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## **Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics-Think Tanks and Confucius Institutes as Instruments of Soft Power\*\***

### *Abstract*

*In the attempt to project more favourable picture image of country and to explain Chinese views on international relations, Chinese government is adopting Confucius discourse. Its approaches include China peaceful rise and development, promotion of Chinese language and culture through Confucius Institutes (KI) and activities designed to better explain Chinese point of view. One of them is also through Think Tanks explaining that what China is doing is non-threatening. We will present the process of building of national image through selected instruments of soft power and newly adopted discourse promoting Zhongyong<sup>1</sup> dialectics.*

*The first part will discuss the concept of Peaceful rise and development. The second section explains Think Tanks and tackles both think tanks from China and CEE region. In the third section we will present Confucius Institutes, origin and background and CEE in the region. The conclusion summarizes the article's findings and their implications.*

**Key words:** *peaceful development, zhongyong, Confucius institute, think tank, Confucius Institute, Soft power, Chinese Dream*

### **Introduction**

Ever since the launch of the “policy of reform and opening”, by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970-ties, as an significant event in the contemporary history of China, we see various academic discussions on the attempt of China to re-emerge as the “Middle Kingdom” when China was one of the key world political and economic actors. Hence there are discussions on China’s future as great power, hegemon and assertive Chinese stance.

On the other hand, Chinese scholars are opting for different discourse, more based on the background knowledge which they see as crucial for studying China. In that sense Zhongyong dialectics are mentioned as the core component of the background knowl-

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<sup>1</sup> Zhongyong means “taking the middle course”. The Zhongyong dialectic is a Chinese way of thinking, understanding of the world and principal behavioral norm. According to the dialectics of Zhongyong, the middle course is better than extreme behavior. Further information on Zhongyong see Qin Yaqing, “Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China’s International Strategy”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2014, available at: <http://cjjp.oxfordjournals.org>, pp.285-314.

edge.<sup>2</sup> Qin Yaqing<sup>3</sup> in his article explaining the concept of Continuity through Change claims that Hegelian dichotomous structure is perfect realist approach for explaining the western view of China as a hegemon and potential clash with US. In that sense, he is introducing background knowledge as the compulsory knowledge for further research and understanding of the China's international politics and taking the middle course or *Zhongyong* as the major dialectics applied to Chinese both domestic and international affairs. In a way, this and other similar attempts are offering and providing different views and understandings of international relations not based on the Western tradition and values. The question remains whether the same can be applied in practice. Therefore we shall concentrate on the building of national image and soft power and try to present it using both angles in the attempt to see whether China acts as power in the region we aim to study selected countries (CEE) or it aims to establish balance and harmonious relations amongst countries on the New Silk Road by applying new approach in international relations.

Tackling the concept of soft power, Chinese scholars introduced the new concepts i.e. responsible great power and peaceful rise whilst traditional policies such as "keeping a low profile" and "never seek hegemony" were questioned. "Chinese Dream" concept which means realization of "the great renewal of the Chinese nation" is also one of them.

As stated previously China is trying to project more favourable image thus adopting new approaches. Its approaches include China peaceful rise and development, promotion of Chinese language and culture through KIs and activities designed to better explain Chinese point of view through Think Tanks explaining that what China is doing is non-threatening. We will present the process of building of national image through selected instruments of soft power. In this article we shall attempt to answer the following questions:

- ◇ What is the Chinese view of soft power?
- ◇ Does China act as a power in the CEE region or it aims to establish balance and harmonious relations amongst countries on the New Silk Road by applying new approach in international relations?
- ◇ What are the impacts of think tanks and Confucius Institutes on China's stance in the world and within countries gathered in framework cooperation otherwise known as 16+1?
- ◇ What are the Think Tanks and Confucius Institutes doing?
- ◇ How are they thought of outside of China?

The purpose of this article is to understand how the Confucius Institutes and other promotion activities may be helping China promote its goodwill agenda or simply realizing bigger plans and picture.

This article will proceed as follows: the first part will discuss the concept of Peaceful rise and development. The second section explains Think Tanks and tackles both think tanks from China and CEE region. In the third section we will present Confucius Institutes, origin and background and CEE in the region. The conclusion summarizes the article's findings and their implications.

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<sup>2</sup> Qin Yaqing, "Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2014, available at: <http://cijp.oxfordjournals.org>, pp. 285-314.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 286.

## China's Peaceful Rise and Development

The State Council Information Office published in December, 2005 a white paper entitled *China's Peaceful Development Road*.<sup>4</sup> The document is composed of five chapters, i.e., *Peaceful Development Is the Inevitable Way for China's Modernization; Promoting World Peace and Development with China's Own Growth; Developing by Relying on Its Own Strength, Reform and Innovation; Seeking Mutual Benefit and Common Development with Other Countries; and Building a Harmonious World of Sustained Peace and Common Prosperity*. According to the White Paper on Peaceful Development, "China should develop itself through upholding world peace and contribute to world peace through its own development."<sup>5</sup> It should achieve development with its own efforts and by carrying out reform and innovation; at the same time, it should open itself to the outside and learn from other countries. It should seek mutual benefit and common development with other countries in keeping with the trend of economic globalization, and it should work together with other countries to build a harmonious world of durable peace and common prosperity. This is a path of "scientific, independent, open, peaceful, cooperative and common development".<sup>6</sup>

The objective of the White Paper coincides with the Belt and Road Initiative and 16+1 Framework and various regional mechanism China takes part in or initiates it.

