



The Effectiveness of Confucius Institutes as a Tool of China's Soft Power in West Africa: A Linguistic Perspective

William Nankep Kouanang^{1*}, Assou Sagara¹, Xin Lu², Xia Zhao²

¹School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University of Science and Technology, Zhenjiang, China

²School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University of Science and Technology, Zhendjiang, China

*Corresponding Author

William Nankep Kouanang

School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu
University of Science and
Technology, Zhenjiang, China

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Abstract: This research paper aims to analyze the effectiveness of Confucius Institutes as a tool of China's Soft Power in West Africa from a linguistic perspective, with a particular focus on how Chinese language promotion influences learners' perceptions. It also suggests a novel approach on the teaching of Chinese language and culture at Confucius Institutes, especially from a linguistic perspective. Drawing on non-empirical research methods, the paper exploits second-hand data on Confucius Institutes research books, articles, conference reports as well as official sites; with main focus on two selected West African countries as case studies, namely Ghana and Nigeria. The findings indicate that Confucius Institutes are expanding in West Africa, and that Chinese language instruction at the Institutes, when coupled with cultural programming, enhances China's image among educated youth and fosters their linguistic curiosity and Soft Power affiliation. However, the findings equally revealed that some challenges such as sociolinguistic barriers with French/English dominance, resource disparities, and perceptions of ideological influence limit the broader societal reach of Confucius Institutes programs. Thus, this research paper is inked with sociolinguistic as well as pedagogic implications, and therefore suggests a diachronic-linguistic teaching approach of the Chinese language and culture at Confucius Institutes.

Keywords: Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, Chinese language, West Africa, Linguistic Influence, Language Perceptions, Language Policy, Sociolinguistics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly multipolar world, cultural and linguistic resources have emerged as crucial instruments of international influence in correlation with the concept of Soft Power. This concept, as defined by Joseph Nye in the 1990s, refers to a state's ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or economic pressure. This form of power is rooted in values, culture, and foreign policy legitimacy, distinguishing it from the material coercion of Hard Power. Recent studies emphasize that China has deliberately incorporated Soft Power into its global strategy, deploying cultural and educational

institutions as key vehicles of attraction (Sun, 2023). Among these vehicles, the Confucius Institutes stand out as central instruments of China's cultural diplomacy. Established in 2004, Confucius Institutes aim to promote the Chinese language and disseminate Chinese cultural values, positioning China as both a cultural and educational partner to host countries. In Africa in general, and in West Africa in particular, Confucius Institutes have expanded rapidly alongside deepening economic ties, symbolizing China's intent to complement financial investment with cultural engagement (Adams Bodomo, Mboya & Nkrumah, 2024). For Beijing, the spread of Mandarin and cultural programs is not

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merely pedagogical but strategic: language teaching functions as a conduit for improving China's international image and legitimacy (Homawoo & Conyers, 2021).

The linguistic dimension of Confucius Institutes in West Africa is particularly significant. Language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a marker of identity and ideology (Bamgbose, 2011). In a region historically shaped by the dominance of colonial languages such as French, English, and Portuguese, the introduction of Mandarin adds a new layer of linguistic competition and cultural negotiation. While many African learners view Chinese language acquisition as an opportunity for educational advancement and access to China-related careers (Opoku-Darko & Odinye, 2017), studies also highlight ambivalent attitudes. In this case, learners' motivations often shift over time, with integrative motivations (interest in culture and affinity with Chinese society) coexisting with instrumental ones (job opportunities and scholarships), reflecting dynamics found in broader cross-cultural language learning (Matsumoto, 2015).

