

# A Study on the Internationalization of China's Higher Education: Focusing on the Confucius Institutes

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**Abstract** – Under the background of internationalization of higher education in the world, China is also constantly promoting the process of internationalization of higher education. With the internationalization of China's higher education and the continuous development of Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools model in running schools, Confucius Institute, as a new Chinese language international promotion agency in China, also launched the Confucius Institute model of cooperating with foreign universities. This kind of Confucius Institute model has played an important role in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education. The paper mainly uses the method of literature analysis to integrate the relevant information and data of Confucius Institutes and the internationalization of China's higher education. By reviewing the relationship between Confucius Institutes and the internationalization of China's higher education and the development status, this paper analyses the achievements of Confucius Institutes in expanding international teaching channels, improving international management ability, accelerating the course internationalization process, enhancing students' international level in the process of promoting the internationalization of China's higher education. At the same time, the paper summarizes the problems of Confucius Institutes in the process of promoting the internationalization of China's higher education, including teachers, teaching materials, funding, quantity and regions, non-uniform system, nature and motivation. Then, put forward improvement plans of these problems. Finally, conclusions and implications are drawn. To find a better plan for the international development of China's higher education, and at the same time provide new ideas for the international development of higher education in the world.

**Keywords** – Internationalization of China's Higher Education, Confucius Institutes, Higher Education.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the internationalization of higher education in the world, China is also constantly promoting the internationalization of higher education. Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively - Run Schools model comes into being in the era of economic globalization and internationalization of higher education, and has become a powerful means and an important force to promote the internationalization of China's higher education. With the vigorous development of Chinese- Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools model, Chinese education authorities have formulated several relevant policies and regulations to

standardize and guide Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run improvement and perfection, to promote the healthy and sustainable development of the internationalization of China's higher education (Ren, 2016). With the continuous development of Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools model, Confucius Institute, a new Chinese language international promotion organization in China, has also launched the Confucius Institute model of cooperating with foreign universities to set up Confucius Institutes. With the fundamental purpose of "teaching Chinese and spreading Chinese culture" and the basic model of Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools model, Confucius Institutes are an important form of overseas education, a typical representative of the internationalization of higher education, and an important way to build a powerful country in higher education.

As an organization that teaches Chinese and disseminates Chinese culture, Confucius Institutes are not only a general language learning institution, but also a product of the globalization of higher education and a new form of education that adapts to the development of globalization (Zhao, 2017). Officials from China have compared Confucius Institutes to language and culture promotion organizations such as Portugal's Instituto Camões, Britain's British Council, France's Alliance Française, Italy's Società Dante Alighieri, Spain's Instituto Cervantes and Germany's Goethe-Institut—several of them named for an iconic cultural figure identified with that country, as Confucius is identified with China (Norrie, 2011). However, Confucius Institutes in China are different from language and cultural communication institutions in other countries in that their unique school-running mode has gradually become an important form of the internationalization of China's higher education. There are various cooperative modes of Confucius Institutes, among which the main mode of Confucius Institutes is the joint establishment of Confucius Institutes by domestic and foreign universities (Zhao, 2019). Therefore, to some extent, Confucius Institutes are a unique form of Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools model in Chinese universities, and they are also one of the important carriers to develop the internationalization of China's higher education.

Taking Confucius Institutes as an example, studying the internationalization development of China's higher education can provide a more detailed understanding of the internationalization development model of China's higher education, especially in the field of Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools. At present, the main research object of Chinese academic papers is the single Confucius Institute or the internationalization of Chinese higher education. By combining the two, we can better discover the influence of Confucius Institutes on the internationalization of China's higher education, how Confucius Institutes promote the internationalization of

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China's higher education, and the problems arising in the development process of Confucius Institutes, to provide a more feasible plan for how Confucius Institutes can better promote the internationalization of China's higher education in the future.

Under the background of the continuous improvement of the internationalization level of China's higher education and the continuous development of Confucius Institutes, Chinese scholars have conducted an endless number of studies on these two elements, but the number of papers combining them is insufficient. Therefore, to make Confucius Institutes better promote the internationalization of China's higher education, it is necessary to continue the research on the relationship between Confucius Institutes and the internationalization of China's higher education.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Internationalization of China's Higher Education and Confucius Institutes*

At a very early time, foreign governments began to explore the introduction of foreign avant-garde educational ideas and attract foreign excellent educational methods to improve their own educational systems. In 1966, the United States enacted relevant laws requiring universities to strictly implement various education policies, strictly abide by the global education system, and inject large amounts of funds into universities to support their education development, to conform to the construction of an education model of global development. The globalization of higher education is deeply influenced by financial institutions. However due to the relatively backward economic conditions at that time, China started the relevant education research relatively late (Ren, 2016).