The term and concept of peaceful development is used first of all to reassure the other nations that the rise of the China both military and economically, will not pose a threat to peace and stability, and that other nations will benefit from China's rising power and influence. When we study the leading international relations theorists we see that this concept is viewed as a disguise to hide real Chinese intentions. Hence, Mearsheimer explains this as disguising its rise through the use of peaceful development theory and Confucian culture.<sup>7</sup> Kissinger, on the other hand, is using background knowledge as supported by Chinese scholars, and is turning to the past, and Chinese Empire and tries to explain the synocentric system<sup>8</sup> that ruled in the Central Empire. He explains that Chinese Emperors felt it was impractical to contemplate influencing countries that nature had given the misfortune of locating at such great distance from China. By that he explains China never had interest

4 "China's Peaceful Development Road", *Renmin Wan*, published 22 December 2005, available at: [http://en.people.cn/200512/22/eng20051222\\_230059.html](http://en.people.cn/200512/22/eng20051222_230059.html), (accessed on 15 May, 2017).

5 Ibid.

6 "White Paper, China's Peaceful Development", available at: <http://in.chineseembassy.org/eng/zt/peaceful/1855717.htm>, (accessed 3 May, 2017).

7 John J Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully" in *The Tragedy of the Great Power Politics*, University of Chicago, updated version with VII Chapter, London, 2014.

8 Ming dynasty had synocentric view on the world which defined relations with East Asian neighbours. ( China saw itself as the "centre" surrounded by "barbarians" who are enlightened by the rule of the Chinese Emperor. Takeshi Hamishata explained the principle of synocentrism as based on the Middle Kingdom which is basically the abstract principle of managing relations between China as the centre and entities at its periphery. The power was central and represented in one person, the Emperor, presiding over Great Secretariat which acted as a "cabinet" and oversaw the work of six boards. The Government was consisted of eight governors and sixteen provincial governors. Foreign counties were ranked in hierarchy and graded pursuant to the geographic closeness and cultural similarity. There were three zones encompassing Korea, Vietnam, Lou Qiu and Ryukyu islands, Japan and other counties (eighteen in total). The second zone included non-Chinese Asian nomadic people Sulu, Malacca, Sri Lanka and others. The tributary system functioned in a way that it consisted of the network of bilateral relations between China and each individual country paying the tribute and emperor's gift as a mean of exchange between China as the centre and other countries. The tribute paying system changed and evolved from the system of relations and interactions until the institutionalized type of diplomacy during the Ming dynasty. Chinese rule over East Asia imposed by tributary system not only that impacted culture of the neighbouring countries but placed it in the synocentric international system or the system with China in the centre. The Emperor system of tributary shaped the foreign politics and trade during the two thousand years period of Chinese domination over the region and has important role in the Asian history, specifically East Asia.

in dominating countries that are not located in its vicinity. According to Kissinger, "in the Chinese version of exceptionalism, China did not export its ideas but let others come seek them."<sup>9</sup> The Chinese discourse on China's International Strategy is also quite specific varying from (韬光养晦) *Tao guang yang hui* – Keeping the low profile to (奋发有为), or *Fan fa you wei*, that is, striving for achievement.<sup>10</sup> There is also very heated internal debate within China too, whether to focus on either economic prospect or threat of war or how much of the international burden it should bear<sup>11</sup>, all of these shall constitute Chinese foreign policy elements.

We can observe that China adopted very specific ways of exporting its ideas through peaceful development concept, international relations with "Chinese characteristics", think tanks with "Chinese Characteristics" and Confucius Centers, fast-track concept of introduction of "Asian values", specific cultural traits and Chinese language. We shall further attempt to present these specific concepts and answer the questions we set in the first part.

### Chinese view of soft power

The soft power concept is western concept in international relation and the term itself was created in the late 1980's by Joseph Nye in his book "Bound to Lead". He contrasted hard or command power with soft power or "Co-optive power" as the ability to shape what other want by being attractive. The attractiveness can be found in culture, ideology and institutions which are helping in legitimization of a given state power.<sup>12</sup> The concept has frequently appeared in government policy papers, academic discussions and the popular media and as the authors Hongying Wang and Yeh Chung Liu researched, it first appeared around 1997 in China academic papers.<sup>13</sup> Almost the same time, the implications of the rise of China have been debated in global relations. We shall attempt to present the Chinese view on this western concept and how they see it fit in the Chinese strategy and Zhongyong dialectics. According to the Wang and Lu, Chinese view soft power or *ruan shi li* as the "ability to persuade others with reason and to convince others with moral principles."<sup>14</sup> They also see it as the power to subdue others without a fight which is in line with the Chinese philosophy and specifically Mencius (king's way as opposed to bully's way).<sup>15</sup> This understanding corresponds to the Chinese background knowledge<sup>16</sup>, specific ways of thinking which is condi-

9 Kissinger, Henry, *On China*, Penguin Books, London, 2012, p. 17.

10 Yaqing qin, "Continuity Through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, volume 7, issue 3, 2014.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 290.

12 Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1990.

13 Hongying Wang, Yeh Chung Lu, "The conception of Soft Power and its Policy Implications: Comparative study of China and Taiwan", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Volume 17, 2008, issue 56, p. 427.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 427.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Background knowledge according to Adler and Poulot, a term coined by Searle "consists primarily of intersubjective expectations and dispositions which can be grasped only as embedded in practice. Individuals and groups act, interact, reason, plan and judge, symbolically represent reality, and have expectations of the future within a dominant interpretative backdrop that sets the terms of interactions, defines a horizon of possibilities and provides the background knowledge of the expectations, dispositions, skills techniques and rituals that are the basis of the constitution practice and their boundaries". Emaunele adler, Vincent Pouliot, "International Practices: Introduction and Framework", in Adler Pouliot (eds.), *International Practices*, p.16; John R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World*, New York Basic Books, 1999, p. 108, cited from Pouliot, *The Logic of Practicality*, p. 267.