Yet, the effectiveness of Confucius Institutes as Soft Power instruments is shaped not only by China's intentions but also by African agency and socio-linguistic realities. As Homawoo and Conyers (2021) argue, Confucius Institutes often encounter challenges in establishing balanced cultural exchanges, with asymmetries in institutional power limiting equal partnership. Moreover, structural constraints—such as resource disparities in host institutions, limited integration of local languages, and skepticism about China's geopolitical agenda—further complicate their influence (Thiombiano & Zhang, 2020). These barriers echo Bamgbose's (2011) broader observation that African languages and local linguistic ecologies remain marginalized under globalizing pressures, often sidelined in favor of foreign linguistic hegemonies. Consequently, assessing the effectiveness of Confucius Institutes in West Africa requires a nuanced, linguistically grounded perspective that considers both the transformative potential of Mandarin instruction and the limitations imposed by socio-cultural contexts.

This study therefore seeks to examine the role of Confucius Institutes as instruments of Chinese Soft Power in West Africa from a linguistic viewpoint, with focus on Ghana and Nigeria, guided by three research questions:

1. To what extent does Confucius Institutes' language and cultural instructions reshape West African learners' perceptions of China?
2. How do learners' linguistic motivations and post-learning perceptions mediate their affiliation with Chinese Soft Power?
3. What socio-linguistic barriers (e.g., colonial language dominance, resource disparities) constrain the Soft Power impact of Confucius Institutes in West Africa?

By situating Confucius Institutes within the intersection of language policy, sociolinguistics, and international relations, this research article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how linguistic influence interacts with cultural diplomacy in shaping China-Africa relations, leaning on Soft Power.

2. Confucius Institutes in the world and in West Africa (Ghana and Nigeria)

Confucius Institutes are non-lucrative educational institutions funded by the Chinese government, whose purpose is to promote the Chinese language and culture. These Institutes are managed by the Confucius Institute Headquarters ("Hanban"), in Beijing, China. The ever first Confucius Institutes was established in SEOUL, South Korea [1], in 2004, although the first pilot project was launched earlier that year in Tashkent, Uzbekistan [2]. Since then, there has been a dissemination of Confucius Institutes worldwide. In 2017, the number of Confucius Institutes considerably increased in the world. Five continents witnessed the spread of these Institutes on their countries. This proliferation of Confucius Institutes is represented below with a histogram that shows the increase of Confucius Institutes around the world from 2004 to 2017, followed by a pie chart that shares out the number of Confucius Institutes on each continent, within the same timeframe.

¹ 首尔孔子学院. Hanban official website, http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_6848.htm

²Don Starr, "Chinese Language Education in Europe: The Confucius Institutes," *European Journal of Education* 44, No. 1 (2009): 65-82

