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Chinese cultural soft power: A case study of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ljiljana STEVIĆ¹

Abstract: This paper analyses the impact of Chinese public diplomacy and soft power (cultural soft power) on the public perception in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have tested the three specific images China aims to project in Bosnia-Herzegovina: China as an ancient civilization, a leader of the developing countries and a responsible partner in the international community. We will see whether cultural soft power, applied by means of Confucius Institutes, academic exchange programs and think tanks, has an impact on the public perception in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first part tackles the theoretical framework of public diplomacy, soft power and cultural diplomacy. The second part delineates the institutional, diplomatic and regulative framework of soft power and introduces the stakeholders, i.e. academic exchange and Confucius Institutes. The final part analyzes the survey and interviews and presents the results as to how these various public diplomacy tools are shaping the perception of China in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The paper concludes by arguing that Chinese public diplomacy produces soft power in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is in turn positively perceived.

Key words: cultural soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, state image, Confucius Institutes, academic exchange.

Introduction

Public diplomacy remains an important element in international relations as communication increasingly gains the role of vital means in accomplishing foreign policy strategic interests. Unlike diplomacy, which according to the Cull definition

¹ Ljiljana Stevic, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka, ljiljana.stevic@unibl.org; the article has been adapted from the author's PhD dissertation.

is an actor-to-actor relationship in international relations management (Cull 2008, 51), public diplomacy represents the attempt of managing international relations through the actor (the government of one state) and the public (of the other state or states) relations (Cull 2008, 51). “The core concept of public diplomacy is that it is the way in which international actors advance their foreign policy not by engaging one another, but by engaging with a foreign public. It really is the communication component of foreign policy” (Cull 2008, 51). The basic elements of the public diplomacy are listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, cultural or academic exchange and broadcasting (Cull 2008). The role of cultural diplomacy as the element of the public diplomacy has been recently neglected in the western countries whilst it is getting more important in Asia, especially in China. If the product of public diplomacy or cultural diplomacy is attractive to the public of other countries, its resources are producing soft power, making soft power a product or an attraction derived from public diplomacy (Stevic 2020).

All the aforementioned elements can impact the national image, hence making public diplomacy a crucial tool for China, concerned about its image and attempting to do as much as possible to deliver the image of traditional values-appreciating country, non-threatening partner and leader in the “community of the shared future for mankind” concept. Cultural diplomacy as cultural exchange thus became increasingly important elements for China. Language promotion as part of the cultural diplomacy is an important aspect and tool besides art, sport, music, etc. Hartig states language learning as the ideal tool contributing to better mutual understanding (Hartig 2017). Unlike individual aspects of language learning, functional approach of the state reflects in the language learning via institutes i.e., British Council, Cervantes, Goethe Institute, Institute Française, *Kongzi Daxue* 孔子大学 or Confucius Institute as the Chinese tool of Cultural diplomacy. Unlike the majority of dominant researches tackling Chinese soft power and work of Confucius Institutes, (Wuthnow 2008; d’Hooghe 2010; Hartig 2017) claiming that Chinese image projection representing China as the traditional values country orientated towards Confucius values serves only to mask Chinese intentions that are predominantly hegemonistic, we hereby promote a thesis that appreciation for the wider context, possible through cultural and educational institutions, enables better relations and successful cooperation and better positioning in the international relations and on the crossroad of various interests and influences where BH is currently situated. The thesis is in line with the Chinese school of IR represented by the Qin Yaqing, Zhao Tingyang and Yan Xuetong.

When Joseph Nye, who originally coined the phrase of soft power, defined three resources of soft power: culture, political values and foreign policy, Chinese

academics recognized the importance of soft power for the “branding” of China and building the image which will present China as a non-threatening partner and a responsible stakeholder as well as a technologically developed state. Nye defined culture as a “set of values and practices creating the meaning for society” (Nye 2004, 11). “When one’s state culture presumes universal values and its politics promote values and interests that other share, it increases probability of obtaining its desired outcome” (Nye2004, 11). Whilst Nye sees the civil society as the main carrier of the soft power, in China, this concept is defined by the Chinese Communist Party. “The government cannot and should not control culture” (Nye 2004,17); however, this concept in China is understood as the CP lead initiative. As China shows, the state can be the initiator in the creating of soft power and certain attractiveness lays in the Chinese political model and its success hence the structure of the soft power and its effects are different to Nye’s conclusion.

The cultural soft power term itself has been coined by the former Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party Hu Jintao in the report for the 17th CP Congress in 2007. (Xinhua, Full text of Hu Jintao’s Report delivered at the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, 2007). Chinese academics relied on Nye’s concept at the beginning but with the time they adjusted the concept to the Chinese cultural soft power and its role in the international relations. The Chinese term of soft power has the character of which denotes culture (*wenhua*文化) and presumes education, sport, media, etc.) The *wenhua* 文化 term has specific meaning in the Chinese recent history.² The culture is seen as the Chinese global power, a tool to help China tell its “side of the story” aiming to confront “the Western cultural hegemony” (打破西方文化霸权) and even out the unequal relation with the dominating Western world. (Li 2016) Cultural soft power concept is an important concept both in the domestic and international context as seen in the Hu Jintao’s speech who stated that the “cultural soft power is not only an important component of the national power but an important source of national cohesion too” (Xinhua 2007). Chinese traditional culture is thus seen as important resource. Traditional values and philosophy are offering alternative values in resolving international issues and alternative view on the international situation. This is where the Chinese school of international relations comes in hand and their view according to the “moral