tioned by specific cultural, historical and language traits. As Wang and Lu explain, Chinese view of soft power is similar to Nye's as he sees it as "spiritual power". In our case and as it will be shown on the case study countries from CEE region, soft power also includes the concept of aid and investment. As Wang and Lu explain the view of soft power which is more than a country's "ability to influence other countries through its attractiveness to include, for example, the ability to generate compliance in a society by moral example and persuasion."<sup>17</sup> Based on that we could argue that the concept of the Belt and Road encompasses all elements from investment, aid, to cultural, educational cooperation, all consisting specific messages and views from Chinese angle. Thus China also accentuate its traditional culture, philosophy, medicine, architecture, cuisine and martial arts all carrying this specific message on diversity and different background knowledge and understanding. Therefore we see the role of Confucius Institutes as one of the crucial instruments of Chinese soft power. Chinese academics argue that the Chinese background, tradition and especially harmony rooted in Confucianism and other schools of thoughts provide "promise to counter-balance the self-centered value system of the West".<sup>18</sup> Chinese discourse explains that Beijing consensus versus Washington consensus offer China's model of economic development with preservation of their own way of life, tradition and systems. This concept is particularly attractive to the countries of central and eastern Europe that are conditioned or abandoned by EU thus providing additional fuel to the weakened markets of this region. This politics will either help them in integration with the Western Europe. Or it will impact Brussels and competitive role in the CIE countries. According to the Wan and Liu, technology and science are in Chinese discourse important source of both soft and hard power.<sup>19</sup> In that sense we can view the role of Huawei<sup>20</sup> and its US-like branding in the countries of former Yugoslavia, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Huawei provides scholarships, laboratories for university, students exchange and acts as a sponsor of major music festivals in the region.

Further on we shall present the main instruments used for Chinese export of ideas and soft power. One of the new mechanisms which expands and grows is the concept of Think Tanks with "Chinese characteristics". We shall attempt to explain the history, specific traits and methods of use of this specific intellectual tool.

## Think Tanks

In August 2016, the European Council on Foreign Affairs wrote that "Xi Jinping's call for the construction of 'think tanks with Chinese characteristics' has led to a proliferation of institutes and an expansion of their portfolio of activities, their international networks, and their public profiles."<sup>21</sup> One of the problems that Chinese government realized was the lack of tools for impacting China's international image.

17 Hongying Wang, Yeh Chung Lu, "The conception of Soft Power and its Policy Implications: Comparative study of China and Taiwan", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Volume 17, 2008, issue 56, p. 427.

18 Ibid, p. 428.

19 Ibid, p. 429.

20 Huawei is a Chinese multinational networking and telecommunications equipment and services company headquartered in Shenzhen, Guangdong. It is the largest telecommunications equipment manufacturer in the world, having overtaken Ericsson in 2012.

21 Francois Godement, "A Hundred Think Tanks Bloom in China", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, August 2016, available at [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/a\\_hundred\\_think\\_tanks\\_bloom\\_in\\_china\\_7104](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/a_hundred_think_tanks_bloom_in_china_7104), (accessed 19 August, 2017).

Therefore, the Chinese government has, since the third plenum of the 18th Party's Congress in 2013, called for a new approach to soft power, one that emphasizes the unique role of independent think tanks in generating new ideas and enhancing China's soft power.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the role of think tanks is big in enhancing China's soft power. The overall goal of this initiative is to improve the consulting mechanisms available to decision makers and to increase China's soft power.

One of the roles of think tanks in China is connected to the view of soft power and it serves to export Chinese view outside the China. The second role of think tanks in China is to provide the public opinion to the main party however we shall tackle the first role only.

In Asian countries i.e. Japan, South Korea and China, think tank organizations often work as part of the corporations. The Work of Chinese organizations is sponsored by the government and the clients of their researchers are political leaders. Historically think tank organizations must be independent from political parties and state administration so as to adopt independent and autonomous view on political subjects.<sup>23</sup>

There are reportedly more than 2,000 policy research institutions, boasting 35,000 full-time researchers and 270,000 support staff in China. The vast majority—as much as 95 percent—are government supported.<sup>24</sup> It is a safe bet to say that there are more think tankers in Beijing and other centres in China than there are in any other country save the United States.

According to the detailed reported made by the European Council on Foreign Relations in August 2016, Communist Party sees the role of think tanks as a “service providers influencing the views of everyone – from the leaders to the led.”<sup>25</sup>

However, one of the roles we are going to explore is international role of think tanks the attempt of influence opinion on China. There is a great importance attached to this role and can be recognized in the words of president Xi Jinping who said that “constructing think tanks with Chinese characteristics is a major task in order to develop scientific decision-making, democratic decision-making, China's national governance, and modernisation, as well as to strengthen China's soft power”.<sup>26</sup> We will argue that this is going to be main tool in exporting Chinese view on international relations, peaceful development, zhong-yong and harmony as an attempt to either approach China and diminish threat from China. However there are think tanks with major role concentrated on internal affairs in China.

According to the Dingding Chen there is a whole new generation of think tanks which

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22 Dingding Chen, “The Rise of China's New Soft Power”, *the Diplomat*, 9 June 2015 [https://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/upload/old\\_site/2012/10/ThinkTankVodic-LowResfinal.pdf#015](https://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/upload/old_site/2012/10/ThinkTankVodic-LowResfinal.pdf#015), available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/the-rise-of-chinas-new-soft-power/>, (accessed 20 August, 2017).

23 „Vodic kroz evropske think tank organizacije” published in May 2012, available from [https://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/upload/old\\_site/2012/10/ThinkTankVodic-LowResfinal.pdf](https://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/upload/old_site/2012/10/ThinkTankVodic-LowResfinal.pdf), (accessed 20 August, 2017).