After 40 years of reform and opening-up, the internationalization of China's higher education has made important progress. China has become the world's largest source of international students and an important destination country for overseas study. With the promotion of the "Belt and Road" Initiative and the support of China's various opening-up policies, the internationalization of China's higher education has ushered in challenges and new opportunities (Wang, 2018).

Generally, the internationalization of China's higher education can be divided into the following three stages: 1) Exploration stage: 1978-1992; 2) Policy improvement stage: 1993-2008; 3) Integrated education planning and layout: Higher education internationalization connotation enhancement stage: 2009-2015 (Wang, 2022).

Many scholars are positive about the achievements China has made in the internationalization of higher education in recent years. Yang (2021) believes that the internationalization of China's higher education profoundly and vividly reflects the great historical process of reform and opening-up. As a latecomer in the process of modernization, China's internationalization is different from that of the western industrial society. China should understand and realize the internationalization of higher education based on both its own achievements and its

contribution to mankind. Yang (2016) also believes that the main forms of internationalization of Chinese higher education include studying abroad, integrating an international dimension into university teaching and learning, and providing institutional partners in Chinese universities. Through these forms, the quantity and quality of Chinese higher education have been greatly changed, but at the same time, China is also faced with some fundamental problems. Such as Training objective transnational programs in cooperation with foreigners, curriculum and teaching methods have not fully adapted to the needs of economic development and social transformation (Yuan & Fu, 2012).

In China, Confucius Institutes are the most common and influential form of Chinese higher education overseas (Wang, 2016). Confucius Institutes are public educational and cultural promotion programs funded and arranged currently by the Chinese International Education Foundation, a government-organized non-governmental organization under the Ministry of Education of China.

At present, there are two types of Confucius Institutes abroad. Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms. Among them, Confucius Institutes can be divided into two modes which are cooperative education and direct investment by headquarters. And Confucius Classrooms include independent Confucius Classrooms and Confucius Classrooms under Confucius Institutes (Zhao, 2019).

According to the classification of the main body of the school, the cooperative mode of Confucius Institutes is divided into cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities, cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities and multinational companies, cooperation between foreign governments and Chinese universities, and cooperation between foreign organizations and Chinese universities (Zhao, 2019).

In the CiteSpace software, by analyzing the high frequency key words of a certain domain, we can master the hot point and key point of the research of the domain, and further discover the key problems at a deeper level. Among them, "Confucius Institute" appears in the relevant literature with absolute advantage and is the central theme of the research, "China" is the main scope of the research, "higher education" is the main discipline of the research, and "Belt and Road" is the policy background and support of the research. "Chinese culture, soft power, cultural communication, international communication, public diplomacy" is the main content of the study. It can be seen that Confucius Institutes are the result of the dual role of global objective needs and China's independent promotion, the cultural symbol of contemporary China's "going global", the first brand of Chinese language, culture and education "going global", the bridge of dialogue between different civilizations, and gradually becoming an effective carrier of cultural exchanges and an important platform for enhancing friendship between Chinese and foreign people (Chen et al. 2023).

### *Previous on The Relationship of Confucius Institutes and Internationalization of China's Higher Education*

As one of the special form of Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools, the role of Confucius

Institutes in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education is beyond doubt.

Different scholars have different positions for Confucius Institutes in promoting the internationalization of Chinese higher education. Yang (2016) thought that apart from Confucius Institutes, people pay little attention to Chinese universities and their connections with other foreign universities. It shows that Confucius Institutes are an important form to promote the internationalization of China's higher education. Zhao (2019) divides the Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Schools model according to the school-running subject, learning model, teaching model and enrollment model. Confucius Institutes are one of the cooperative education models in China. The author describes it separately and calls it "Confucius Institutes model". The description of the types and characteristics of the Confucius Institutes model provides a strong support for the writing of this paper. Liu et al. (2010) wrote that Confucius Institutes, as institutions for the international promotion of Chinese, have their own characteristics and advantages compared with those for the promotion of other language institutes. At the same time, Confucius Institutes have played a very important role in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education. Research by Han and Shi (2010) clarified the role of overseas schools represented by Confucius Institutes in the opening up of China's higher education, and how to further improve their contribution to the opening up of China's higher education on the basis of previous studies. Wang (2016) discussed the contribution and development of Confucius Institutes in the overseas running of higher education, believing that Confucius Institutes have built an important bridge for the communication and exchanges between China and the world.