² 4th of March movement during the 20ies of the last century represented also a warning on the “cultural invasion” coming with the Western imperialism. Cultural revolution (1966-1976) started by Mao Zi Dong, political and social chaos aiming to regain Mao’s political domination in the CCP which resulted with the permanent destruction of some of the most important cultural and traditional remains.

realism”, “relational theory” and “*Tianxia*”³ theory based on the traditional knowledge, values, history, that China is offering to the international partners as the cultural soft power or additional value in the area of international relations theories. The concept of the Chinese cultural soft power was for the first time mentioned in the Chinese academic circles in 1997 (Wang and Lu 2008, 427).

Majority of Chinese experts promote the “cultural school” (*wenhua pai* 文化派) that places culture at the core of soft power. Cultural soft power thus remains the most popular term with the top leadership, starting with Hu Jintao and continuing with Xi. The moral values associated with Chinese culture include respect for community, integrity, harmony, and accommodation of differences (*he er butong* 和而不同) (Wang 2016). One of China’s core tasks, therefore, is to explain China’s moral values to the world and to offer an attractive alternative to the Western values. According to Wang and Lu, the Chinese view of soft power *ruanshi li* (软实力) is “possibility to persuade others with reasoning and moral principles” (Wang and Lu 2008, 427). This understanding is suitable to Yaqing’s⁴ understanding of the “background knowledge” which presumes making decisions and reasoning taking into consideration historical, cultural and language treats or according to the moral realism of Yan Xuetong⁵, (Wang and Lu 2008, 427). Cultural soft power in the official sources and opinion was best described by the current PR China President Xi Jinping

³ Zhao Tingyang concept of *Tianxia* explains the world system based on the ontology of coexistence by the means of relational rationality which gives the priority to decreasing mutual hostility in relation to the individual rationality giving priority to its own interest. The impartial will of heaven is above all.

⁴ Yaqing relational theory with the epistemology based on the dialectics of harmony and *zhongyong* “with relationality as the metaphysical component of its theoretical hard core. It conceives the International Relations (IR) world as one composed of ongoing relations, assumes international actors as actors-in-relations, and takes processes defined in terms of relations in motion as ontologically significant. It puts forward the logic of relationality, arguing that actors base their actions on relations in the first place. It uses the Chinese *zhongyong* dialectics as its epistemological schema for understanding relationships in an increasingly complex world. This theoretical framework may enable us to see the IR world from a different perspective, reconceptualize key elements such as power and governance, and make a broader comparison of international systems for the enrichment of the Global IR project.” (Yaqing 2016)

⁵ Yan Xuetong is the founder of “moral realism” theoretical construction or “binary theory” stating that the power of state determine strategical interests but types of leaders determine strategy for accomplishing those interests. In accordance with that theory, China can change international system in the 21st century if it applies principles of honesty and justice both in China and worldwide. Moral realism and offensive realism of John Mearsheimer represent the conflicted theories and Mearsheimer states that diplomatic strategy of China relying on the moral as the priority will not be sustainable as the same made USA even more aggressive in the international politics.

during his address at the 12th Session of the Politburo, 30th of December 2013 “...it is necessary to fulfil four requirements in order to strengthen Chinese soft power: building strong foundation for development of cultural soft power, emphasizing Chinese values, representing the uniqueness of the Chinese cultural charm and strengthening international discourse” (China 2013). So, culture is seen as the diplomatic tool, which China is using in the projection of its soft power. Chinese culture, specific hence attractive for the foreign public, the tool to introduce China as the benevolent trust-worthy nation (Lai 2012b).

This introduction of cultural diplomacy, and the Chinese view on this helps us understand this concept in the context of diplomatic relations between BH and China, encompassing the elements of investments, cultural and academic exchange and cultural diplomacy as China present it. In order to introduce this subject, we will use Popovic (2020), interpretation of the above-mentioned Nye’s model of four elements of cultural diplomacy and its impact on the cultural institutes. The first one is the cultural similarity between sponsor and host country because “common cultural, ethnical or religious identity is in the core of unincumbered intercultural communication” (Popovic et al. 2020, 50). The only commonalities we can find between Bosnia and Herzegovina, specifically Republika Srpska and China is not in the common cultural identity but more towards the inclination for traditional values and identification of suffering in NATO bombing and feeling of being threatened by the USA and insisting on the non-interference in internal issues of one country. The second element is economic cooperation and the “host country need to be open to economic incentives and political support” (Popovic et al. 2020, 50). Bosnia and Herzegovina, in both entitles is very much leaning towards Chinese loans and investments filling the gap left after EU decreased its activities and investments. This situation is also rapidly changing in the last couple of years where the US and EU are putting additional pressure on BH to decrease economic projects and loans with China (Doehler 2019). The third element is the political similarity (Popovic et al. 2020, 50). In this case, even though there is no political similarity, BH as part of former Yugoslavia had socialist system which China often cites as the “joint past” and “traditional friendship” (Zweers&Shopov2020). Chinese political system and values are not repulsive to Republika Srpska especially, which does not pay much attention to China political system and does not view it as oppressive. The last element is intercultural dialogue which secures the success of cultural diplomacy. According to Nye, if the cultural diplomacy elements are not attractive, they do not represent cultural diplomacy but propaganda. The last point Popovic states as an obstacle to accepting the Chinese cultural diplomacy is the open intercultural dialogue which provides successfulness of cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy techniques that are not attractive to the host country, does not