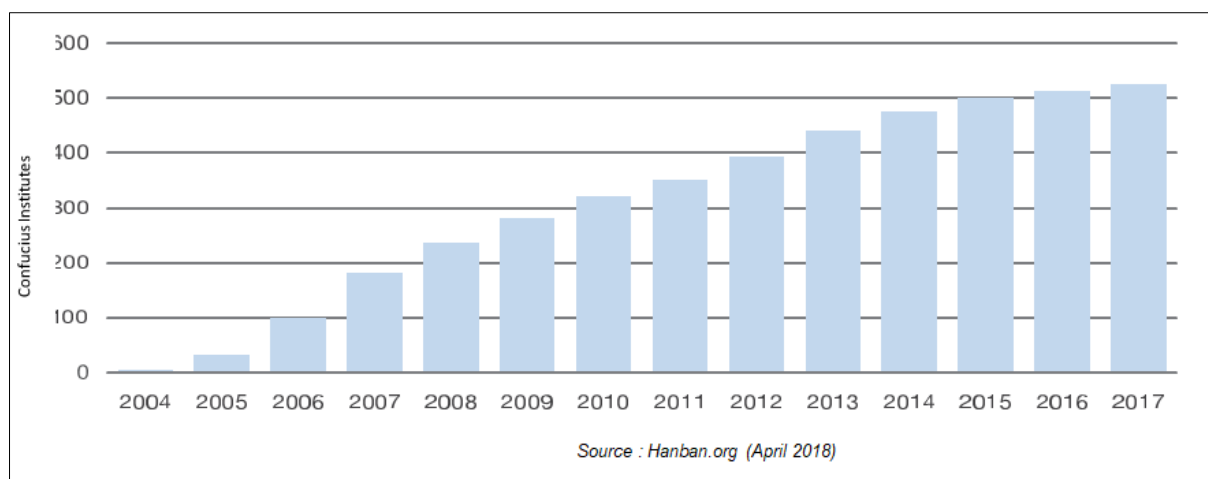


Figure 1: Number of Confucius Institutes worldwide

On the above figure, the vertical line depicts the increasing number of Confucius Institutes from 0 to 600, and the horizontal one displays the specific years of the gradual increase of the Institutes from

2004 to 2017. It is therefore clear that there has been a proliferation of Confucius Institutes across the globe from its creation in 2004 till 2017.

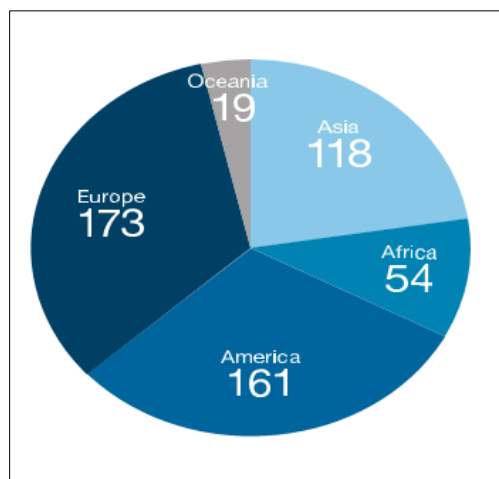


Figure 2: Global distribution of Confucius Institutes

Source: Hanban.org (April 2018)

The above pie chart presents a good number of Confucius Institutes in each continent from 2004 to 2017. Therefore, we clearly observe that 173 of the Institutes are located in Europe, 161 in the United States of America [3], 19 in Oceania, 118 in Asia, and 54 in Africa. Thus, we count a total number 525 Confucius Institutes all over the world from its establishment in 2004 till 2017.

Since 2018, the number of Confucius Institutes in Africa has been increasing. In fact, during the 20th anniversary of the first Confucius Institute in Africa – the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi set up in 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya –, Li (2025)

reported that there are now 67 Confucius Institutes in 47 African countries. This shows a significant expansion of Confucius Institutes in Africa in general and in West African countries in particular, specifically in Ghana and Nigeria.

In Ghana precisely, several private university colleges, senior high schools and basic schools have accepted the Chinese language to be taught to their students Opoku-Darko (2023: 27). The country counts a total number of three Confucius Institutes, the first one jointly established by the University of Ghana and Zhejiang University of Technology in 2013, the second one at the University

³ 关于孔子学院/课堂, Hanban official website, http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm

of Cape Coast, inaugurated in 2016 in collaboration with Hunan City University, and the last one in 2023, welcomed and jointly built by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and Hubei University of Automotive Technology (Michael Oduro, 2024)

In Nigeria, there is growing interest in learning the Chinese language among the citizens. As of now, there are two Confucius Institutes and other Confucius classrooms for the teaching and learning of the Chinese language and culture (Ifeanyi Odinye, 2017: 1). Till date, the number of institutes remains unchanged, with one in the University of Lagos, and the other in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Anambra.

3. Reshaped China perceptions from West African learners through Confucius Institutes

China's global image has previously been weak owing to negative Western and global media coverage and a lack of a global understanding of its political system and culture (Adams Bodomo *et al*, 2024). Hopefully, Confucius Institutes play, through their teachings and the promotion of Chinese language and culture, a significant role in reshaping learners' perceptions of China. Over the last three decades, the economic reforms in China have contributed to its meteoric rise to become one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Benewick & Donald, 2009). The rise of China's economic power has increased its political influence in many parts of the world, particularly Africa (Wu, 2016).