Yang (2010) also pointed out that there are some negative evaluations on Confucius Institutes in the political and academic circles. Some argued that since most Confucius Institutes operate within universities, Confucius Institutes sponsored language and culture courses could threaten the academic integrity of higher education. Liu (2007) believed that Confucius Institutes not only greatly accelerated the process of internationalization of Chinese culture and education, but also embodied China's "soft power". But at the same time, there are also some problems that need to be improved: 1) Teachers; 2) Textbooks; 3) Teaching methods; 4) Issues of cooperation with local universities; 5) The way of running schools.

### III. METHOD

This paper takes Confucius Institutes as the research object and the starting point to study the development of internationalization of China's higher education. This paper analyzes the role of Confucius Institutes in the development of higher education and finds out the problems in the process of Confucius Institutes. According to the results of the study, paper puts forward some methods to correct these problems, to better enable Confucius Institutes to promote the internationalization of China's higher education. In order to achieve these goals,

this paper will adopt the research method of literature review. In order to conduct a detailed literature review, this paper searches the database with keywords such as "internationalization of higher education", "internationalization of higher education in China", "Confucius Institutes", "Confucius Institutes and internationalization of higher education in China". At the same time, in order to obtain the relevant materials of Confucius Institutes, this paper also referred to annual reports, annual basic data, government reports, the official website of Confucius Institutes, and the official website of Center for Language Education and Cooperation.

This paper will combine the internationalization of China's higher education with Confucius Institutes, discuss about the development of Confucius Institutes under the background of internationalization of higher education, the relationship between Confucius Institutes and internationalization of Chinese higher education, the promotion role of Confucius Institutes in the process of internationalization of Chinese higher education, and analyze how Confucius Institutes promote the development of internationalization of China's higher education. Based on this, the paper points out the problems of Confucius Institutes in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education, and puts forward solutions to them. This is not only to further promote the development of higher education and Confucius Institutes in China, but also to provide a new perspective for the internationalization of higher education. And the following questions need to be addressed:

1. How do Confucius Institutes promote the internationalization of higher education in China?
2. What are the problems of Confucius Institutes in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education?

### IV. FINDINGS

#### Development Status of Confucius Institutes

Globally, as of December 31, 2022, there are a total of 492 Confucius Institutes and 819 Confucius Classrooms in 160 countries and regions around the world. There are 137 Confucius Institutes and 112 Confucius Classrooms in Asia; 64 Confucius Institutes and 46 Confucius Classrooms in Africa; 184 Confucius Institutes and 335 Confucius Classrooms in Europe; 88 Confucius Institutes and 249 Confucius Classrooms in the Americas; 19 Confucius Institutes and 77 Confucius Classrooms in Oceania (Confucius Institute Annual Development Report, 2022).

As of December 31, 2022, the number of registered students of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms worldwide totaled 1.5 million, reflecting a year-on-year increase of 48.51% over 2021. Among them, long-term students reached 1.2 million, up by 44.26% over 2021. For Confucius Institutes and Classrooms in Asia, the aggregated number of registered students reached 877,000, with a significant increase of 126.96% from 2021. In Europe, the number of Confucius Institutes and Classroom students witnessed a steady increase, up by 9.59%. The age

structure of the students also changed significantly. The students from middle school grew by a marked 109.74% over 2021 to reach 679,000, while those from primary school, university and the general public increased steadily. In the same year, Confucius Institutes and Classrooms offered a total of 4.318 million hours of classroom teaching in 79,000 courses, up by 67.03% over 2021. There are more than 4,000 Chinese directors, teachers, and volunteers, as well as over 6,000 overseas local faculty and staff joint efforts (Confucius Institute Annual Development Report, 2022).

*The Role of Confucius Institutes in promoting the Internationalization of China's Higher Education*

*Expand International Teaching Channels*

Teaching staff is the core of university operation. In recent years, with the deepening of China's "Double First-Class Construction" more and more universities have taken the internationalization of teaching staff construction as a baton to improve the international vision of teaching staff through introduction and training. In fact, Confucius Institutes, as an important platform between Chinese and foreign universities, are an important carrier and support for achieving high-level international teaching staff construction. On the one hand, the demand for teachers in Confucius Institutes promotes the construction of international teachers in colleges and universities. On the other hand, participating in the construction of Confucius Institutes gives teachers in Chinese universities the opportunity to carry out cross-cultural communication and management and Chinese language teaching abroad, enriching the international background and overseas experience of teachers, and helping to build a group of international and high-level teachers with international vision.