24 Yan Zhong Huang, Elizabeth Economy, “Where China Can't Compete”, *Foreign Affairs*, published 21 September 2015, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-09-21/where-china-can-t-compete>, (accessed 19 August, 2017).

25 Francois Godement, “A Hundred Think Tanks Bloom in China”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, August 2016, available at: [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/a\\_hundred\\_think\\_tanks\\_bloom\\_in\\_china\\_7104](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/a_hundred_think_tanks_bloom_in_china_7104), (accessed on 19 August, 2017).

26 Why did Xi Jinping emphasise the idea of building think tanks with Chinese characteristics? (习近平为何特别强调新型智库建设?, Xi Jinping weihe tebie qiangdiao xinxing zhiku jianshe ?), *People's Daily*, 29 October 2014, available at: <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/1029/c148980-25928251.html>

are privately funded and do not depend on government for funding. Three think tanks are the most prominent due to their activities and influence: the Chunqiu Research Institute, the Center for China and Globalization Studies, and the Chongyang Institute of Financial Studies at Renmin University.<sup>27</sup> The Chunqiu Institute has also created a very popular website named “Observers” that leans toward China’s leftist forces, though some liberal voices are also active on the website. So the website plays the role of integrating voices from the right and the left in China, hoping to provide useful ideas of governance to influence China’s development.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, there is the right-leaning think tank, the Center for China and Globalization Studies, led by another well-known public intellectual Wang Huiyao. One major research task of this think tank is about the so called ‘sea turtles’: people coming back to China after many years of study or work in foreign countries.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, there is the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University. This one was established in 2013, with a generous donation of 200 million Renminbi (about US\$33 million) from a private business man named Qiu Guogeng. Although the Institute’s main focus seems to be on financial research, its activities and projects are actually much wider in reality, including global governance, security studies, and so on.<sup>30</sup>

In 2015, The General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics, and issued a circular calling on all localities and departments to implement them in a conscientious manner.<sup>31</sup> The Communist Party (CCP) General Office and the State Council General Office released a document setting out the, basic principles, and general objectives for the development of a new kind of Chinese think tank – the “Opinion on strengthening the construction of new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics” (hereafter, the Opinion).<sup>32</sup> The Opinion acknowledges that think tanks play “an irreplaceable role in international relations”, and emphasize that they are very important to China’s soft power.<sup>33</sup>

China created an action plan for the New Silk Road concept, Belt and Road Initiative. The Plan encompasses 55% of the world BNP, 70% of the world population, and 75% of the total energy reserves. Chinese action plans and official communication related to the Belt and Road clearly shows the objective which is Chinese contribution to the international economic development strengthening connectivity which becomes the key word of Chinese diplomacy.<sup>34</sup> This initiative shows all elements which are described as international relations

27 Dingding Chen, “The Rise of China’s New Soft Power”, *the Diplomat*, 9 June 2015, available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/the-rise-of-chinas-new-soft-power/>, (accessed 20 August, 2017).

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 “Opinion on strengthening the construction of new types of think tanks with Chinese characteristics” (关于加强中国特色新型智库建设的意见, *Guanyu jiaqiang Zhongguo tese xinxing zhiku jianshe de yijian*), *Xinhuanet*, 25.1.2015, available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2015-01/21/c\\_133934292.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2015-01/21/c_133934292.htm)

32 Silvia Menegazzi, “A Hundred Think Tanks Bloom in China”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, August 2016, available at: [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/a\\_hundred\\_think\\_tanks\\_bloom\\_in\\_china\\_7104](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/a_hundred_think_tanks_bloom_in_china_7104), (accessed on 19 August, 2017).

33 Ibid.

34 “One Belt, One Road” is English translation of “yidai yilu (一带一路)”. The Chinese government itself uses the term BRI or the Belt and Road Initiative in official statements in English, while in the French the same initiative is called the New Silk Road or “Nouvelles routes de la

with Chinese characteristics. According to the professor Mitrovic Central and Eastern Europe are seen by China "as an essential factor of China's Belt and Road Initiative as proposed by president Xi Jinping in 2013."<sup>35</sup> Mitrovic states that the major cooperation projects between CEEs and China were progressing fine except from few obstacles which she sees in the "limited capabilities of the relatively small economies of the 16 countries, neglected ties in the past and tendency of China to treat them as a unique group of states as well as membership of eleven countries in the EU." This according to the Mitrovic has both legal and polit-economic impact on the cooperation.<sup>36</sup>

On the third summit between China and CEE held in Belgrade in December 2014 Prime minister Li Keqiang suggested establishing think tanks network with the purpose of academic research and exchange of opinions. A year after on the Fourth summit in Sudzou Li Keqiang repeated the support for establishing 16+1 network and encouraged cooperation between researchers from both sides. One of the most important issue on the agenda of network cooperation is finding answers on how to strengthen cooperation between 16 countries of CEE and China, create additional opportunities for synergy between Belt and Road and 16+1 and define challenges in the process.<sup>37</sup>

In the Belgrade Guidelines for Cooperation between China and CEE, in the seventh point "Deepen people-to-people and cultural exchanges and cooperation at the sub-national level", item 2 and 3, it is emphasized the need for regular China-CEE High-Level Symposium of Think Tanks and support the establishment of a China-CEEC think tanks exchange and cooperation center.<sup>38</sup>

Think tanks are closely involved in this project. They are expected to provide know-how for its realisation and to carry out strategic coordination with international partners. The role of think tanks is to explain the Chinese development model to foreign audiences who would like to emulate it. Think tanks thus in the region of CEE countries and within framework of cooperation 16+1 are cooperating with China, conducting joint studies about the situation in countries that may be involved in the initiative, which the government can then use to make funding decisions. There are also initiatives that are gathering think tanks within the initiative i.e. "OBOR think tank cooperation alliance" (一带一路智库合作联盟, *yidaiyilu zhiku hezuo lianmeng*) and the RDI platform (Research and Development International) (蓝迪国际智库平台, *landi guoji zhiku pingtai*). These initiatives are designed to facilitate international exchanges and provide consultation to Chinese enterprises.