In West Africa in general, learners' perceptions of China are significantly reshaped through their direct engagement at Confucius Institutes. These institutes facilitate a move from abstract, negative often media-driven notions of

China to more concrete and personal understandings grounded in cultural and linguistic exchange. Therefore, learners begin to perceive China not just as a distant economic power but as a civilization with a rich cultural heritage, which fosters a greater sense of global connectivity. This positive perception is directly linked to the quality of instruction and the cultural immersion experiences provided by the Confucius Institutes. Consequently, the Institutes are seen as effective Soft Power tools that successfully promote a more nuanced and favorable image of China among students (Adams Bodomo *et al*, 2024).

Equally, Confucius Institutes principally reshape West African learners' perception of China to the one that easily supply employment in big firms, corporations and enterprises. In fact, they widen and reshape learners' views of China not only towards the employment companies, but also to self-business, self-commerce, self-trade, and to the obtainment of scholarships to further their education in China. In this respect, with the command of the Chinese language at hand, post-learners can easily slip through the nooks and crannies in China or anywhere the language is indispensable to be used.

In Ghana principally, Confucius Institutes reshape learners' perception of China by letting them know that through the teachings at Confucius Institutes they can get job and employment offers. As instance, critical data show from 2013 to 2022 that the Confucius Institute at the University of Ghana (CIUG) has impacted their graduates and has significantly made contributions in the employment sectors of its graduates in the country (Adams Bodomo *et al*, 2024: 187). This is substantiated in the table below:

Table 1: Employment rates of graduate and postgraduate students from the years 2013 to 2022

Year	Students Graduated	Further Studies (Postgraduate)	Employment
2013	24	2	22
2014	36	6	30
2015	72	N/A	72
2016	81	14	67
2017	74	4	70
2018	63	8	55
2019	43	7	36
2020	72	4	68
2021	124	18	116
2022	140	7	140

Source: Taken from Adams Bodomo *et al*, (2024: 187)

The table above reveals how learners' perceptions of China has been reshaped to portray an image of an employment supplier in Ghana.

In Nigeria, teachings through Confucius Institutes have reshaped learners' perceptions of

China towards the advantages they offer. From this perspective, Confucius Institutes and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) particularly established a relationship with China General Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria in March 2018, from which students, after their trainings at the Institutes can

easily have access to employment (Zhangbao Yu, *et al*, 2024: 502). Concretely, in a view to reshaping learners' perception of China from Confucius Institutes, Zhangbao Yu, *et al*, (2024: 502-503) explain that the Chamber in collaboration with Confucius Institutes regularly recommends students for employment as interpreters/translators, sales representatives, public relations officers, etc. to enterprises, such as China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), TEC Engineering International (TEC), China Harbour Engineering (CHEC), SINOMA International Engineering (SINOMA), China National Petroleum Corporation (PetroChina) and China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), Yongxing Steel (Yongxing), Star Times, Times Ceramics, Rongtai Aluminum Industry, Kingrock Nigeria Ltd, (Kingrock), Anhui Construction Engineering Group (AHCE), Juddy-Bolema Luggage Company (Juddy-Bolema SinFrica Business Station (SinFrica), China-Nigeria Friendship Hospital (CNFH), Huawei, OPPO Mobile Communications (OPPO) and China Blue Sea Petrochemical and Godfrey Technology (Godfrey).

4. West African Learners' Linguistic Motivations and Post-Learning Perceptions

China has now erected itself and is viewed as a world economic dragon from which everyone can connect themselves. In West Africa in general, and in Ghana and Nigeria in particular, learners' linguistic motivations and post-learning perceptions are mainly geared towards this goal. As the linguistic motivations and post-learning perceptions from learners are unhidden, this makes them easily affiliate with China's Soft Power policy. "Soft Power," as defined by the American political scholar Joseph Nye in the late 1990s, "occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants [...] in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants." It is worth reminding that Soft Power refers to the ability of a country to shape global outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or force (Li Li *et al*, 2025: 36). Li Li *et al*, (ibid) precise that the key aspect of China's Soft Power strategy is the establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide [...]. The aim of these Institutes is to promote the

Chinese language and culture while fostering international understanding and collaboration.