Teachers are the dominant force in the development of universities. Teaching staff is the most basic problem in the construction and development of colleges and universities. Without international teachers, there will be no international colleges and universities. The internationalization of teachers is the core part of the internationalization of colleges and universities. Teachers with international knowledge and experience can directly promote the development of teaching and scientific research in the direction of internationalization. Due to historical reasons, the degree of internationalization of teacher resources in Chinese universities is relatively low, and the shortage of international teachers makes Chinese universities cannot meet the needs of international personnel training of economic globalization to a certain extent, which hinders the better and faster development of Chinese universities. In the first case, through Confucius Institutes, Chinese colleges and universities can learn about the teachers of overseas partner institutions, compare with their own teachers, find out the weak links of their own teachers and the advantages of the other side, and introduce excellent teacher resources of the partner institutions in a targeted way through cooperation and exchange, so as to improve the efficiency and effect of talent introduction. In the second case, Confucius

Institutes, as an important platform for "strengthening educational and cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and other countries in the world", provide a shortcut for universities to obtain endogenous international teacher resources. According to the Confucius Institute Charter, the Chinese partner institutions of Confucius Institutes shall send competent, well-rounded and excellent Chinese teachers to the Confucius Institutes for management and teaching. After coming to the Confucius Institute, these teachers will carry out teaching and scientific research work together with local Confucius Institute teachers, learn in the service, grow in practice, expand their international vision, improve their international cultivation, and exercise their international ability, so as to become excellent teachers with international vision and international standards.

*Improve International Management Ability*

The internationalization of management is a long and complicated systematic project, which requires universities to adapt to the situation and goal of the development of internationalization in the aspects of school-running mechanism, management personnel quality, management level and management efficiency. In order to realize the internationalization of management, it is necessary for colleges and universities to acquire international management resources, including international management talents, international management methods and international management systems. In terms of international management talents, Confucius Institutes not only help universities to introduce international high-level management talents, but also serve as a platform for learning, training and improving the internationalization level of their own management teams. There are more or less differences between international students and domestic students in culture, politics, religious beliefs and other aspects, so the management of international students must be international, and the management level of international standards must meet the various needs of international students, promote international students to better and faster adapt to school life, and improve their satisfaction in studying in China. In the process of management practice, Chinese managers improve the level of international management through continuous learning, optimize management methods, and make university management more scientific and reasonable. In terms of international management system, Confucius Institutes are the window for Chinese universities to learn from foreign advanced management experience. Through this window, Chinese colleges and universities can combine the international management system with their own actual situation, realize the "internalization of external system", and achieve the purpose of management internationalization. For the Chinese directors of the Confucius Institutes to be dispatched, they are required to receive management training in accordance with the standards of diplomats of the Confucius Institute headquarters, which greatly improves the international management level of the Chinese directors of the Confucius Institutes.

### *Accelerate Course Internationalization Process*

The level of internationalization of scientific research is an important indicator of the country's "Double First-Class Construction". Chinese and foreign universities use Confucius Institutes as bridges and links to build scientific research institutions, carry out joint research and academic exchanges, and promote multi-level and wide-ranging scientific research cooperation between universities of both sides.

Guided by the "Double First-Class Construction" index, more and more universities regard the internationalization of curriculum system as the key path to improve curriculum quality and optimize curriculum level. International curriculum is an effective carrier of international personnel training and an important symbol of higher education internationalization. Effective acquisition of international curriculum resources is of great significance to promote the process of internationalization of universities in our country. According to the Confucius Institute Charter, Confucius Institute can send outstanding students to Chinese partner institutions for cultural exchanges, and Confucius Institute students can receive Chinese language education in domestic partner universities, and domestic partner universities must set up international courses for them. Driven by this demand, the use of the cooperation platform of Confucius Institutes to actively introduce relevant international courses to foreign institutions and improve the level of curriculum internationalization has become a convenient path for the internationalization process of Chinese colleges and universities. At the same time, Confucius Institutes also make the strong curriculum resources of Chinese partner institutions, especially the Chinese language curriculum resources, "go global" and become the objects of competition introduced by foreign partner colleges.

