; correcting misperceptions; looking for areas where we can find common cause”(Leonard, Stead & Smewing 2002 p. 8). In this regard, the primary goal of public diplomacy was about building and maintaining positive, lasting relationships between different actors.

In order to be better present the concept of public diplomacy, scholars raised the term of “new public diplomacy”. Melissen (2005) believed that new public diplomacy was not restricted to disseminating messages, or just government-to-people outreach, it was also about building relationships within societies and non-governmental parties at home and abroad. It included an emphasis on greater exchange and collaboration towards new actors such as NGOs, advocacy groups or non-state actors.

Gilboa (2009) described the new public diplomacy with several components: “it is pursued by states and non-state actors; it is based on “soft power,” two-way communication, strategic public diplomacy, information management, nation branding and e-image; it involves domestication of foreign policy and it deals with both short and long term issues; it is a communication system designed to create a dialogue with both foes and allies; it requires a capability to effectively use credible information in an

attempt to persuade actors to understand, accept or support policies and actions” (Gilboa 2009 p. 3).

In summary, in the post-9/11 period, public diplomacy became increasingly linked with credibility, mutual understanding, and building long-term relationships. Although public diplomacy was “one of the most salient political communication issues in the 21st century” (Snow & Taylor 2009 p. ix), it lacked a shared and generally accepted definition (Gilboa 2008). Despite scholars defining the concept of public diplomacy into three periods according to the cold war and the 9/11, activities practiced during those three periods persist even until now. From the perspective of initiators, state actors incline in design and dissemination of messages to solve communication problems and advance political objectives, while non-states actors lean to building relationships and finding mutual interests.

Theoretical Framework

The Information Framework and the Relational Framework

Hocking (2005) identifies “two worlds” of public diplomacy with competing paradigms: *the traditional hierarchical approach* and *the network-based approach* (Hocking 2005 p. 35). While the traditional hierarchical approach is centered on intergovernmental relations and top-down communication, the network-based approach emphasizes non-hierarchical cooperation and multidirectional flows of information. The network-based approach also provides a “fundamentally different picture of how diplomacy works in the twenty-first century” (Hocking 2005 p. 37).

Based on debates after 9/11, Zaharna (2010) discusses two conceptual frameworks of public diplomacy initiatives in *Battles to Bridges: U.S. Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy after 9/11*. One is the *Information Framework*, which is similar to Hocking's traditional hierarchical approach. Some people advocate that public diplomacy need to be "more forceful and strategic in getting its message out" (Zaharna 2010 p. 137). Leonard (2002) points out that some policymakers in United States feel the key problem of anti-Americanism is a lack of information, which is to say that if foreign publics have accessed to the same degree of information and insight as Americans have, and then they would agree with Americans.

The information framework "focuses on the design and dissemination of messages to solve communication problems and advance political objectives" (Zaharna 2010 p. 138). It considers public diplomacy as a process of creating and transferring information from the sender to the receiver so to achieve a specific result. It relies more on mass media channels, because they can "convey the most information to the most people in the least time" (Zaharna 2010 p.139). From this perspective, the challenge then is how to design messages and deliver information from senders to receivers.

The effect of information-based public diplomacy depends heavily on controlling information, which is nearly impossible in today's technological world. Furthermore, the same as propaganda, while the sender attempts to control the flow of information, it would damage its credibility and inhibit the ability to build trusting relationships with foreign publics. In contrast, efforts to co-create messages and circulate information can

enhance credibility (Zaharna 2010). Nye (2003) had predicted that future communication battles will be “a contest of credibility” (Nye 2003 p.68).

The other one is the *Relational Framework*, same as Hocking’s network-based approach. The relational framework emphasizes “relationship-building and positive maintenance of social structures to solve communication problems to advance political objectives” (Zaharna 2010 p. 146). According to this model, relationship-building is the primary objective of public diplomacy as it helps foster a better and more connected international environment. Compared with the information framework, public diplomacy initiatives within the relational framework share six key dominant features: *Identifying, defining, and building relationships; Finding mutual interests; Relationship-building strategy; Coordination; Participation; Continuity and Sustainability* (Zaharna 2007, 2010). These six dominant features help to test whether public diplomacy practiced by the CICU conforms to Zaharna’s relational framework of public diplomacy.

Moreover, Zaharna (2010) asserts communication activities from the relational perspective are more a keen to social processes that focus on regulating, maintaining, and enhancing relationships, rather than actually creating or building relationships, because some form of relationships are presumed to exist. In this regard, interpersonal communication becomes the ideal medium. It may not be the most efficient medium, but it is the most effective one for sustaining relationships, and for circulating information within the social context (Zaharna 2010).