The most prominent think tanks in the region are IAS<sup>39</sup>, Institute of Asian Studies, led by Professor Dragana Mitrovic which comprises academic cooperation, gathering academics

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soie". Similarly, countries in the region often call this initiative a New Silk Road.

35 Dragana Mitrovic, " 'Sixteen Plus One' in 2015/2016 – upgrading, framing and stepping up cooperation", *Azijske sveske*, Institut za Azijske studije, Beograd, vol 2, no.1/2016

36 Ibid.

37 Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Li Keqiang Attends the Fourth Summit of China and Central and Eastern European Countries*, 25 November 2017, available at: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1319048.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1319048.shtml), (accessed on 20 August, 2017).

38 Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Belgrade Guidelines for Cooperation between China and CEE*, published on 17 December 2014, available at: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1224905.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1224905.shtml)

39 Institute for Asian Studies, <https://www.ias.rs/>, Belgrade think tank doing research, education, consulting activities with the aim to spread knowledge on Asia and Serbia thus contributing to the cooperation between the countries of CEE and Asian countries



and professors tackling issues of Belt and Road Initiative as well as all contemporary issues of China and its policies. IAS organized the international scientific conference "Sixteen plus One framework as part of Belt and Road Initiative and Chinese Dream – achievements, challenges and prospects" which gathered eminent professors and experts who analyzed current results and consequences of cooperation, discussed objectives and obstacles and also some impediments to cooperation offered in the form of Belt and Road and 16+1 initiatives.

The Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD) from Belgrade is another type of think tank cooperation. Its activities include one published study and a conference on the topic of Belt and Road Initiative. They are also very active in promoting Belt and Road Initiative which strives from their close cooperation with Chinese think tank Shanghai University of International Business and Economics which also cooperates with Croatian Confucian Institute.

In BiH, particularly Republika Srpska, there is one think tank which independently works on promotion of Belt and Road thus organizing in December 2016 small consultative lecture for the professionals, politicians and academia in the RS. The Institute for strategic analyses and dialogue, ISAD, was established in 2015. Its headquarters is in Banja Luka and it was established by the former diplomats who combine theoretical knowledge and experience in international relations and diplomacy.

Slovenian think tanks i.e. e-Regions, New eSilk Roads and the Center for European Perspective organized think tank meeting of the e-region in Ljubljana in 2016. Similar think tank symposium for China and CEE countries was organized in 2014 and supported by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>40</sup>

We showed examples of regular activities, frequent meetings and conferences in the whole region with the mission to explain Chinese foreign policy within the two initiatives that are becoming very important for the countries of CEE. Think tanks are expected to provide know-how for the realisation of various projects and to carry out strategic coordination with Chinese partners. The role of think tanks is to explain the Chinese development model, Chinese approach to international relations and in some way to decrease fear of China as hegemon.

## **Confucius Institute**

One of the instruments establishing Confucius Institutes ili Kong Zi Da Xue around the world despite the fact that Kong Zi was not popular several decades ago, especially during Cultural Revolution 1966 -1976 when Confucius was seen as an obstacle to progress. Nowadays Confucius represents symbol of unification and the basis of the concept of the "harmonious society," which is essentially a Confucian concept.

<sup>40</sup> Report on the 2nd High Level Symposium of Think Tanks of the People's Republic of China and Central and Eastern European Countries, available at: Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs [http://www.mzz.gov.si/fileadmin/pageuploads/foto/1409/Porocilo\\_2\\_O\\_SIMPOZIJU\\_ZBRANI\\_PRISPEVKI\\_ab\\_01.pdf](http://www.mzz.gov.si/fileadmin/pageuploads/foto/1409/Porocilo_2_O_SIMPOZIJU_ZBRANI_PRISPEVKI_ab_01.pdf)

The revival and rebirth of Confucianism in the contemporary Chinese society is a phenomenon provoking numerous discussions. Confucianism reappears as an attempt to overcome challenges both inside the China and in the interaction with its neighbours. A revival of Confucianism is seen as a strengthening of Chinese identity and as a symbol of nation in meeting the globalization.

The Confucius Institute project can be seen as an attempt to increase Chinese language learning and an appreciation of Chinese culture. However, it may be considered as a part of a broader soft power projection in which China is attempting to win hearts and minds for political purposes.

The opening of China to the world, economic development and increase of political influence have increased demand for learning the Chinese language and understanding its history and culture. China started opening of Confucius institutes first as a pilot project in July 2004 in Uzbekistan and then established the first Confucius Institute in Seoul in November 2004. There are more than 390 CIs in the world, and 132 of CIs are in Europe and there are more than 519 of Confucius classrooms (usually established within secondary or primary schools).<sup>41</sup>

The main agent is HANBAN, a state-owned agency for education- the Office of Chinese Language Council.<sup>42</sup> Its work model is rather specific and it differs CIs from other cultural institutes i.e. British Council, Goethe Institute, Cervantes, (they all promote language and culture), as it relays on the local stakeholders "who do not only provide advantage to craft projects and programs but it is also helpful in terms of engagement with the local community." In the case of CIs, the engagement of local stakeholders makes it easier to secure external funding from local businesses.<sup>43</sup> All CIs are under the authority of HANBAN, the Office of Chinese Language Council International. Confucius Institutes typically are created through a partnership between two academic institutions, one foreign and one Chinese. Hanban provides start-up money for the institutes, which in most cases are physically located on university campuses. Confucius Institutes typically are created through a partnership between two academic institutions, one foreign and one Chinese. Hanban provides start-up money for the institutes, which in most cases are physically located on university campuses.