represent diplomacy but propaganda (Popovic et. al 2020). We will present the Chinese public diplomacy tool and attempt to show that, unlike in the some of the Western countries, cultural activities and multicultural dialogue China conducts are not seen as propaganda in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus confirming the “cultural soft power” and its positive perception in BH.

Based on the empirical research we made into specific stakeholders in BH as receivers of the elements of public diplomacy, we will measure whether the projected images have impact on the host’s perception. We will evaluate the effects of promotion of the Chinese language and culture via Confucius Institutes in BH.⁶ Since 2019, the umbrella body of CIs in the world, HANBAN Office of Chinese Language Council International (国家“国家推广普通话”办公室) affiliated to the Chinese Ministry of Education, was transformed into the recently established Chinese International Education Foundation and the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation. The Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) is a non-profit charitable organization jointly initiated by 27 universities, enterprises and social groups which is dedicated to supporting Chinese international education projects worldwide, including Confucius Institutes (CIEF 2021). The Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) is a non-profit professional educational institution for international Chinese language education, affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education (CLEC 2021). Its main functions are developing National Chinese Language Proficiency standards across the world and hosting certification tests; supporting the provision of teaching resources; operating international Chinese language education programs such as the “Chinese Bridge” series and China Studies Program; and organizing relevant activities of international exchanges and cooperation. Confucius Institutes operate directly on university campuses and employ local staff from the University and Chinese staff paid by the partner universities and sent for the period of two to four years to the host

⁶ Bosnia and Herzegovina have two Confucius Institutes opened in Sarajevo and Banja Luka at the respective universities. Both Confucius Institutes are organizing language and cultural courses. Sarajevo (Sarajevo CI) is organizing public courses of Chinese language but according to the home director, the biggest interest and attraction for the public are all activities related to health i.e., Taiji or Traditional Chinese Medicine. Kong Fu is the activity which is traditionally popular in Sarajevo and has had its history in pop culture from 80ies when Bruce Lee was very popular in former Yugoslavia. (Stevic 2018). CI at the University of Banja Luka was established three years following the establishment of Sarajevo CI in 2018. Both CIs in Bosnia and Herzegovina initially had good start and students attending lectures and cultural activities. (Univerzitet u Sarajevu 2021) However, as the time passed by, the number of courses and activities decreased in Sarajevo. There are numerous reasons, and we would like to emphasize the lack of local staff and local sinologists as the most important for further development of CIs work.

countries (HANBAN, 2019). Therefore, the role of Confucius Institutes in this research is introduced as the specific instrument to convey the message of diversity and hybridity of Chinese culture and values (medicine, philosophy, architecture, music, costumes, martial arts, painting, calligraphy, etc.) rooted in the long civilizational tradition hence offering an alternative to the Western values system (Lai 2012b, 85). Specifically, this research supports the Hartig thesis that language promotion via cultural institutes have crucial role for the cultural diplomacy of one state (Hartig 2016, 5).

Methods

Sample and procedure

The sample within the quantitative research, i.e.. the online survey consists of 191 respondents, of which 16.0% are students at the Confucius Institute University of Banja Luka and University of Sarajevo. The gender structure is well balanced, with a slightly higher percentage of the sample being women (56.6%). Most respondents have the status of unemployed (79.6%). The age of the respondents ranges from 16 to 66 years, with an average age of about 22 years ($M = 22.09$, $SD = 9.34$). Statistical analysis was performed in two software, exploratory factor analysis in FACTOR version 9.2. (Lorenzo-Seva&Ferrando, 2013), while other statistical analyzes are in R (R Core Team, 2013).

Three groups of standard indicators were used for the survey, which relate to 1. attitudes towards China, 2. ethnocentrism and 3. openness to experience.

A new group of indicators was based on Wuthnow's theory was created to measure attitudes towards China (Wuthnow, 2008), which defined three images that China seeks to project: as an ancient civilization worthy of respect, a leader in developing countries, a responsible partner in the international order. The instrument contains 15 items, with five items related to each of the dimensions. Within each dimension, two items are negatively defined, while the other three items are positively defined. Respondents give answers on a scale that has three options: yes, no, I don't know. Since this is a new instrument, its metric characteristics and factor structure were tested in this study, and in the Results section, these indicators are also presented.

The GES (Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale; Neuliep, 2002) was used to assess ethnocentrism. This scale has 22 items, with 15 items used in the final analysis. Within the instrument there are a few positively defined items (example of "Most

other cultures are backward compared to my culture”), while a smaller number, only three, of negatively defined items (example of “Lifestyles in other cultures are as valid as and those in my culture”). A higher score on this scale indicates more pronounced ethnocentrism, and respondents give answers on a five-point Likert-type scale. Measurement of openness according to experience was performed through 10 items from the Big Five Inventory Instrument (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999; Lakić, 2012) related to this personality trait. The instrument consists of several positively defined items (example of the item “I consider myself a person who is imaginative”) and a smaller number of negatively defined items (example of the item “I consider myself a person who prefers routine tasks”). A higher score on this scale indicates a pronounced openness to experience, and respondents give answers on a five-point Likert-type scale.