In general, the information framework focuses mainly on information transfer, often with goals of persuasion and control. In contrast, the relational framework is geared towards building relationships, exchanging messages, and fostering social structures for advancing objectives.

The Network Communication Approach

Due to different models of media and communication, Zaharna similarly differentiates between the mass communication approach and the network communication approach to public diplomacy (Zaharna 2007).

The Mass Communication Approach rests on the premise of sender-message-receiver model. This approach, focusing on information production and dissemination, is the dominant approach in public diplomacy used by nation-states to wield soft power (Zaharna 2007, 2010). Its transmission strategy relies on “carefully crafted messages disseminated via mass media vehicles to a target audience with the goal of changing attitudes or behavior (Zaharna 2010 p. 94).” The sender devotes to the design and delivery a static message to passive audiences and remains accountable for supporting and maintaining the initiative. Moreover, this approach captures the basic elements of mass communication because it matches Lasswell’s model of “Who says what to whom in what channel with what effect?”

The Network Communication Approach, focusing on message exchange, benefits from technological developments associated with the Internet and social media. This

approach has been employed by advocacy NGOs to create soft power (Zaharna 2007, 2010, 2014). The advantage of this approach is that it tries to gather audiences into a dynamic interaction and allow the initiative to expand and maintain itself. Moreover, relationship-building is the primary feature because it connects each member in the network so that information tends to be circulated rather than merely transmitted (Zaharna 2007, 2010).

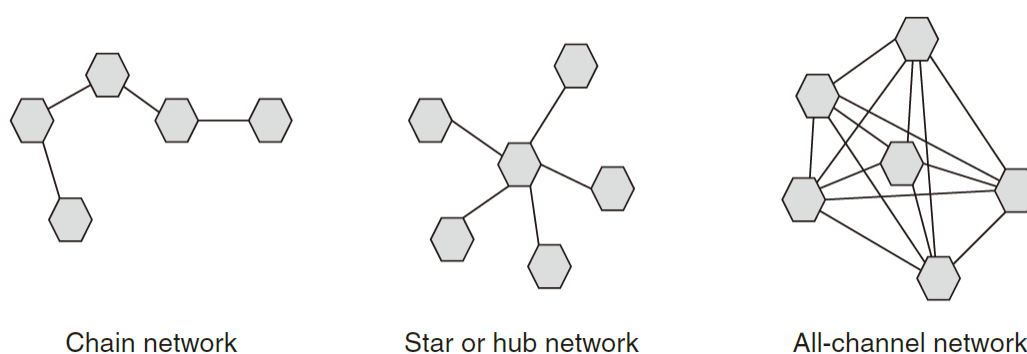
When we speak of a network communication approach, we need to ask what type of network it is. Zaharna (2013) brings out four dimensions that influence a network: *key participants* (sponsors, partners, and stakeholders), *purpose* (conducted by key participants), *time frame* (network's time horizon), and *communication mode* (members in a network exchange information or interact with each other).

Together with this message-exchange network, the network communication approach to public diplomacy initiatives consists of three inter-related components: network structure, network synergy, and network strategy (Zaharna 2010, 2014).

a) *Network structure*, the core of network communication approach, is about facilitating message exchange and information flow (Zaharna 2010). Networks analysts have identified three basic types of networks: *chain, hub or star and all channels*, as seen in Figure 1 from Zaharna (2010). For the chain network, information moves along a line of separated contacts and end-to-end communication must travel through the intermediate nodes. For the hub or star network, actors are tied to a central but not hierarchical node or

actor, and must go through that node to communicate and coordinate with each other. The all-channel network offers the most efficient flow of information which is direct, multidirectional, and simultaneous. It is important to note that the all-channel network thrives from sharing, rather than controlling information (Zaharna 2010).

Figure 1 — Three Basic Types of Networks



Sourced from Zaharna (2010)

b) *Network synergy* derives from building relationships and incorporating diversity to reach a force multiplier of “the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts” (Zaharna 2010 p. 104). According to Zaharna (2007, 2010), this happens in the two ways. By bonding internally, this transforms a group of strangers into a team that is capable of working collaboratively towards a common cause. By bridging externally, the team extends its reach to other teams, establishing a coalition. This internal and external relationship-building not only harnesses diversity, but also generates synergy. In addition, network synergy is important in transforming passive audiences into actively involved members.

c) *Network strategy* focuses on how information is used and circulated to foster an overarching narrative and identity. To attract and retain members of the network, the key is that these narratives and identifies are not predetermined independently by the sponsor, but generate collaboratively with network members.