### *Enhance Students' International Level*

Talent cultivation is the primary function and core task of a university. In terms of promoting the internationalization of students, the positive impact of Confucius Institutes on the internationalization of Chinese universities is mainly manifested in the following aspects: First, promoting the "school-based internationalization" of domestic students, and the universities cooperating with Confucius Institutes directly attract outstanding foreign students to study in their schools through Confucius Institute scholarships. Confucius Institute students generally have a good Chinese language foundation, and they can quickly establish a good relationship with domestic students after coming to China. Mutual learning and cooperation with foreign students bring international atmosphere and vitality to domestic students and promote the "school-based internationalization" of domestic students. The second is to help Chinese universities recruit foreign students. When the Confucius Institute students return home after their studies in China, they will spread their knowledge about their study, life and experience in China through word of mouth. Most of the students who have won Confucius Institute scholarships are local models of Chinese learning, and their publicity has a role

model effect, which is easy to attract people's attention and attract more outstanding students to learn Chinese and study in domestic universities with Confucius Institute cooperation. The third is to enhance the international level of students through student exchange programs. In the process of Confucius Institute construction, with the deepening of exchanges, the degree of trust between Chinese and foreign universities has been further enhanced, and student exchange programs developed based on the advantages of resources of both sides have become easier to operate.

### *The Problems of Confucius Institutes in the Process of Promoting the Internationalization of China's Higher Education*

#### *Teachers*

With the rapid increase in the number of Confucius Institutes, the supply of qualified teachers has become a serious problem. If the selection criteria for Chinese teachers are strictly followed, then the scope of Confucius Institute teachers will be narrowed down to professionals who are proficient in both Chinese and English or local languages. And the scope of meeting both of these conditions has been narrowed down to those who majored in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages or Chinese Language. The Confucius Institute itself, as a non-profit organization disseminating language and culture, also serves as the task of disseminating Chinese culture. Therefore, in the selection of Chinese teachers, whether the volunteers understand Chinese culture will also be considered, and it is better to have relevant expertise or experience. These conditions also increase the threshold for the selection of Chinese teachers.

But in fact, the number of volunteers meeting all the above conditions is not enough to solve the problem of insufficient Chinese teachers.

In order to provide a sufficient number of Chinese teachers, it is necessary to adjust the selection conditions when the actual use of Chinese teachers, appropriately relax the selection conditions, so that more people are qualified to serve as Chinese teachers. Nowadays, not only those who major in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages can serve as Chinese language teachers in Confucius Institutes, but also those who have excellent grades in other majors and are proficient in foreign languages. However, there are fundamental differences between the two language systems. English transition teachers have varying degrees of understanding of Chinese language knowledge, cultural background and teaching methods of Chinese as a foreign language, even without any systematic Chinese teaching training. Teaching only based on the intuitive cognition and mastery of mother tongue is easy to be unsatisfactory. It is not enough in terms of professionalism. This also leads to the problem of uneven quality of Chinese teachers.

In order to enable all Chinese teachers to master professional Chinese teaching methods before officially taking up their posts, there will be centralized pre-job training for Chinese teachers who have been admitted. To help teachers who have teaching experience in other

subjects but are new to teaching Chinese as a foreign language to "speed up" Chinese knowledge and skills, foreign language knowledge and skills, culture and communication, second language acquisition theory and learning strategies, teaching methods, Chinese talent and other aspects. However, the intensive training in a short period of time cannot cover up all the problems of non-professional Chinese teachers. Even though they will go through the strict selection and intensive training before taking office and have the opportunity to retrain their business when they are in office, they will still have various problems in the actual Chinese teaching, such as lack of Chinese language knowledge, lack of Chinese cultural knowledge reserve, limited English ability and oral expression obstacles, and the teaching method is too traditional and "Chinese style". Lack of classroom teaching experience and management experience suitable for local students.

### *Teaching Materials*

In terms of teaching materials, the Confucius Institute Headquarters has been vigorously developing and promoting Chinese teaching materials, and its types have increased to thousands, whose quantity and quality can almost meet the different requirements of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms. Despite this, there is still a lack of teaching materials adapted to different cultural backgrounds and needs at different levels, and Confucius Institutes around the world still feel that teaching materials are insufficient or not applicable. There are many reasons for this situation, among which the most important reason may be that the degree of localization of teaching materials is not high enough to meet the actual needs of Confucius Institutes in different regions.