Results

We created a survey that measures three separate dimensions of cultural soft power: China as an ancient civilization worthy of respect (example of items from the survey “China has a rich history and culture based on its ancient past”), China as a leader in developing countries (sample item from the survey “China is a technology giant”) and China as a responsible partner in international relations (example of an item from the survey “China’s foreign policy does not endanger other countries”). These items were formed in accordance with the ideas of the author Joel Wuthnow, who gave the definition of the perception that China is trying to project, which we used in this research. Since this is a newly created instrument (survey), the factor structure of the instruments (number of factors and the amount of factor saturation) and certain quality indicators of the factor structure (internal consistency, replicability and semi-confirmatory suitability indices) were checked. This check was performed by exploratory factor analysis (EFA), where due to the violation of the assumption of multivariate normal distribution, ULS (Unweighted least squares) on the polychoric correlation matrix was used as the extraction method (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). To check the number of factors, three techniques were used that prove to be the most adequate and precise in determining the number of latent factors – optimal implementation of parallel analysis on the matrix of polychoric correlations, classical (Horn) parallel analysis on the Pearson correlation matrix and HULL method⁷ (Subotic, 2013).

⁷ The Hull method aims *to find a model with an optimal balance between model fit and number of parameters*. That is, it aims to retrieve only major factors (Lorenzo-Seva, Timmerman and Kiers 2011).

All techniques indicate that this is a one-factor solution, i.e., that the predicted three dimensions, empirically, still form one dimension. Essentially, although this is one factor, i.e., one dimension, it encompasses the content of the already mentioned three dimensions. After estimating the number of factors, the EFA was performed and in the first step, due to low factor saturation and low coefficients of shared variance (ECV; Ferrendo & Lorenzo-Seva, 2018), items were excluded (“Chinese technology is equal to other countries’ technologies”), 11 (China) wants to conquer other countries”) and 13 (“Respect for the wishes and interests of other countries is characteristic of China”) from the first version of the instrument. The EFA procedure was then repeated without these three items. EFA results show that the one-factor solution ($KMO = .79$, $\chi^2(66) = 574.2$, $p < .001$) explains 45.36% of the variance. Table 1 presents the items from the final version of the factor saturation survey.

Table 1: EFA results (saturation factor)

Items:

I think Chinese culture and civilization are respect worthy	λ .89
China has rich history and culture based on the ancient civilization	.94
Ancient civilization of China is worthy and equal to other ancient civilizations	.69
Chinese civilization is less worthy from civilizations of other countries	.74
China does not have ancient and important past	.39
China is the biggest economic power	.42
Chinese economy is growing annually	.66
Chinese economy is stagnating	-.39
China is technological giant	.58
China wishes only its own development	-.52
China wishes world peace and mutual appreciation amongst states	.66
Chinese foreign policy endangers other states	.57

By analyzing Table 1, it is noticeable that the factor saturations range from $\lambda = .39$ to $\lambda = .94$, where the average factor saturation is $M\lambda = .62$ which is above the lower recommended limit ($M\lambda = .50$) to assess the quality of the factor structure according to some authors (e.g., Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In support of the fact that this is a quality factor solution, there is also data on internal consistency, which in this case is $\alpha = \omega = .88$, which is above the recommended limit $\alpha = \omega = .70$ (Kline

2000), high replicability coefficients $HL = .95$ and $HO = .82$ (recommended minimum value is $HL = HO = .80$; Ferrando & Lorenzo-Seva 2018), as well as partially satisfactory semi-confirmatory suitability indices – i.e. satisfactory height $GFI = .951$ (recommended minimum value is $.950$; (Hu & Bentler 1999) and unsatisfactory height $RMSR = .127$ (recommended value is below or slightly above $RMSR = .073$; (Harman 1962). In general, it can be said that this survey (instrument) is valid from the aspect of factor validity. In accordance with the obtained EFA results, a summation or average score was formed for this survey, which was used in further analysis, with a higher score indicating a more positive view of China.

In addition to the fact that “Ethnocentrism” and “Openness” according to experience can influence the results, these psychological constructs can be used to check the criterion validity of a survey measuring attitudes towards China. In order to verify this type of validity, a correlation analysis⁴¹ was conducted, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

	Attitude towards China	Ethnocentrism	Openness towards new experience
Attitude towards China		-.37	.27**
Ethnocentrism			-.34**
Openness towards experience			

Note **- $p < 0.01$.

The results in Table 2 support the criterion validity of the instrument measuring Attitudes towards China. Namely, it has already been mentioned that the higher score on the mentioned instrument represents a more positive view of China, then a negative connection with ethnocentrism (lower ethnocentrism, more positive attitude towards China), as well as a positive connection with Openness to experience (higher openness, more positive attitude towards China). Correlations range from low to medium intensity intensities (Cumming, 2012).