The mass communication approach, centering on information production and dissemination in a one-way flow, differs drastically from “the network communication approach which focuses on information exchange” (Zaharna 2010 p. 97). One of the fundamental differences between the mass communication approach to public diplomacy and the network communication approach is that the first “*begins* with a pre-determined message” whereas the latter “*ends* with the message or story” (Zaharna 2010 p.111).

In this setting, the network communication “focuses *first* on creating the structure and relational dynamics for effective communication among network members, and *then* members collaborate to co-create the narrative” (Zaharna 2014 p. 22). The network communication approach has introduced a relational dynamics which switches public diplomacy from “message content to message exchange, control to coordination, and products to process” (Zaharna 2014 p.12).

China’s Public Diplomacy and Confucius Institutes

From “Propaganda” to “Public Diplomacy” in China

During the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, international propaganda is a widespread phenomenon, but over time, the term propaganda has come

to be “a pejorative term for negative or offensive manipulation, particularly in the political arena” (Snow 1998 p. 32). Even today, propaganda is still synonymous with “the government big lie” (Arndt 2005 p. xi).

However, “propaganda” does not have a bad connotation in Chinese. The Chinese government usually uses the term *dui wai xuan chuan* or *wai xuan* (external propaganda in English) to mobilize international activities and cultivate Chinese image overseas. Compared with propaganda’s English translation, in Chinese, *xuan chuan* (propaganda) has a positive connotation associated with activities such as the release of news, general shaping of ideology, or even advertisement (Wang 2008).

During China’s 30-plus years of reform and opening up, the Chinese government realizes that translating *xuan chuan* to “propaganda” has easily led to antipathy from Western audiences before they receive and accept Chinese information. Meanwhile, “propaganda” also easily leads to misunderstandings in intercultural communication activities. China had been criticized from all sides and Chinese international image was damaged, because of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. The economic cooperation between China and Western societies especially the United States was stopped.

In light of this, the functions of the State Council Information Office established in January 1991 was to illustrate China’s aim to become more open in its publicity work instead of mentioning propaganda (D’ Hooghe 2007). The official translation of *xuan chuan* in English became “publicity” instead of “propaganda” in 1997 in order to let the

world know about China accurately. This transformation in semantics signaled the changing process of foreign policies in China, and the concept of propaganda was eliminated.

The term “public diplomacy” was coined during the Cold War. Although this is not a new term, China, compared to the United States and other countries, is a novice in this regard because until 2004, public diplomacy is officially endorsed only at the highest political levels in China. China’s public diplomacy is established in the "Hu-Wen decade (2002 - 2012)" (Hu: Hu Jintao 2002-2013, leader of the party, state and army of the People's Republic of China; Wen: Wen Jiabao 2002-2013, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China). In other words, the Chinese government has decided to play the “Western game” and to conform to the form of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is seen in China as a means of countering the “China threat theory”, and the goal objective of China’s public diplomacy is to introduce China to the world and helps foreign publics to understand the real China (Qiu 2009, Zhang 2009, Zhao 2009, Zhao 2012).

Culture as China’s Soft Power

Hundreds of essays and scholarly articles have been published in China since the early 1990s on the subject of soft power. Many Chinese scholars have developed the discourse on soft power into the Chinese context. Based on Nye’s definition of soft power, the primary question among Chinese scholars being what the major resource of China’s soft power is.

On one hand, the majority of Chinese scholars and decision-makers regard culture as the paramount resource of soft power. For example, Wang (1993), as the first scholar to bring the notion of soft power to China, argues that admirable culture and ideology are the main resource of China's soft power. Chen (2007) states that Confucianism which is illustrated by Beijing's Harmonious Society theory, and the expansion of CIs as China's major soft power.

On the other hand, some scholars, acknowledging albeit the importance of culture as one of soft power resources, argue that China's soft power borrows from military resources and its economic strength. Zheng and Zhang (2007) argue that China's soft power assets derive not only Beijing's multilateralism and good neighbor policies, but also from its economic diplomacy. Gong (2007) describes China's soft power as *institutional power* (the ability to establish international institutions), *identifying power* (the ability to gain global leadership through influencing other countries), and *assimilating power* (the attraction of one country's cultures, ideologies, and social institutions). Li and Worm (2010) believes that if one country offers others many opportunities for economic gains, then those others would reluctantly comply with the country on non-economic issues, sometimes even.