During the development of Chinese textbooks, the number of textbooks in China is far more than that of foreign local textbooks, and the number of Chinese local textbooks is large and rich in content. However, due to the factors such as difficult content and insufficient consideration of the characteristics of overseas students, the problem of "inaccessibility" will still be encountered in foreign countries, which also highlights that the number of local textbooks needs to be improved. Moreover, in the face of a variety of textbooks, some teachers do not know how to choose, and there is a mismatch between the textbooks and the actual teaching situation, which affects the teaching effect. In the final analysis, it is still the lack of in-depth research on the social environment and cultural customs of the country's local textbooks. In addition, due to the constraints of the knowledge level and funding mechanism of overseas teachers and researchers, textbook writers lack an international perspective and the diversity of textbooks is not prominent, resulting in an imbalance between the learning needs of foreign Chinese learners and the content of textbooks.

### *Funding*

There are three main sources of funding for Confucius Institutes: funds provided by Confucius Institute Headquarters, funds invested by foreign parties, and

income from Confucius Institutes' own activities. For Confucius Institutes in the initial stage of development, funding from headquarters and foreign investment are still the main sources of funding. In contrast, the funding sources of language and culture communication institutions in other countries are relatively diverse. Take the Goethe Institute as an example, the annual appropriation of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs only accounts for 30% of the total income, while sponsorship from foundations, donations from enterprises or individuals, and income from its own activities are the main sources of its operating funds. It can be seen that Confucius Institutes currently have the problem of relatively single funding sources.

As a long-term project, the current operating funds of Confucius Institutes mainly rely on the start-up funds and project funds invested by the Confucius Institute headquarters. The fund source structure is relatively simple, and the government has obvious traces of operation, so it is difficult for Confucius Institutes to provide financial support for further cultural exchange activities. The unreasonable financial structure, on the one hand, leads to the headquarters and the government to intervene too much in its operation, on the other hand, the Confucius Institute's innovation ability is insufficient. Confucius Institutes lack understanding and thinking of market demand, lack of innovation in the content and form of cultural industry and tend to be superficial, lack operational vitality, and fail to make full use of their influence to expand resources and develop cultural industry for profit.

### *Quantity and Regions*

In the past two decades, Confucius Institutes have developed from three countries in the world to 160 countries and regions so far, and the number of Confucius Institutes has also grown from three in the first year to 492 now, an increase of 164 times. However, it is worth noting that the annual growth rate of Confucius Institutes is gradually slowing down, which may indicate two problems: one is that Confucius Institutes realize that the rapid development speed cannot guarantee their teaching quality; the other is that the construction of Confucius Institutes overseas is limited or has problems.

In terms of the speed of development, the Confucius Institute lags behind the Goethe Institute and the Alliance Française, which have a longer history of development, and appears more ambitious. However, while the number of Confucius Institutes is increasing, the distribution of Confucius Institutes on a global scale is also uneven.

### *Non-uniform System*

With the reform of the Confucius Institute, the Sino-Foreign Language Exchange and Cooperation Center of the Ministry of Education has replaced the former Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) to perform relevant responsibilities. At the time of the transition of the old and new organizations to manage the Confucius Institute, the newly established China International Foundation for Chinese Language Education still has a

lack of coherence in the operation and management of the Confucius Institute brand. The Confucius Institute has been developed for twenty years, and its development quality and level are beyond doubt, but there are still problems such as imperfect management mechanism and unstable funding investment that need time to be solved. However, at present, the role of the Chinese Education Foundation is a little slow. For example, in the construction of the official website, the related projects of Confucius Institutes still need to be viewed on the official website of the former Confucius Institute headquarters. The newly built official website of the foundation has less content and less information about Confucius Institutes and related projects, and the webpage construction is still at a low level. In terms of policies and systems, although the Foundation has also issued a charter, rules of procedure of the board of directors, financial system and information disclosure system, no new management methods or development plans for Confucius Institutes have been issued with the establishment of new institutes, and Confucius Institutes around the world still carry out education and language and culture promotion in accordance with the previous fixed mode. Therefore, the new management organization of Confucius Institutes should attach great importance to the learning of operation and management ability and the transformation of the role of managers.

#### *Nature and Motivation*

Since its establishment, Confucius Institutes have developed at a fast pace and have gained a certain influence in the world. However, due to the great changes in the international situation in recent years, Confucius Institutes, which were considered to have "political significance" at the beginning, have encountered certain setbacks in Western countries. Especially after the outbreak of the epidemic in 2020, Western countries' negative sentiment toward China has intensified, and the mainstream media's negative news reports on Confucius Institutes have different meanings, leading to a decrease in the recognition of Confucius Institutes in Western countries. The new international environment challenges the development of Confucius Institutes.