Table 3 presents the basic descriptive indicators of the surveys (instruments) used in this study. In addition to the results of the survey on seeing China, instruments were used to assess ethnocentrism and openness to experience as personality traits, because we believe that these two psychological constructs could influence the results.

Table 3. Results of descriptive statistics, internal consistency and difference between the group of attendants and non-attendants of the Confucius Institutes

Instruments	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Sk	Ku	a	g
Attitude towards China	12	1.17	3.00	2.62	.31	-1.51	4.04	.75	.53*
Ethnocentrism	15	1.00	3.93	2.04	.57	.54	.08	.84	-.08
Openness	10	1.80	5.00	3.74	.62	-.43	.08	.81	.38

Note: N-number of items; Min-Minimum empirical value; Max-maximum empirical value; M-arithmetic mean; SD-standard deviation; Sk-skjunis; Ku-kurtosis; α -Cronbachov coefficient of internal consistency; Hedges'g coefficient of difference between two groups; *- $p < .05$.

Regarding the results presented in Table 3, it is important to note that all instruments used have satisfactory internal consistency (Kline, 2000).

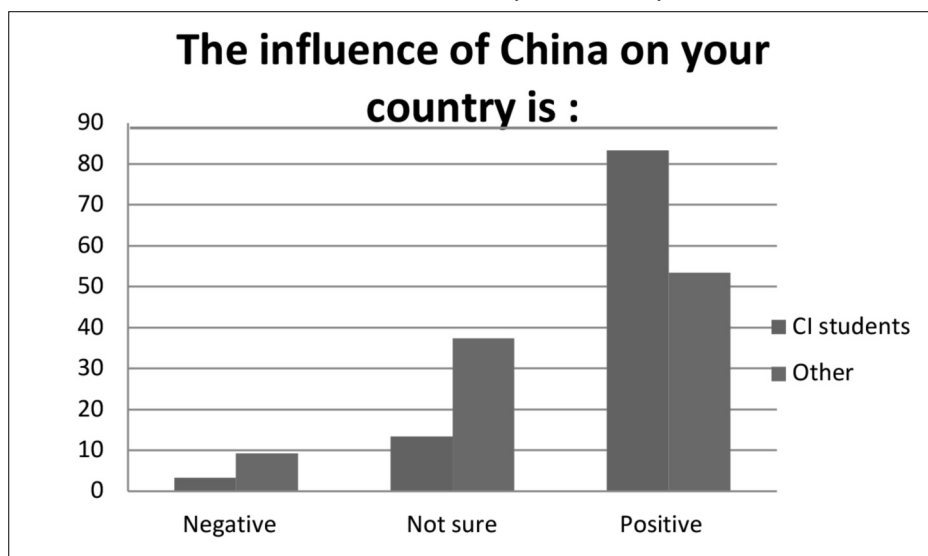
This data is important because it indicates that there is little or no effect on the remaining results (differences between groups or correlation coefficients). Also, information about the groups of students and non-students on the used instruments is important. The only statistically significant difference was obtained on the instrument measuring Attitudes towards China. According to Cumming (2012), this effect can be described as a medium-intensity effect. The differences were measured by Hedges' g, which is an alternative measure to the popular Cohen d where the g coefficient takes precedence in situations where the two groups differ greatly in size as is the case in this study. We have shown that the activities on learning the language and culture of China are important and influence a more positive attitude towards China.

In order to check whether ethnocentrism and openness to experiences have an effect on the differences between students and non-students at the Confucius Institute in relation to the attitude towards China, a moderation analysis was conducted. This analysis was performed in the SPSS package PROCESS version 3.0 (Hayes, 2018). The moderator model looks like the X variable (independent) in the first case was the scale of ethnocentrism, and in the second openness to experience, Y (dependent) variable Attitude towards China, while the moderator (M) was a categorical variable - students / non-students at Confucius institute. In both cases, no moderator effect was found, ie in the case of ethnocentrism - $F(1,187) = .01$, $p = .99$, and in the case of Openness to experience - $F(1,187) = .96$, $p = .33$. The reason for this result may be the existence of a disproportion in the size of groups of students and non-students.

The online survey also included a set of questions related to respondents' (positive or negative) perceptions of how China behaves or what effects it has on

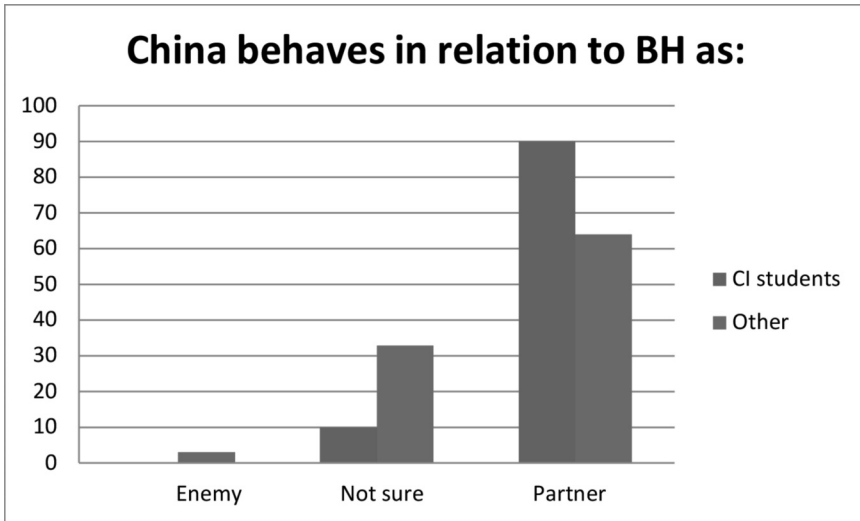
Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unlike the previous survey, which was operationalized in the form of a composite (average) score, here we will present the answers of respondents who are either students or non-students at the Confucius Institute in the form of graphs, and the results in the graphs refer to the percentage of respondents.