Although scholars dispute the resources of soft power, China's leadership underscores the role of culture as its soft power (Vuving 2009). At the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on October 15, 2007, Hu Jintao stated that the CPC must "enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better

guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests"². From that point on, the term 'soft power' becomes a term officially and broadly used by the Chinese government.

Optimistically speaking, China has always had an attractive traditional culture, though China's modern culture has entered the realm of global popular culture in recent years. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China³, 380 thousands foreign students from 203 countries enroll in Chinese universities in 2014. A total of 3.5 million Chinese students studied abroad between 1978 and 2014. International learning and knowledge has propelled students toward accepting and understanding different cultural and community perspectives.

In addition, China's leadership has always trumpeted the Chinese culture as belonging not only to the Chinese, but to the whole world. For example, by the end of 2014, China has established Chinese Cultural Centers in 20 overseas countries to reach out to foreign citizens. These Cultural Centers offer a variety of activities such as film screenings, forums, classes on Chinese culture, and other activities.

Confucius Institutes

As such, the promotion of culture is a part of soft power. CIs as a central part of China's public diplomacy initiatives aim to promote understanding of the Chinese language and culture, to stimulate cultural exchange and collaboration between China and

² Xinhua News Agency. (2007). Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 17th Party Congress. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749_6.htm, (access to April 15, 2015).

³ National Bureau of Statistics of China. <http://data.stats.gov.cn/index.htm>, (access to April 15, 2015).

other countries, and to deepen friendly relationships with other nations (Hanban n.d.). Zaharna (2014) has described CIs as highly network public diplomacy initiatives, and other countries could draw from the Chinese cultural and relational approach to public diplomacy.

CIs are non-profit educational institutions which aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries since 2004. They were given the name from Confucius, the 5th century Chinese thinker, educator, and philosopher whose teaching and philosophy has deeply influenced the shaped the East Asian, and China in particular (Ma 2007). Confucius's Confucianism emphasizes two terms: "benevolence" (*ren* in Chinese) which means humanity, caritas, kind-heartedness and love of men; "the rules of propriety" (*li* in Chinese) which are a set of rules and regulations of proprieties prescribed by social convention (Wu 2012). Confucianism guides people to treat others with respect and propriety, to co-exist with nature, and to strive for a better future given one's current surroundings. Confucius's enduring teachings⁴, for example, include: "*Harmony in diversity*"; "*Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself*"; "*Help others establish what you wish to establish yourself, helps others achieve something you wish to achieve yourself*".

Confucianism has a remarkable position in contemporary Chinese society, but it was banned in the Maoist era. Confucianism has resurged under China's former leader Hu Jintao, who emphasized building policy of the harmonious society. This policy echoes

⁴ Confucius, the Analects. Translate by Bojun Yang and Dianjue Liu. Zhong hua shu ju. 2008

Confucius's harmony idea. Although the Confucius Institute does not explicitly teach Confucian thought and ideals, it does embody some of the features of Confucian harmony.

First, harmony is interpersonal as it takes more than one person to establish harmony. The Confucius Institute is a partnership between institutions in China and a foreign country. A harmonious relation is hopefully achieved between the two nations through the Confucius Institute.

Second, Confucius believes "Harmony in diversity." Harmony does not represent perfect agreement; instead, it tolerates differences between the two sides. The Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institute state that a Confucius Institute can be modified to accommodate the distinct conditions and needs of different countries.

Lastly, a harmonious relationship exists when all parties receive mutual benefits and mutual constraints, and no one wins over the other. In a word, the "Confucius" in CIs is not only a branding strategy, but also represents an idea of harmony from building "harmonious society" at home and "harmonious world" internationally.

Methodology

Research Design

The central question addressed by this research paper is whether public diplomacy practiced by the CICU conforms to the tenets of Zaharna's relational framework of public diplomacy. Qualitative research will primarily be concerned with "understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspective, not the researcher's" (Merriam 2009 p. 14). Since this study seeks to understand experiences of the CICU, the qualitative research method suits this purpose well. This research paper will use a qualitative case study because the data collection focuses on one specified CI that is not representative of all CIs around world. It is not realistic to examine all CIs exclusively.

Merriam (1998) classifies the case study into three categories according to the overall intent of the study. The descriptive case study presents a detailed account of the case. The interpretive case study develops conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering. The evaluative case study involves description, explanation and presents judgment. Since this study is interested in whether theory applies in practice, therefore it is an evaluative case study.