Especially in today's globalization, under the background of globalization and integration in full swing, countries and nations begin to consciously protect and publicize their cultural heritage. In order to maintain the purity of mother tongue and countries have adopted hunting, protecting mother tongue at home and promoting mother tongue overseas. On the other hand, there are more than 20 national language promotion organizations in the world, and all countries want to spread their cultural values through the promotion of language. If Confucius Institutes want to stand out among language institutions and occupy a certain market share, it is a huge challenge.

#### *Improvement Plan*

##### *Ensure the Quality of Teacher Resources*

As an important strategy to enhance China's cultural influence and national soft power, the state should provide

macro-support from policies and funds to escort officially recognized international Chinese language promotion organizations such as Confucius Institutes. We encourage and support domestic universities to set up master's degrees in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and cooperate with Confucius Institutes to set up Chinese language teaching majors. Support the teacher supply and career development of Confucius Institutes and local teachers through multiple channels at the macro level, and introduce policies, formulate plans, and invest funds to solve the worries of teacher reserve and sustainable development.

At the same time, the training of Confucius Institute teachers should highlight the locality and application. It is necessary to train, train and select teachers according to different countries and regions, different cultural backgrounds and different teaching objects in order to ensure the quality of teachers in Confucius Institutes and better and more efficient Chinese teaching and cultural promotion.

As for the pre-job training of Chinese teachers, we should abandon the previous style of little and shallow, and implement country-specific differentiation and treatment in teacher training, separate and batch training, extend the training frequently, enrich and strengthen the training content. At the same time, Chinese teachers should be encouraged to improve their own Chinese teaching level through various forms of cooperation.

#### *Enrich Teaching Resources*

At present, Chinese teaching resources are faced with problems such as insufficient supply of high-quality products, weak innovation drive, imbalance of product structure, and no adaptation to local conditions. Therefore, this paper suggests the following measures: First, enhance the content of research and development of teaching materials. Second, introduce the teaching material evaluation mechanism of "qualified evaluation + level evaluation". Third, we will improve and upgrade the structure of resources. Fourth, it is necessary to explore and study the characteristics and rules of Chinese learning and teaching in the non-native language environment, innovate the localization methods of Chinese teaching, and enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of Chinese teaching.

At the same time, facing the future, facing the world. To cope with the global digital divide, build a diversified and personalized online learning environment for the learning needs of different groups around the world. Deepen the integration of information technology and Chinese language teaching, lead the innovation of education concepts and education models, connect online resources with offline courses, and connect digital Confucius Institutes with physical Confucius Institutes.

#### *Expand the Source of Funding*

Establish a stable mechanism and guarantee system for funding education. The development of Confucius Institutes has always been funded by the national financial allocation, but with the growth of the number of Confucius



Institutes, the problem of insufficient funding has become increasingly prominent. In this regard, there should be constantly expanding channels for raising funds and integrating resources, encourage social forces to participate in the school, and consider widely attracting donations from the business community, celebrities and overseas people, and even establish a special foundation. Under the operation and management of the China International Foundation for Chinese Language Education, in order to achieve full development and burst out new vitality, the Confucius Institutes need to innovate and develop, change the previous development mode, constantly optimize the reformed management mode, and make use of internal and external favorable conditions to promote the high-level development of Confucius Institutes in the new era.

The Foundation shall further improve the management system and quality evaluation system of Confucius Institutes, fundamentally guarantee the efficient operation of Confucius Institutes, innovate the funding guarantee mechanism for development, reverse the disadvantage of the former Confucius Institutes with a single source of funds, expand diversified fund-raising channels, actively encourage and mobilize the whole society to participate in the construction of Confucius Institutes, and improve the efficiency of the use of funds invested in Confucius Institutes.

#### Balanced Development

From the current regional distribution of Confucius Institutes, there are more countries in Europe, the United States and East Asia, and less in Africa and South Asia. There may be many reasons for this situation, but as an important platform for the spread of China's soft power, the establishment of Confucius Institutes should focus on the balance of resources. China should strengthen the establishment of Confucius Institutes in neighbouring countries, especially in Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, so as to enhance their understanding of China and gradually eliminate their concerns about China. For African countries, economic assistance is only a window for them to understand China, and Confucius Institutes should provide them with more opportunities to experience Chinese culture and understand China in a more comprehensive way.