*Graph 1. Frequency of answers to the question
“China’s influence on your country?”*



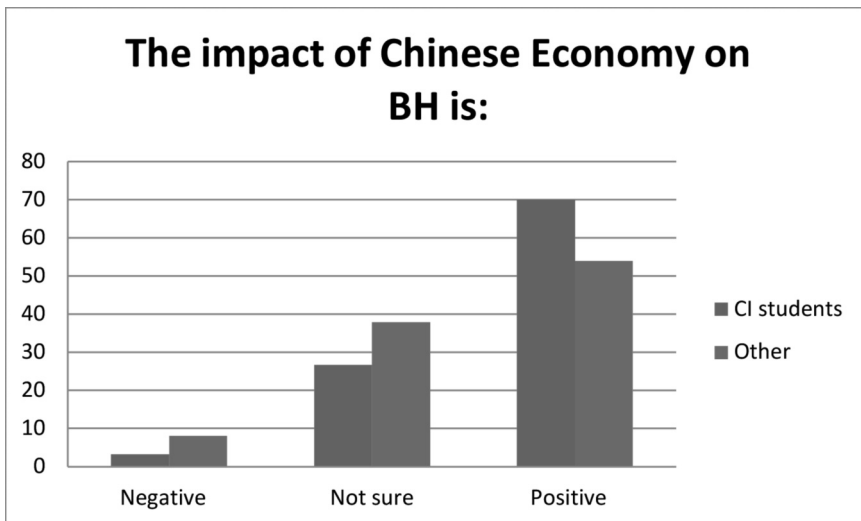
Graph 1 shows that there are differences between students and non-students of the Confucius Institute in terms of seeing (positively or negatively) China’s influence on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both groups of respondents estimate the negative impact of China on Bosnia and Herzegovina in a very small percentage (up to 10% for the group of non-participants). The differences between these two groups are more evident in the answers “I’m not sure” and “positive”, with non-participants being more inclined to the first mentioned answer, while participants are more inclined to the second answer.

Graph 2. Frequency of answers to the question “Does China have a relationship with BH?”



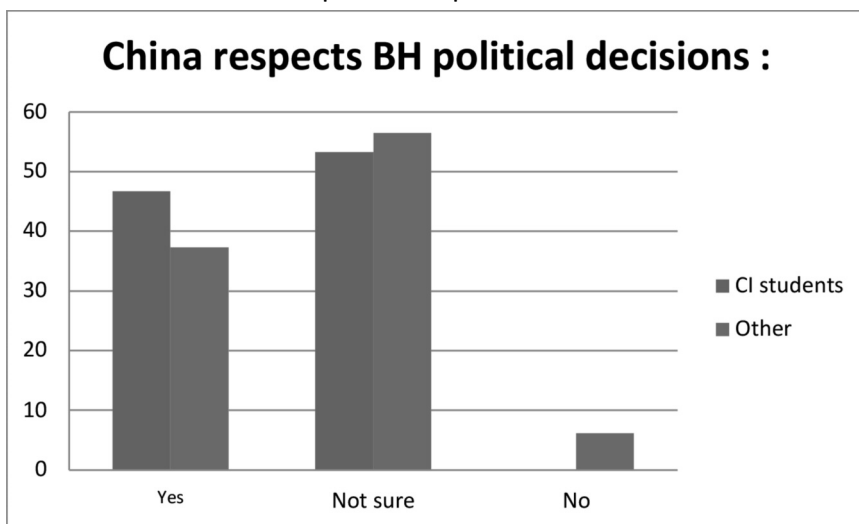
A similar tendency of the answer can be noticed in Graph 2, where absolutely no student of the Institute has circled the “enemy” option.

Graph 3. The frequency of answers to the question “The impact of the Chinese economy on BH is:”