At the beginning the processes and initiative went from Chinese universities with a desire to strengthen contacts with foreign universities and organizations as a means to internationalizing themselves. By fostering academic exchanges, association with a foreign university through a Confucius Institute can impact the university quality and international, which some Chinese universities are aiming for. However, things changed and the initiatives are also coming from the host countries and universities.<sup>44</sup>

41 Falk Hartig, "Cultural Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: The Case of CI in Australia", *Communication, Politics & Culture*, vol. 45, p. 256.

42 The Office of the Chinese Language Council International is governed by a group made up of members from state ministries and other organizations. These include the State Council, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Culture. The Confucius Institute Division is one part of Hanban, which also includes an Examinations Division, focusing on Chinese proficiency tests; a Teaching Quality and Evaluation Division, which concerns itself with Chinese language teaching materials; and a Communications Division, which handles international cooperation and exchange activities.

43 Ibid.

44 The first institute in Serbia for example was initiated by Chinese partners in Belgrade however Novi Sad initiated opening of the CI at their University. Similar situation happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina where Banja Luka University initiated the process and still awaits the positive

Despite the impressive numbers, these institutions have not been subjected to many studies and there is a general lack of understanding of its purpose and goals.

Ever since the first CI was established in Seoul in late 2004 there have been obscurities concerning the question of what these institutes do and what they actually are. Some see them as an instrument of Chinese public diplomacy<sup>45</sup>, cultural diplomacy<sup>46</sup> or more broadly as part of China's "soft power" strategy.<sup>47</sup> While it is clear that the preferable way of understanding CI would be as sole educational institutions we cannot avoid its role as soft power.

We shall try to answer the questions on the role and impact of Confucius Institutes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe gathered by the framework of cooperation 16+1. However, for the purpose of this paper we shall persist in presenting the CIs in the region of selected countries known as countries of former Yugoslavia. Whilst doing that we shall attempt to present the values of CI contribution in the area of education, culture and economy. We are interested whether these countries can cooperate better within this framework and what is the impact on their mutual cooperation as well as cooperation with China.

We are also interested in explaining the CI either as a type of impression management, an effort by China to create a positive image of itself or an education project which has aim to enable various cultural exchange and language learning which will again impact the positive image of China and enable better cooperation within the framework of cooperation 16+1 and One Belt One Road strategy. In this respect, the Confucius Institute project fits in well with the notion of China's peaceful development. But it is not entirely a soft power strategy, as Nye<sup>48</sup> defines that approach as the one that does not rely on coercion-sticks, or on payments-carrots but more on ability to use attraction and persuasion, soft power.

Another issue presented is measurement of success of CIs. We shall argue that various institutions working under the framework of Hanban cooperation are contributing to the overall good image of Chinese intentions and politics in the region. Besides that, China as innovation orientated country and society will also benefit from cooperation and exchanges as well as joint scientific projects with the countries of CEE thus CIs becoming an important vehicle in international academic exchange hence scientific opening and development.

When it comes to mutual cooperation amongst various organizations and CIs sponsored by HANBAN we cannot claim that working on the same task impacted their mutual connections and cooperation quite the opposite. We shall present the examples of failed cooperation on the concrete examples.

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decision from the Hanban.

45 d'Hooghe Ingrid, "The Rise of China's Public Diplomacy", *Clingendael Diplomacy Papers*. No. 12. Hag: The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2007.

46 Anholt Simon. *Places: Identity, Image and Reputation*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

47 Gil Jeffery, "China's Confucius Institute Project: Language and Soft Power in World Politics", *The Global Studies Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2004, pp. 59-72.

48 Joseph S Nye, "Academy Meetings- The Future of Power", published on 16 February 2011, available at: <https://www.amacad.org/publications/bulletin/spring2011/power.pdf>, accessed 13 May, 2017.

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## Case studies of the selected CI's from CEE

As pointed out, CIs have specific stakeholder engagement with a higher level of coordination and commitment by the local stakeholders. Zaharna states that this kind of setup provides "a bonding feature for sustained stakeholder engagement."<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, CIs are not only linked with Chinese academic institutions but are also linked to the headquarters in Beijing. This headquarters, as Zaharna explains, "became a network hub, which in turn serves as an indirect link for all other Confucius Institutes around the world to connect with each other"<sup>50</sup>. Since 2006, Hanban has held the annual Confucius Institute Conference for current and prospective Institutes. The conference, additionally enables delegates the opportunity to meet, share experiences, and exchange ideas, and it represents the addition of direct interpersonal communication to global stakeholder engagement process"<sup>51</sup> This process, as we argue, enabled CEE countries and the countries of former Yugoslavia to come together to exchange ideas, values, culture and language. However, there are no proves that CIs helped in strengthening cooperation amongst the narrow community of sinologists and other experts gathered around CI or think tanks involved in different aspects of Chinese studies. It was even noted that two CIs Belgrade and Zagreb were involved in translation of Mo Yen books with no apparent signs of cooperation even though we are talking of the languages that are understood by both nations. Similarly CIs of the recent date i.e. Sarajevo University in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not cooperate with Banja Luka University nor provides help and assistance in the organization of Chinese courses. The same applies to University in Istocno Sarajevo which again acts independently and which opened Confucius classroom within Faculty of Philology. Again, no cooperation is noted and this center actually cooperates with Belgrade CI.

In the summary below, we randomly selected several countries of former Yugoslavia to show the examples of Confucius Center cooperation. For the purpose of this paper we shall show only four countries.