Data Collection

Literatures related to CIs and the CICU are gathered for analysis. Because Merriam (2009) emphasizes the advantage to use many different sources of evidence, data is collected through multiple avenues, including the institutional documents, site visits and news reports. On one hand, the multiple literature sources are useful to present a holistic

picture of the case under study. For example, the institutional documents of the CICU provide the historical events that contribute to relationships-building in the network. On the other hand, the diversity of data helps gain in-depths understanding of the CICU and improves accuracy of the study.

To supplement the data collected from literatures, the staff employed by Carleton University who holds management and administrative position within the CI is invited for an interview. The interviewee is identified as Interviewee A. Because it is intended to be an exploratory research, mostly questions in the interview are open-ended according to this paper's theoretical framework.

Data Analysis

Zaharna (2010) has described CIs as highly networked public diplomacy initiatives, and CIs appear to adopt a relational framework of public diplomacy rather than a process model. Therefore, data is analyzed using the relational framework, which switches public diplomacy from message content to message exchange, control to coordination, and products to process. With an emphasis on a qualitative case study, the research paper will examine whether the CICU conforms to the relational framework through the network communication approach which consists of three interrelated components: network structure, network synergy, and network strategy. At the heart of each component lies message exchange.

This research paper will focus on finding out tenets of relational framework in the

CICU to answer the research paper's question. The tenets of Zaharna's relational framework of public diplomacy include *Identifying, defining, and building relationships; Finding mutual interests; Relationship-building strategy; Coordination; Participation; Continuity and Sustainability* (Zaharna 2007, 2010).

Findings and Analysis

To discuss the central question addressed by this research paper, the following analysis is based on the activities and literatures of the CICU. This section begins with an introduction of CIs and then examines the CICU through its network structure, its network synergy, and its network strategy.

The Rise of Confucius Institutes

China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language or the Hanban (Confucius Institute Headquarters) is a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. The Hanban launches the CI initiative to provide Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide since 2004. The CIs are expected to be long-term initiatives. The CI initiative plays a role in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners. They also contribute to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world. There were 475 CIs and 851 Confucius Classrooms in 126 countries and regions at the end of year 2014.

Instead of establishing independent cultural institutes like the British Council,

France's Alliance Française and Germany's Goethe Institute, China's CIs are established as a partnership between a host educational institution and a Chinese institute. Financing is shared between the Hanban and the host institution. There are five cooperative models in establishing CIs⁵:

- *“A partnership between a Chinese university and a foreign university;*
- *A partnership between a Chinese secondary school and a foreign secondary school;*
- *A partnership between a foreign nongovernmental organization and a Chinese university;*
- *A partnership between a foreign government and a Chinese government;*
- *A partnership between an enterprise and a university.”*

Taking CIs in Canada as examples, most of them present a partnership between a prominent Chinese university and a foreign university that chooses to house the CI, while the remainder is a partnership between governments. Furthermore, one university can have more than one partnership. For example, Central China Normal University, the partner of the CICU, has partnerships with three other overseas Universities, includes University of Kansas in the United States, University of Newcastle in Australia and State University of Surabaya in Indonesia. However, besides the major partner, the CICU also

⁵ Hanban News. (2010). what are the features of the Confucius Institute's operation? http://english.hanban.org/article/2010-07/02/content_153909.htm, (access to June 1, 2015).

works together with other Chinese universities such as Nankai University, Nanjing University, Wuhan University, East China Normal University, and etc. CIs need to work with other Chinese universities to maintain state of the art information and other resources.

This bundle system provides a platform for internal communication and long-term relationship-building. It also promotes a higher level of cooperation and engagement, which is lacking from those other independent cultural institutes. This supports it being an all-channel network. However, both the CI hosted foreign university and the Chinese university are linked back to the Hanban. This latter fact supports it being a hub-star network. Each CI is expected to complement its teaching activities and to link with other CI and local communities. To this end, the Hanban hosts an annual conference to facilitate the global linking of all CIs. The interactive web portal of the Hanban and Confucius Institute Online also facilitate information sharing among all CIs, partners, teachers and students on language teaching and learning, cultural activities, as well as information about the CI. From these facts, the CI initiative is a combined network of the hub-star network (the Hanban as hub) and the all-channel network.

Network Structure

Communication structures that enhance the flow of information increase the overall effectiveness of the organization. The network structure is pivotal to CIs' ability to facilitate message exchange and efficiently circulate information.