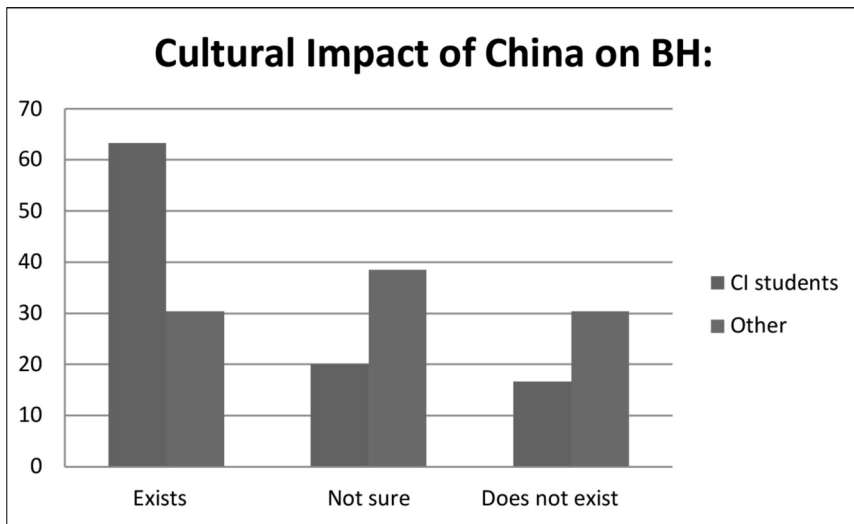
The answers in Graph 3 follow the tendency to answer questions 1 and 2. This tendency is reflected in the almost equally represented answer to the three offered options, and in this case, there is a slight difference in the frequency of answers between the two groups.

*Graph 4. Frequency of answers to the question
"China respects BH's political decisions:"*



Graph 4 also shows a similar tendency to answer, especially the yes / no options, i.e., positive / negative in the context of the previous questions, but also, there is a very similar way of answering the "I'm not sure" option between the two groups of respondents, and this option is most often chosen. We think it's because they are other questions (including the next question), much easier, i.e., effects such as the economy and the relationship with the state are more explicit and more present in the media (e.g., it is very noticeable if a Chinese investor opens a working organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina), while this issue is more implicit and difficult to observe. Nevertheless, students choose the "yes" option more than non-students.

Graph 5. Frequency of answers to the question “China’s cultural influence on BH”:



The tendency observed in the earlier charts is also noticeable in Chart 5. There are differences of opinion between students and non-students at the Confucius Institute regarding China’s cultural influence, i.e., students are logically exposed to Chinese culture directly and see and follow all events related to China, and due to this exposure, they have a more positive attitude towards Chinese culture and China in general.

Discussion

The research has ascertained that academic exchange and Confucius Institutes are an effective soft power tool. All respondents cited changes in thinking about China after getting to know China better through language or various cultural activities through academic visits and exchange with Chinese universities. Also, personal engagement of individual professors and deans who travelled to China influenced the improvement of cooperation with Chinese universities, the development of Sinology studies and greater interest in China.

We tested three images by quantitative research comparing Confucius Institute students and non-students, and by qualitative research that included academic

staff, members of think tanks who resided in China, as opposed to those who had no contact with China. In Chart 1, which examined China's influence on BH, it is noticeable that there are differences between students and non-students at the Confucius Institute in terms of seeing (positively or negatively) China's influence on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both groups of respondents estimate the negative impact of China on Bosnia and Herzegovina in a very small percentage (up to 10% for the group of non-participants). The differences between these two groups are more evident in the answers "I'm not sure" and "positive", with non-participants being more inclined to the first mentioned answer, while participants are more inclined to the second mentioned answer. We also highlight Graph 5. Frequency of answers to the question "China's cultural influence on BH:", where it is clear that there are differences of opinion between students and non-students at the Confucius Institute regarding China's cultural influence. Participants, who are directly exposed to Chinese culture, both see and follow all events related to China, and due to that exposure, they have a more positive attitude towards Chinese culture and China in general.

The research confirmed the thesis that the "cultural soft power" projected by the People's Republic of China through Confucius Institutes and academic exchange as key institutional mechanisms for the realization of "soft power", i.e., achieving public diplomacy of the People's Republic of China, decisively contributes to understanding China and understanding of its foreign policy. Research has shown that academic exchange is an effective soft power tool. China is investing heavily not only in higher education but also in internationalization. All respondents reported changes in thinking about China after getting to know each other through language or different cultural activities, and the personal involvement of individuals influenced improved cooperation with Chinese universities, the development of Sinology studies and greater interest in China. A group of respondents who had no contact with China mostly had a positive opinion and believes that China's behavior in international relations is correct, that China respects other countries regardless of their power and size. Of course, some respondents believe that China is trying to have global and imperial supremacy in the world by using "soft power", but that its behavior is adequate and not to the detriment of other countries but is trying to satisfy its interests. This and similar opinions indicate a lack of adequate knowledge and various sources of information, as well as China's inability to present itself in the right way, especially in Eastern European countries, which are always at the crossroads of interests, but also with dominant sources of information from Western countries. Students studying in China could get acquainted with Chinese customs, culture, learn a language, and through language gain an understanding of Chinese thought in philosophy and Chinese values. In addition to students, the academic

staff who stayed in China, through their later work and commitment, they influence the strengthening of ties and better cooperation with Chinese universities.

The cultural activities that both CIs organize fit the desired image China wants to portray in Bosnia-Herzegovina by promoting language, culture and traditional values. The Banja Luka University CI additionally organizes lectures on modern and contemporary China aiming to educate students and introduce development accomplished since Chinese economic opening up in 1978 led by Deng Xiaoping (KI UNIBL 2021). These lectures are also intended as the preparation for the Sinology Department due to be opened in October 2022 (KIUNIBL 2021). We argue that CIs work is not one-way public diplomacy only but an opportunity for both countries thus enabling BH to promote its literature, music and other cultural traits in China (KIUNIBL 2019). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, both universities' CIs had the opportunity to participate in the global conferences organized by that time HANBAN. This was an excellent chance for rectors and deans to meet their counterparts from all over the world and increase potential internationalization of their respective universities (CI UNIBL 2018). Unfortunately, this all ceased with the pandemic and the contacts with partner universities remained on the online basis only, which significantly impacted the quality of cooperation and partnerships. Summer camps for students from BH were another excellent opportunity to not only practice their Chinese skill but to see China for most of the students, for the first time.

Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have similar projects which uses joint efforts in the promotion of cooperation and language courses. As stated previously, CIs belong to home universities but fund their activities with funds, previously arriving from HANBAN and now from partner universities based on the proposed list of projects. Another advantage of these institutes on campuses is the possibility to introduce Chinese language which has not been taught previously at either of those two leading universities in BH. The CIEF official stance is that CIs will help local universities in establishing study programs for Chinese language and in case of University of Banja Luka, we have the confirmation of this approach as previously explained (Stevic 2020)

Conclusion

China sees public diplomacy as an indispensable tool for its foreign policy in order to improve the international image by telling its story and presenting a specific self-image. Chinese leaders understood the importance of the perception

of one country in international relations and focused on a people-based approach, that is, creating a perception in the publics of other countries. The Chinese language, which has long been an elusive medium in communication, is increasingly becoming a tool of public diplomacy and a symbol of China's opening. In this context, this study represents an internationally active China that takes its place in the global order but is also concerned about its own image. As we stated in the introductory discussion, every public diplomacy aims to serve national interests. Public diplomacy in China serves China's foreign policy interest as a reflection of unhindered economic development, which is not in conflict with the interests of Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular. The goal of public diplomacy is to promote the Chinese national interest in BH and to make its voice heard, and to present China in accordance with certain images that we have specifically singled out here as the subject of research. The representation of "real China" in the world provokes debate and skeptical approach in Western countries.

China is viewed differently by the European Union and the Western countries as compared to the views held by Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and the Central and Eastern European countries (d'Hooghe 2010; Turscanyi et al. 2020). The common point is a relatively small level of knowledge of Chinese culture, history, values. In the West, this lack of knowledge causes misperceptions of China as a threat, and in others, the representation of China exclusively in a positive light or as a source of new political and economic opportunities, without deeper analyses or understanding. There is still very little information about China, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which traditionally has no developed study of Sinology or much interest in studying China. This does not apply to Serbia, where Oriental studies have been studied since 1926, and within it, the beginnings towards the study of China as well. A deeper understanding of China, "additional knowledge", creates a basis for greater knowledge of new insights, knowledge-based policies and better cooperation

China, which accounts for a fifth of the world's population and a fifth of total GDP, is the world's second-largest economy, the world's largest exporter and importer of goods, remains a major factor in the international system. While we cannot influence the way the world is viewed through the prism of danger and growing power, hegemony and conflict, we can better listen and learn to understand what China wants today, what it says and what it represents. Sinology studies, which include an interdisciplinary approach to the study of China and Chinese civilization, will enable new generations to gain better insight and help better cooperation with China. An additional value would be the establishment of a think tank that would bring together professors and students dealing with China and produce recommendations for the adoption of policies and strategies related

to China and cooperation with China. Academic study of the People's Republic of China considering all aspects of this five-thousand-year-old civilization, tradition, philosophy, language and culture represented and continued by modern China today and its influence in the modern world, especially in the Western Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina is necessary for proper orientation foreign policies and strategies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska.

In addition, these findings will be supplemented with the new results on the two-year basis survey conducted in BH. Future research should consider comparative research with CIs in the region and the potential effects of the current global situation.

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Ljiljana STEVIĆ

**KINESKA KULTURNA MEKA MOĆ:
STUDIJA SLUČAJA BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE**

Apstrakt: U radu je analiziran uticaj koji kineska javna diplomatije i meka moć (kulturalna meka moć) imaju na javno mnjenje u Bosni i Hercegovini. Testirane su tri specifične slike koje Kina želi da projektuje u Bosni i Hercegovini: Kina kao drevna civilizacija, lider zemalja u razvoju i odgovoran partner u međunarodnoj zajednici. Razmatra se da li kulturalna meka moć, primenjena putem Konfucijevih instituta, programa akademske razmene i *think tank* institucija, utiče na percepciju javnosti u Bosni i Hercegovini. U prvom delu rada dat je teorijski okvir javne diplomatije, meke moći i kulturalne diplomatije, dok se u drugom ocrta institucionalni, diplomatski i regulativni okvir meke moći i predstavljaju zainteresovane strane, odnosno akademska razmena i Konfucijevi instituti. U završnom delu analizirane su anketa i intervjui i predstavljeni rezultati o tome kako ovi različiti alati javne diplomatije oblikuju percepciju Kine u Bosni i Hercegovini. Rad se zaključuje tvrdnjom da se meka moć kineske javne diplomatije ostvaruje u Bosni i Hercegovini, kao i da je ona prihvaćena.

Ključne reči: kulturalna meka moć, javna diplomatija, kulturalna diplomatija, državni imidž, Konfucijevi instituti, akademska razmena.