### Slovenia

China recognized Slovenia on 27 April 1992, and in May the two countries signed an agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations in Ljubljana. The countries also signed a joint declaration stating that the People's Republic of China is the sole legal Government of China and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory. As a country in western Balkan, but first in the region to enter the EU, despite its size, Slovenia represents an important partner to China. Former Yugoslavia had very strong sinology departments both in Belgrade and Ljubljana, thus giving Serbia and Slovenia important lead over other countries in the region. The knowledge of language and culture paved the path to establishing strong relations with PR China.

The Confucius Institute in Ljubljana was opened in 2010 at the Faculty of Economics at the

49 Hartig, Falk, "Cultural Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristic", *Communication, Politics & Culture*, vol. 45, p. 257.

50 Ibid., p. 208.

51 Ibid, p. 221, 257

University of Ljubljana. It cooperates with the Faculty of Arts and the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade. According to Dusan Mramor, dean at the Economics Faculty, the establishment of what is the 284th Confucius Institute represented a "privilege to be part of this global network."<sup>52</sup>

Although the driving force for greater links with China began at the Faculty of Philosophy with the introduction of Sinology in 1995, cooperation between the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade and this faculty began in 2009, culminating with the establishment of the Confucius Institute in Ljubljana. Stanislav Pejovnik, rector of the University, stated it was essential for Slovenians and people of the western Balkan region to grasp the significance of the rapid development of China and the need to be partners to this trend.<sup>53</sup> In the summer of 2012, Slovenia decided to make Chinese lessons more widely available: Chinese language lesson had been available in only a few select schools, but now they are an optional subject on the curriculum at primary schools.

## Serbia

Relations between the two countries (that is, between the PRC and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), established by Serbia and Montenegro in April 1992, and became the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003) were comparatively good. On a 2006 visit to Belgrade, the Chinese State Secretary signed an agreement whereby China would offer grants worth 1 million Euros to Serbia. At this time the Confucius Institute was opened in Belgrade. The state secretary also announced that China regarded Serbia as an opportunity for tourism. In the last eight years, Serbian officials had more than twenty meetings with Chinese representatives. Serbia is being considered as a hub for all infrastructural projects in CEE. In 2009 Serbia signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement with China. However, Serbia continues to have an enormous bilateral trade deficit with China. According to the professor Mitrovic, founder and director of Institute of Asian Studies and professor at the Faculty of Political Science Belgrade, the value of Chinese direct investments in Serbia until the third quarter of 2016 was only US\$ 81.82 million (Chinese National Statistical Office) which is quite modest when compared to the six other members of the group of 16 which attracted several folds bigger FDI from China.<sup>54</sup> As Mitrovic states this proves that China pursues its economic interest on the first place and lack of engagement from the relevant state bodies in Serbia.<sup>55</sup> This proves that the soft power alone which is quite substantial from both sides is not sufficient and engagement from academic and cultural institutions should be followed by concrete actions from the relevant state bodies.

Confucius Institute was officially opened on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2006 with the Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University. Department of Sinology was established in 1974 and since then has been promoting the sinologists both in Serbia and Europe.

52 "CI opens at University of Ljubljana", *People's China Daily*, 27/05/2010/ available at: <http://en.people.cn/90001/90782/90873/7001347.html>

53 Ibid.

54 Dragana Mitrovic, "Sixteen Plus One" in 2015/2016 – upgrading, framing and stepping up cooperation", *Azijske sveske*, Institut za Azijske studije, Beograd, vol 2, no.1/2016, p. 15.

55 Ibid, p. 15.

Since December 2009, the Chinese partner is the University of Media and Communications of PR China.<sup>56</sup> Sino–Serbian relations are also being strengthened by the introduction of Chinese language lessons in 31 elementary and high schools as of the end of 2012, complementing the efforts of Serbia’s Chinese immigrants (an estimated 60,000 Chinese live in Serbia) and their children to learn Serbian and to integrate into Serbian society<sup>57</sup>. Thanks to the Department of Sinology, which has educated generations of sinologists, CI center has great local potential to promote Chinese language, culture, qi gong, tai ji quan, Chinese calligraphy, lectures on art, film, music hence wider population of Belgrade had opportunity to experience China. Belgrade CI also organizes regional sinology conferences thus gathering sinologists and experts from the region and worldwide.

On the other hand this is not the only institution supported by the Hanban. There is a separate center for Chinese Studies at MEGATREND University sponsored by Hanban and the two have no cooperation whatsoever. They also established Association of Synologists.

IAS, Institute of Asian Studies at the Belgrade Faculty of Political Science provides academic approach to studying Belt and Road initiative, enabling students to along with political, security and economic aspects of Chinese development to study Chinese language too.

## Croatia

Confucius Institute in Zagreb was established in 2012 and its aim is not only to promote language learning but to strengthen economic cooperation hence they cooperate with Shanghai University for International Business and Economy. Representatives of Croatian Business Chamber are also member of the CI Council.<sup>58</sup> In 2014, Vice Premier of the PR China visited Croatia and Confucius Institute. Established rather recently, Croatian CI is very active, establishing strong connections and have an important role in the Chinese–Croatian relations.