The first official CI that opened in Seoul, South Korea in 2004 not only highlights the friendly relations at the national level between China and South Korea, but it also creates a relational framework that is distinct from other cultural institutes. In addition, the most of partnerships are between a prominent Chinese university and a host educational institute. This involving cooperative arrangement between Chinese and a foreign organization is unique and important in terms of considering network approaches to public diplomacy.

The CICU was established in 2012 at Carleton University. It is a joint CI between Central China Normal University and Carleton University. From the first official CI that opened in Seoul, South Korea in 2004, CIs are most often linkages among the Hanban, a Chinese university and a foreign university, where the Chinese side normally offers teaching materials, language teachers, a co-director and a share of the budget, while an international partner provides facilities and local staff, as well as contributing to overall funding (Hartig 2012).

The All-Channel Network in Canada-China Relationship

According to Zaharna (2014), there is a complex inter-weaving of relations among the Hanban, Chinese universities and foreign host universities. International partners are not only linked to the Hanban and the Chinese university partner, but also to other CIs. Moreover, Zaharna (2014) believes there are five layers to link all CIs hosts and Chinese partners in a network weaver because of the creation of the CI Online and the annual Confucius Institutes Conferences held by the Hanban. In the case of the CICU, the

practice of the five layers network is limited to theory due to various restrictions.

The first layer (*CI hub*) is a hub-star network as we discussed in the theoretical framework. The “hub” is the Hanban, while all CIs at host universities, the Chinese partners, the CI online are the “stars” linking to the Hanban. The CICU and Central China Normal University are linked to the Hanban, but this kind of linkage is very restrictive. The Hanban does not have the authority to manage the CICU. All of the CICU’s courses are planned not by the Hanban, but unilaterally by Carleton University.

The second (*CI hosts - Chinese partners*) is the pairing between the foreign CI host universities and the partner Chinese universities. The partnership between Carleton University and Central China Normal University provided a platform for other universities in China such as Nankai University, Nanjing University, Wuhan University, and East China Normal University, to conduct exchanges with Carleton University on china related issues. This layer of relationship further facilitates the CICU’s cooperation with universities within China.

The third (*CI-CI*) is the linking of the CI host institutes with other CIs in the same countries. From the survey of the CICU’s institutional documents and news report and according to Interviewee A, the CICU has not had cooperation with other CIs in Canada, not even with the local Algonquin College’s Confucius Classroom.

The fourth (*Chinese partner- Several CIs*) is the linking of a Chinese university with multiple foreign CI hosts. Central China Normal University partners with four CIs

around the world. They are at the University of Kansas in the United States, University of Newcastle in Australia and State University of Surabaya in Indonesia, and Carleton University in Canada.

The last layer (*CI+CI+ Chinese Partner +CI+CI, etc.*) present that the CI hosts in different countries but partnering a same Chinese university can reach other CI hosts in different countries. Each layer expands the size of the network in multiplier. For this layer, the interviewee A suggests that this has not necessarily led to more intense communication or even exchange or cooperation between these four CIs. The fifth layer of relationship is nonexistent.

It is noted that although the CICU's funding is derived half from the Hanban and half from Carleton University, the CICU is not an entity managed by the Hanban. In addition, the Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institute states that a Confucius Institute can be modified to accommodate the distinct conditions and needs of different countries⁶. All of the CICU's collaborations are based on the needs of Carleton University.

The CICU has provided a platform or acted as a connection between two all-channel networks. The one in Canada represents the Canadian public which including Carlton University, the other Canadian Universities. The other one in China is the network of the Hanban, Chinese Universities. The CICU plays a necessary role to bring

⁶ http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_7537.htm

these two all-channel networks into one whole all-channel network which facilitates message exchange and information flow in Canada-China cooperation relationship.

The All-Channel Network in the CICU

The CICU has its own advisory board and steering committee. The CICU Advisory Board is responsible for reviewing and approving strategic policies; assisting to spur interest in and financial support for the Institute: Its Chair is the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) at Carleton University. Its Vice-Chair is the Vice-President at Central China Normal University. Some of the CICU Steering Committee's objectives are: to provide input on proposals for courses, events and activities related to the CICU; to establish and maintain professional networks that can benefit the Institute; to promote the Institute and its activities across the campus. Its Chair is the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Carleton University. Its members are composed of various faculty members across Carleton University including from the School of Linguistics & Language Studies, School for Studies in Art & Culture, Sprott School of Business, School of Journalism & Communication, School of Public Policy & Administration, and etc.