The Chinese language has gained recognition globally (Chen, 2022; Opoku-Darko & Nkrumah, 2022). Therefore, many educational institutions across the globe have incorporated Chinese language in their curricula (Smith & Li, 2022; Xu, 2022). In West Africa specifically, many Institutes have incorporated the learning of the Chinese language in their curricular, and many countries (among which Ghana and Nigeria, which are our main focus here) have put in place the Confucius Institutes, still in a view to sparking the interest in the Chinese language from students. Notwithstanding, the motivations towards the learning of the language keeps on increasing, especially in terms of the advantages learners may have. The constant rise in enrollment in Confucius Institutes suggests that Ghanaians see its value and what it has to offer (Adams Bodomo *et al*, 2024: 187). In this perspective, Opoku-Darko (2023: 27) noticed that in Ghana specifically, the University of Cape Coast and the University of Ghana are presently offering Chinese language program. Several private university colleges, senior high schools and basic schools in Ghana have also accepted the language to be taught to their students.

In this view, we realize that in Ghana, students' linguistic motivations and their post-learning perceptions are nurtured by the myriads of reasons and the benefits they can obtain, as confirmed by the findings from Opoku-Darko (2023). This envy to learn the Chinese language beside numerous advantages linked to its post-learning mediate towards learners' affiliation to China's Soft Power.

Gardner and Lambert's (1972) defined motivation as a construct made up of certain attitudes. As for the case of Nigeria, Ifeanyi Odinye (2017: 4), with the use of the questionnaire, collected data from the students learning Chinese language at the Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in order to obtain information on the attitudes (motivations) of learners towards learning Chinese and their perceptions towards the language. This is observed in the table below.

Table 2: Questionnaire sample

S/N	Survey items (statements)	SD 1	D 2	N 3	A 4	SA 5
1.	I like Chinese language.	3	7	10	24	8
2.	I think Chinese language is difficult.	5	31	4	8	5
3.	I wish to speak fluent Chinese.	0	1	2	12	37
4.	If I study Chinese, it means I don't like our local language.	4	19	1	6	2
5.	The study of Chinese will make me forget English language.	15	20	3	10	5
	TOTAL OF RESPONDENTS	27	78	20	60	57

Source: Taken from Ifeanyi Odinye (2017: 4)

The above table clearly exposes a positive attitude (motivation) vis-à-vis the language, and post-learning perceptions from Nigerian learners of the Chinese language. In this line, learners easily adhere to China's Soft Power. For instance, being aware that the Nigerian labor market loses the benefits from transfer of the technology and skills from the Chinese firms and companies, due to language barriers, policies are required to help the local labor market learn and stop the Chinese pattern of hiring most of the staff from mainland China (Zeidan, 2020: 26, citing Nabine, 2009: 22). This instance tallies with China's Soft Power, as the Chinese look to Soft Power from the government point of view, or the organization related to the government, to help implement policies (Zeidan, 2020: 12).

5. Chinese Soft Power impact on Confucius Institutes in West Africa

The Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes include their key principles. Some of them are that: The Confucius Institutes shall abide by the laws and regulations of the countries in which they are located; they shall respect local cultural and educational traditions and social customs; and they shall not contravene concerning the laws and regulations of China. Moreover, the Confucius Institutes shall not involve or participate in any activities that are not consistent with the missions of Confucius Institutes. In this respect, Confucius Institutes should neither impose themselves nor interfere in the government policy of the host country. Only the three last decades witnessed the advent of Confucius Institutes in the world, precisely in 2004, in SEOUL, South Korea; and in Africa, in 2005, in Nairobi, Kenya. As a reminder, the central concept here is Soft Power, defined by Joseph Nye as the ability to get what we want by attraction (value, culture, models...) rather than constraint or material incitation. Thus, applied to Confucius Institutes, Soft Power assumes the diffusion of the Chinese language and culture, creates sympathy, facilitates cooperations and produces indirect political and economic effects (Nye, 1990s).