Since its independence, Croatian foreign policy mainly focused on the regional issues and European integration. However, Croatian tourism and food industry showed great interest in Chinese market and it is expected that the number of tourists from China will surpass 100 million.<sup>59</sup> Taking into consideration that marine transportation is still the cheapest transport method, Croatia has an advantage compared to other countries in the region and as such is of great interest to China. The institute cooperates with primary schools i.e. Matije Gupca school in Zagreb which became the first primary school which systematically introduced Chinese language in the curriculum.<sup>60</sup>

Since 2012 and its establishment, CI Zagreb offered free courses, and more than 3300 persons learn Chinese language out of which 10 per cent are businessmen.<sup>61</sup>

56 Institut Konfučije u Beogradu. <http://konfucije.fil.bg.ac.rs/o-nama/> (20. 3.2015.)

57 Sanja Zrnić: “Kineski raj u srpskim učionicama” [Chinese Paradise in Serbian Classrooms]. *Vreme*, <http://www.vreme.rs/cms/view.php?id=1042266>, 22 March, 2012.

58 Konfučijev Institut Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. <http://www.ki.unizg.hr/o-institutu> (20. 03.2015.)

59 Sinagate, *Gospodarska suradnja*, [http://www.sinagate.com/?page\\_id=135](http://www.sinagate.com/?page_id=135)

60 Konfučijev institute u Zagrebu, <http://www.ki.unizg.hr/kineski-jezik-za-djecu-i-mlade/>

61 Kineski jezik u pohodu na poslovnu scenu, available at: <https://lider.media/znanja/kineski-jezik-u-pohodu-na-poslovnu-scenu/>

Chinese is taught in three cities in 15 sites and sinology department has been established 11 years ago. Besides Faculty of Philosophy, Economic Faculty and Teachers Faculty have Chinese language courses. This shows active approach from Croatian side and great interest in Chinese language.

## **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The two countries established diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level on 3 April 1995. The first important project was a power plant in Stanari, financed from the special credit line from the Chinese Development Bank aimed at CEE countries. At a meeting in Beijing on 4–6 September 2012, a secretariat for cooperation between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was inaugurated. The secretariat is to oversee communication and coordination between the 16 countries of the region and China. It can be noted that since that time and announcement of the New Silk Road, activities between the two countries have become more pronounced. CI was open in April 2015 in Sarajevo, however its opening was not accompanied by big public interest. Banja Luka University however failed to open Confucius Institute and Hanban for the time being stalls further cooperation. The next attempt is to answer the offer from the Chinese Embassy to introduce Chinese language in schools in Republika Srpska.

Confucius Institute is seen as very important model of cooperation between the stated countries and China. Besides think tanks, this is the main model of cooperation and exchange between China and CEE countries. Furthermore, CIs do not only provide cooperation with Chinese academic institutions but are meant to enable mutual cooperation amongst sinologists, professionals and people interested in Chinese language and culture. There is a good basis for this cooperation which needs to be additionally strengthened.

## **Conclusion**

We showed that Confucius Institutes and think tanks are helping China to promote its agenda and explain the Chinese approach to international relations. China under pressure to relieve its status and role on the international politics strives to explain its role relying on its background and taking into consideration all specific traits of the country's history, culture and philosophy. This coincides with the Chinese view of soft power which is the "ability to persuade others with reason and to convince others with moral principles."<sup>62</sup> This understanding matches the Chinese background knowledge<sup>63</sup>, specific ways of thinking which is conditioned by particular cultural, historical and language traits. Chinese view of soft pow-

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 427.

<sup>63</sup> Background knowledge according to Addler and Puiot, a term coined by Searle "consists primarily of intersubjective expectations and dispositions which can be grasped only as embedded in practice. Individuals and groups act, interact reason, plan and judge, symbolically represent reality, and have expectations of the future within a dominant interpretative backdrop that sets the terms of interactions, defines a horizon of possibilities and provides the background knowledge of the expectations, dispositions, skills techniques and rituals that are the basis of the constitution practice e and their boundaries". Emaunele adler, Vincent Puiot, "International Practices: Introduction and Framework", in Adler, Puiot, (eds.), *International Practices*, p.16, John R. Searle, "Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World", New York Basic Books, 1999, p.108, cited from Puiot, *the Logic of Practicality*, p. 267.

er is similar to Nye's definition of it as "spiritual power". In case of Belt and Road Initiative and 16+1 framework soft power also includes the concept of aid and investment.

Think tanks have important role in this, forming the network of academic exchange and cooperation and explaining the specific model of cooperation from Chinese point of view as well as stressing obstacles too. Lessons, exchange and cooperation with Confucius Institutes provide more knowledge, which leads to better understanding and cooperation. This approach either seen as soft power or educational tool works very well enabling generation of people to gain better understanding of the world which seemed much distanced only few years ago.

Confucius Institute is seen as very important model of cooperation between the stated countries and China and an instrument for better cooperation amongst sinologists, professionals and people interested in Chinese language and culture. When it comes to the specific CEE region, this cooperation needs to be additionally strengthened.

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Љиљана Стевић

## **Мека моћ са кинеским карактеристикама - тинк танкови и Институти Конфуције као инструменти меке моћи**

### Апстракт

У покушају пројектовања повољније слике земље и објашњавања кинеских погледа на међународне односе, кинеска влада усваја Конфучијев дискурс. Њени приступи укључују миран успон и развој Кине, промоцију кинеског језика и културе путем Института Конфуције (ИК) и активности које су осмишљене да боље објасне кинески поглед. Један од њих је такође кроз тинк танкове објашњавајући да оно што Кина чини није претња. Представимо процес изградње националног имиџа кроз одабране инструменте меке моћи и ново усвојени дискурс који промовише Zhongyong дијалектику. Први део ће говорити о концепту мирног успона и развоја. Други одељак објашњава тинк танкове и разматра и оне из Кине као и оне из региона ЦИЕ. У трећем одељку ћемо представити Институте Конфуције, порекло и позадину у ЦИЕ и у региону. Закључак резимира налазе чланка и њихове импликације.

**Кључне речи:** миран развој, Zhongyong, Институт Конфуције, тинк танк, мека моћ, кинески сан