The CICU exists as an organization or department. There are hierarchical positions such as president, vice-president, director, advisory board and steering committee. However, the members in the CICU are from various faculties of Carleton University. They work as a collective and partnership, which is a characteristic of the all-channel network.

In addition, this governance structure facilitates building other partnerships. From the CICU's website, its main partners are faculties at Carleton University. The partnerships are realized through language and culture courses, as well as academic conferences attended by professors invited from China. Workshops and international forums such as "engaging China workshop series" and the annual high-level international forum are also organized in partnership with government agencies and major business associations to develop a greater understanding of Chinese culture, in order to promote cooperation on the education, economic, and tourism fronts. The events mostly feature renowned researchers, senior government officials, business executives from Canada and China. The CICU also provides networking opportunities for Chinese international students with local students through other miscellaneous activities.

The critical feature of the CICU's network structure is not a centralized network in a hub-star model, but it is an all-channel network among the CICU, other faculties at Carleton University, local communities, Canadian universities and Chinese universities. The all-channel network offers a platform of sharing information which is direct, multidirectional, and simultaneous. Although, at present, it is not a very complex relational structure as Zaharna described, it still facilitates message exchange and information flow. It is noted that building a viable network will take time.

Network Synergy

The core of network public diplomacy is the network structure, because the network structure can enable network synergies to emerge. Network synergy is a result of

relationship-building and incorporating diversity to reach a force multiplier of “the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts” (Zaharna 2010 p. 104). As Zaharna (2013) states, the network structure alone is not enough to promise success in public diplomacy. The network structure of the CICU can be view as a living structure, which can grow and thrive, or wither and die. In this living structure, the network synergy is the life blood (Zaharna 2013, 2014).

For the network synergy to emerge, dynamic interactions within the CICU should be building as internal relationships. The internal relationship-building activities such as exchanging e-mails, attending meetings, or participating in online chats, help to transform a group of random individuals working separately into a synergistic team. As Bourdieu (1986) observed, the more interconnected that actors in a network are to one another, the more those actors trust one another and are able to exchange resources (tangible and intangible), thus benefiting the network overall.

Moreover, building relations outside of the network such as linking to other businesses or communities helps boosts the network’s reach, resources, impact, and legitimacy (Zaharna 2013, 2014).

Network synergy also derives from diversity, which emerges as a result of internal and external relationship-building. Zaharna (2007, 2014) argues diversity as one of the hallmarks of team dynamics could creative networks which combine existing resources in new ways. However, the cultural and ethnic diversity always is a challenge in

collaborative teams. Krebs and Holley (2002) explain the diversity could bring new ideas and perspectives, and if a sustained group wants to get transformative ideas, they often have to go outside of their group.

Internal Relationship-building

In the case of the CICU, the internal relationship-building in the CICU illustrates somewhat limitations. First, Chinese teachers who come to teach Chinese for the CICU come as academic exchange scholars. Many of these Chinese teachers only stay for short periods of one to two years, which obstructs ongoing team-building opportunities. Second, their teaching loads at the CICU are heavy, hindering them from building deeper relations with other CICU local staffs. Third, the Chinese co-director only locates in China although the local director employed by Carlton University speaks mandarin as first language. As a result, the internal relationship-building is mainly between local staff of Carlton University. The lack of dispatched staff from China limits the potential to incorporate diversity.

External Relationship-building

With regard to building external relationships, one of the distinct features of collaboration is between Chinese universities and the foreign university. The foreign university acts as a host for the CI with the support and resources coming from Chinese. For example, the CICU hosts Forum on China Studies and Research inviting the professors of Nankai University and Beijing Normal University as the guest speakers to share their views with a wide range of people from Ottawa on issues such as the

inter-relationship of the central government and local governments in China, challenges to China's growth, shadow banking in China and China in international trade.

It is also important for the CICU to establish external links to the public and local communities. The CICU offers not only credit courses to registered Carleton University's students, but non-credit courses to the public from the communities who want to improve their Chinese language ability and learn Chinese culture. In addition, executive certificate programs are open to students and the general public, which are mainly on bilateral political and cultural differences, trade practices, bilateral marketing, bilateral human resource management, cultural appreciation, international education and tourism.

Another important set of external relations are with local government agencies and businesses. The CICU designed Chinese business language certificate program to develop basic knowledge of Chinese language to communicate and facilitate social integration in a business environment.