6. Colonial Language Heritage and Sociolinguistic Barriers

Colonial heritage deeply shapes language hierarchies in West Africa. Colonial languages such as French, English, etc., according to the countries, occupy the academic, administrative and professional spheres. Djité (2008) shows how these hierarchies perpetuate and create inequalities in access to educational resources. Thus, in this context, Chinese, a newly introduced language via Confucius Institutes faces two main obstacles: First, the low utility perceived by a large part of the population; and second, the pedagogical mediation which is generally

in colonial language. Therefore, these aspects marginalize the Chinese language as secondary or "exotic" compared to the professional priorities dictated by colonial languages.

In Ghana, since the Chinese language is not the native language, it comes with challenges that need to be addressed (Adams Bodomo *et al*, 2024: 188). In addition, given that English is the dominant language in the country, the perceived usefulness of Chinese language is mainly economic. This relevant analysis combines the theory of Nye (1990s) with a critical reading of linguistic power relations. Adams Bodomo *et al*, (idib) noticed that as researchers have paid attention to development in Chinese studies in Ghana, they therefore believe that, if grants are made available for these researchers to undertake research work, most of the challenges faced with teaching and learning Chinese language can be identified and addressed. Again, these unidentified areas that pose problems to the teaching and learning of Chinese at the Confucius Institute at the University of Ghana is an evidence that there are barriers, among which colonial languages and sociolinguistic ones, that prevent Chinese Soft Power from impacting Confucius Institutes in Ghana.

In Nigeria, Ifeanyi Odinye (2017: 5), though his investigation on the attitudes of Nigerian students towards the learning of the Chinese language revealed positive ones, reminds that in Nigeria, English is the dominant foreign language which is equally a national language. He adds that without a credit in English language, students cannot be admitted in a higher institution in Nigeria. English language is the medium of teaching and learning in Nigeria. These are some of the reasons why the English language is very important in Nigeria. The introduction of the Chinese language into Nigerian schools received different reactions. Many think it is a welcome development while others see it as a distraction to the students already learning English and French.

A sociolinguistic perspective emphasizes that its effectiveness depends on local linguistic ecology, such as language hierarchies, educational politics and the status of the existing languages (Bamgbose, 2011). Despite its effort to gain ground on multiple territories in the world, the impact of Chinese Soft Power on Confucius Institutes is relatively not very sensed due to, in addition, societal norms Confucius Institutes face, which are different from those in China. This situation definitely constraints the Soft Power impact of Confucius Institutes in West Africa, especially in Nigeria and Ghana.

In a word, colonial heritage creates a structural competition that the Soft Power of Confucius Institutes cannot overcome without explicit politics of linguistic mediation and a clear demonstration of socio-economic benefits of Chinese language learning, through the Chinese language integration possibilities into the linguistic premises.

7. Resource disparities in West Africa

The impact of Chinese Soft Power on Confucius Institutes is constrained due to resource disparities. This does not allow Chinese Soft Power to swiftly operate in West Africa, Especially in Ghana and Nigeria.

In Ghana, resource disparities are felt at the level of the number of trained teachers. In fact, (Adams Bodomo *et al*, 2024: 188) say that the study of the Chinese language in Ghana has developed over the years as more students take interest in the language. They add that more schools in Ghana are becoming interested in adding Chinese language to their curriculum; however, there are not enough teachers available to assist with the teaching of the language. This lack of trained teachers constrains the Chinese Soft Power of Confucius Institutes.