#### Unified Evaluation System

The so-called quality assessment mechanism refers to seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages on the basis of judging and evaluating the operation effectiveness of Confucius Institutes, so as to provide development basis for future development and give full play to the role of long-term mechanism. However, up to now, most of the Confucius Institutes are international language and culture promotion organizations with the participation of domestic and foreign universities. Therefore, in order to ensure the sustainable development of Confucius Institutes, a sound internal evaluation system and a third-party system should be established, and this system must involve all parties. Strengthening the management of Confucius Institutes can

effectively enhance the supervision. The first thing to deal with the cooperation between the two sides. Confucius Institutes should adhere to the principle of mutual benefit, and should dialectically analyze the opinions or suggestions provided by overseas partners before considering whether to accept them. In addition, commercial development can be taken appropriately, but profit should be avoided. Second, Confucius Institute headquarters should adhere to the overall planning of the school guidelines.

#### Confidence Philosophy

Despite the barriers that Western countries have put in place for Confucius Institutes, it should be seen that the demand for learning Chinese in countries around the world is still increasing. It should be made clear that the main task of Confucius Institutes is to build a platform for language exchange and cooperation between China and the rest of the world, and that Confucius Institutes should not be given too many "political tasks". Under the oppression of the Western discourse system, the communication mode of Confucius Institutes is slightly weak, and it is difficult to make their own voice. Therefore, Confucius Institutes need to expand the communication mode and integrate media resources to promote the development of their own communication ability. It is necessary to use the Confucius Institutes as a medium to integrate the Chinese concept of inclusiveness, openness and harmony into overseas campuses and communities, and explore new ways of "education + culture" exchange in light of local realities, so as to enhance the recognition of universal values between the two sides, avoid misunderstandings caused by cultural differences, and achieve harmonious coexistence of cultures.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

#### Conclusions

First, two research questions raised in will be answered here:

For how Confucius Institutes promote the internationalization of higher education in China, as an institution promoting the spread of the Chinese language to other countries, Confucius Institutes also play a commendable role in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education. The unique requirements of Confucius Institutes make the cooperation and contact between Chinese and foreign universities closer. In the context of the development of Confucius Institutes, Chinese universities have broadened the channels of international teachers, improved the ability of international management at the level of school operation, accelerated the internationalization of curriculum development, and also improved the internationalization level of college students. It can be seen that Confucius Institutes have played an obvious role in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education in the fields of teachers, school operation and management, curriculum and students.



As for the problems of Confucius Institutes in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education, according to the development of Confucius Institutes, it can be found that in the process of promoting the internationalization of China's higher education, Confucius Institutes have problems such as insufficient teachers, insufficient teaching resources, shortage of funds, uneven regional development, lack of evaluation system, and cultural conflicts. In order to solve these problems and enable Confucius Institutes to better promote the internationalization of China's higher education, it is necessary to improve and perfect such aspects as teachers, teaching resources, funds, balanced development, perfect evaluation system, and build cultural confidence.

As the largest international educational cooperation in human history and the largest internationalization project in the history of Chinese universities, the Confucius Institute has experienced a complete 20 years from its establishment to today. The past 20 years have been full of exploration and challenges, and after a decade of growth, this transformation will remain a road of exploration for international cooperation, which will undoubtedly accumulate valuable and pioneering experience for the major theme of education and development, especially international cooperation among universities. As far as the findings of this study are concerned, the development of Confucius Institutes around the world shows their individuality and has made great achievements in promoting the development of higher education in China. But in terms of the challenges that have emerged so far, Confucius Institutes still have a long way to go, and there are still many areas that need to be improved.

### Implications

This study analyzes the role of Confucius Institutes in promoting the internationalization of China's higher education, and the challenges faced by Confucius Institutes, and puts forward countermeasures against these challenges. This can provide useful implication for the future development planning of Confucius Institutes, international education cooperation, and the development of world civilization.

Firstly, the global rigid demand is the fundamental motivation for the rapid development of Confucius Institutes. For a country or a higher education institution that wants to further develop the internationalization of higher education, timing is crucial.

Second, seeking a wide range of international partners is the key to breaking through the limitations of internationalization of higher education. The object of international cooperation of higher education institutions should not be limited to certain countries or certain regions, no matter in developed or underdeveloped regions, it is necessary to internationalize the exchange of higher education.

Third, build cultural confidence in the integration of the international development of higher education with the unique local culture. No matter in the process of developing the internationalization of higher education, or in the process of promoting local culture, we should

actively find the union between the two. The two complement each other and make progress together.

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