In addition, from the website of the CICU, their partners include both Chinese organizations such as Central China Normal University, China Tourism Academy Wuhan Branch, and Canadian organizations such as Ottawa & Gatineau Hotel Association, Ottawa Chamber of Commerce, Invest Ottawa, Ottawa Business Journal, and Canada China Business Council. As for cooperating with other CIs internationally, the CICU, due to its mission of deepening relationships locally rather than internationally, is not expected to be seen in the indefinite future.

Network Strategy

The third dimension of the network communication approach concerns network strategy. It focuses on how information is used and circulated to foster an overarching narrative and identity. To attract and retain members of the network, the key is that these narratives and identities are not predetermined independently by the sponsor, but generate collaboratively with network members.

Zaharna (2010) has emphasized that the mass communication approach “begins with a pre-determined message” whereas the network communication approach “ends with the message or story” (Zaharna 2010 p. 111). Network communication first focuses mainly on message exchange in a network structure, and then on co-creating message content based on diverse cultural backgrounds of network members (Zaharna 2010, 2014). In this way, the message has credibility because it does not favour any particular cultural backgrounds.

Much of literatures assume shared or mutual interests as a prerequisite for relationship building. In the case of the CICU, it behaves more like an information provider rather than both an information recipient and provider due to the fact that information flows predominantly one way to the benefit of local businesses and entities. However, the CICU’s strategy is precisely to establish the relationships first, regardless of its own short term gains, in anticipation of cultivating long term shared interests. The network strategy in the CICU focuses first on message exchange, and then on co-creating messages based on itself and its partners’ need.

When it comes to the credibility with the messages from the CICU, it is important to note that the teachers brought in from China to teach the Chinese language and culture courses offered by Carleton University under the CICU must teach according to pre-set syllabuses designed according to the university's curriculum. The teachers could certainly however, utilize tools and materials that would support the learning of their students.

Next to the task of introducing Chinese language to people abroad, the CIs also introduce Chinese culture and provide information about China. In order to do this, the CICU holds various cultural activities such as Chinese spring festival gala, learning *wing chun kung fu* and Chinese songs, and series forums on China studies and research. There are also various certificate programs and workshops which are based on local needs in the CICU. For example, the CICU, at the request of a local renowned architect, held a workshop on building "*feng-shui*", as well as other workshops for the National Arts Centre Orchestra. These tailored-made workshops satisfy the interest for Chinese culture from different groups of the Canadian public. These co-create teaching courses and workshops based on local needs, also enhance the credibility of the messages coming from the CICU.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the relational and network communication approach to public diplomacy have provided a new research direction, however, through the above case study, the practices of the CICU do not conform perfectly to Zaharna's theory. However, the network structure, which is core to the network communication approach, does apply to the CICU. As for network synergy, it is present and can be observed from the CICU's operations. The network strategy of co-creating messages in the CICU's case is dependent on local needs.

The CICU shares the six dominant tenets of Zaharna's relational framework of public diplomacy. First, *identifying, defining and building relationships* are the central concern of the CICU regardless of its own short term gains. The CICU aims to build up positive, strong, and progressive relationships with local communities and citizens, local firms, NGOs, Canadian universities and Chinese universities. Second, the CICU understands the local needs and seeks to *find mutual interests* between China and Canada and its publics. Third, the CICU is dependent on the *relationship-building strategy*, which demonstrates interactivity and mutual interests, and downplays, or even neglects the message strategy. It focuses on interactions that help in building trust. Fourth, the CICU acts toward *coordination* efforts rather than control. The fact of building strong relationships with publics in the CICU is based on mutuality and reciprocity. Fifth, the CICU stresses participation over presentation. The message from the CICU is not a product from the sponsor but a joint co-created message generated within network

members. The last, the CICU is a long-term initiative, and continues to grow rapidly. It shows widespread interactions across the publics and promises relationship *continuity and sustainability* so far.

Although one may assume public diplomacy initiatives benefit the originator of an initiative, its outcomes may benefit both the originator and the recipient. China is attempting to create a positive image of itself the education of the Chinese language and culture at Confucius Institutes. However, Canadians can also benefit from the establishment of CIs to fulfil the needs of local businesses and communities. CIs have brought a new dimension to China's public diplomacy. Since they are housed in universities, CIs are able to combine two educational tools of public diplomacy, which are the cultural and language institutions and the academic exchange programs. In addition, associations with a local university give CIs a sense of prestige and authority for teaching the Chinese language and culture.

One of the lessons learned from the CI initiative could be that cultural institutions like CIs should immerse themselves with local communities. As CIs endeavour to make the Chinese language and culture appealing to locals, they should also aggressively learn about their host countries' culture, to make it a true "cultural exchange".

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