In Nigeria, a similar situation is observed. In fact, the issue of inadequate manpower in the teaching of Chinese language is a constrain to the rapid and effective learning of the language in Nigeria Ifeanyi Odinye (2015: 5). The researcher added that insufficient learning centers and teaching materials are no doubt part of the militating factors against the learning of the Chinese language in the country. More precisely, Zhangbao Yu, *et al*, (2024) signal that the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria faces the challenge of a severe shortage of teaching resources despite several records set in HSK exams, despite numerous prizes won during the “Chinese bridge” competition since 2018; and despite numerous trained Nigerian students in the Chinese language (50,000) with the manpower the Institute supplies to different enterprises in Nigeria and beyond (about 30,000). This shows severe resource disparities in the country. Moreover, there is a huge human resource market scarcity that limits the China’s Soft Power impact of Confucius Institutes in the country. As the post-learning perception of students affiliate them with China’s Soft Power from the opportunities they chase and obtain from the Confucius Institutes, the number of trained students still do not meet up with the demand. Zhangbao Yu, *et al*, (2024) believe that there is a huge asymmetry between demand and supply in that the talents produced by the 2 Confucius Institutes in the country are still unable to meet the increasing demand for their services. The barriers impeding on China’s Soft Power effect on Confucius Institutes is preoccupying,

given that Chinese enterprises are not the only ones employing talented trained Chinese students. As it costs far more to employ Chinese expatriate workers and far less to employ local Nigerian workers, Chinese enterprises have adopted the system of localization employment. In this regard, there is a growing demand for locals with proficiency in Chinese and practically, rough estimates suggest that the burgeoning Chinese language market in Nigeria needs at least 10,000 to 15,000 new talents every year (Zhangbao Yu, *et al*, 2024).

8. Teaching at Confucius Institutes in West Africa

The primary goal of Confucius Institutes is to ensure the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture. This is therefore a sure way to improve Chinese Soft Power impact on Confucius Institutes in West Africa. The basic training programs includes “Chinese cultural training courses, and cultural activities such as **Taijiquan** (martial art), calligraphy, paper-cutting, Chinese painting, traditional Chinese opera and skills of traditional Chinese massaging” (Ehizuelen Omoruyi *et al*, 2017: 12; Jean Gonondo, 2021: 35). In fact, the Chinese training program focuses on resource building and cultural sensitizing about China (Nordtveit, 2011: 102). More specifically, the language teaching is usually followed by the organization of some colorful events about Chinese culture, such as the Chinese martial art, songs and music, folk instruments, folk dancing, traditional Chinese opera, Chinese chess, the art of paper-cut, Chinese knot, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese paintings, tea art are some of the cultural content taught by the Confucius Institute (Y. Huang, 2019; Liu & Zhao, 2019, Jean Gonondo, 2021).

It is therefore noticed that from a linguistic perspective, much attention is not paid to the teaching of the language at Confucius Institutes, as the emphasis is mainly far away as evoked above. Concretely, at Confucius Institutes, emphasis is not laid on several linguistic aspects such as syntax, pragmatics, semantics, stylistics, phonology, and so on. Commonly, people think that language is just a tool for access to other fields of knowledge. Therefore, it does not need profound considerations, in terms of research and teaching. Thus, we speak the language and so what? But how we arrived at speaking and achieving a perfect command and embodying the language is the whole concern. It is indeed necessary to reconsider how much we really understand about the nature of language and its role in human’s life. Therefore, if taken for granted, one may be surprised to realize that some of the most damaging racial, ethnic, and socio-economic prejudices are based on our linguistic ignorance. Thus, language learning and teaching is far more than what with we think, given the complexities it bears. At Confucius Institutes in West Africa (Nigeria and

Ghana), the teaching and learning should take more roots from the linguistic perspective, for a positive impact on China's Soft Power. In Nigeria for instance, Ifeanyi Odinye (2015: 5) reveals the following challenges linked to the learning of Chinese:

