
The effectiveness of Confucius Institutes as a tool of China's soft power in South Africa

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Abstract (in French and English)

The link between teaching Chinese as a foreign language and the role of China on the international stage has grown in importance since 2004 when the Confucius Institutes programme was launched. Despite the confusion that surrounds the categorization of the relationship, Chinese circles increasingly consider the language Institutes as a tool of soft power in "support for the rise of China". The paper analyses the meaning of "cultural" soft power and attempts to measure its effectiveness in support of China's foreign policy aims through the study of Confucius Institutes in South Africa. Based on fieldwork data the paper unpacks the reality on the ground through a study of the process of attraction at the executive level as well as at the students' level. It concludes that Confucius Institutes, despite fierce attempts by a number of Chinese actors to promote their presence and activities in South Africa, can be effective tools of soft power only partially and in contexts where power asymmetry is accentuated.

Keywords: China, Africa

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