The Chinese language is said to be the hardest language in the world. This may be because of the difference in the phonology of Chinese language and other alphabetic languages. Chinese language is a logographic and tonal language which makes it hard to speak and write. The Chinese language belongs to a separate branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is a contour tone language. It has many dialect groups. They include Mandarin, Wu, Min, Cantonese, Hsiang, and Hakka. The use of pinyin in the study of Chinese provides many practical advantages for learning the language. Nevertheless, learners still encounter all sorts of problems in the course of learning the language. However, most of the phonological problems which Nigerian students are facing in learning the Chinese language stem from the presence of certain speech sounds in the language that are not in the Nigerian learners' indigenous languages. Chinese characters represent monosyllables, and generally each character represents a single morpheme. The total number of Chinese characters is estimated at over fifty thousand, of which only five to eight thousand are normally adequate for everyday situations.

From what is said above, it stands undoubtable that teaching and learning Chinese are conducted at Confucius Institutes with little attention and focus on linguistic aspects, despite the complexity of the language. If linguistic aspects are given priorities, teaching Chinese language and culture would make Confucius Institutes an effective tool for China's Soft Power in West Africa.

9. Novel Linguistic Teaching Approach and Effectiveness of China's Soft Power as a tool for Confucius Institutes in West Africa

In addition to focusing on linguistic aspects, another approach to the teaching and learning at the Confucius Institutes in West Africa should be done from a diachronic (historical) perspective. In fact, knowing the history of the language at issue will make the learning more attractive and curious and therefore less effort-driven and energy consuming. For instance, the Chinese language is logographic, meaning that it is marked by symbols (characters) used to represent an entire word. Mainly, these characters are usually calqued on images, objects or phenomena shapes. A perfect illustration is the pictogram 山 (shān, "mountain"), which is a stylized representation of three mountain peaks. It is not merely a cultural embellishment; it is a cognitive and mnemonic necessity. Therefore, teaching the Chinese

language from a diachronic approach will let students become more curious, and learning much easier. In fact, at this level, the learner can easily connect the symbols to the objects or phenomena they represent in the real world, thus making them quickly acquire a large amount of words, and intuitively guess their meanings. Eventually, the guessed meaning might be close to the exact one or might be the exact one. This will inevitably constitute an important step in the learning process. From this perspective, this approach touches upon a fundamental pedagogical issue, as it transforms learning, perceived as the dry and arbitrary memorization of strokes, into a logical and narrative process. Consequently, the Chinese Soft Power will be more effective and will have a positive impact on teachings and learning at Confucius Institutes.

10. CONCLUSION

China Soft Power is gaining ground in Africa in general and in West Africa in particular through Confucius Institutes. The effectiveness of Confucius Institutes is vital for China's Soft Power to operate in Africa in general and in West Africa in particular. This effectiveness is viewed through the lenses of Ghana and Nigeria. Confucius Institutes are being multiplied in the world, (1,113 since 2018), and these countries (Ghana and Nigeria) experience their expansion on their land, with two in Nigeria, and three Institutes in Ghana, the last one being recently established in Ghana in 2023. Although other parts in the world (America and Europe) are closing some Confucius Institutes in their countries, Africa, especially West Africa constitutes an open door to them. Institutes in Africa are tools for China's Soft Power operation. Therefore, through teaching and learning, Confucius Institutes aim not only at spreading Chinese culture in West Africa, but also at reshaping learners' perception of China, as a trustworthy country that provides opportunities. However, Confucius Institutes face challenges in Africa, especially in West Africa by being overshadowed by colonial languages, local languages, cultural differences and resources disparities. These discrepancies restrain and constrain China's Soft Power from operating in the country effectively. Moreover, teaching and learning at Confucius Institutes are somehow shallow and mainly focus on cultural transmission and practices, thus neglecting a very essential element, that of teaching and learning from a linguistic perspective in general, and from a diachronic (historical) dimension, to be precise. From this angle, teaching and learning at Confucius Institutes would be more tangible, less effort and less time consuming, and would enable students to easily acquire the language. Thus, by so doing, Confucius Institutes will be effective, and will operate as an indispensable tool for China's Soft Power implementation in West Africa.

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