

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AND PERCEPTUAL CHANGE: EXAMINING THE
CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE'S EFFECTS ON PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA

by

Yuxiang Du
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Committee:

_____ Director

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Program Director

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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by

Yuxiang Du
Master of Arts
Liberty University, 2011
Bachelor of Arts
Beijing Language and Culture University, 2002

Director: Katherine Rowan, Professor
Department of Communication

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George Mason University
Fairfax, VA



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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, my sisters, and my wife.

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ABSTRACT

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AND PERCEPTUAL CHANGE: EXAMINING THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE'S EFFECTS ON PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA

Yuxiang Du, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2016

Dissertation Director: Dr. Katherine Rowan

Public diplomacy is a field studied by both strategic communication and international relations scholars. With more than 500 Institutes established in 134 countries, the Confucius Institute project (CI) has become one of the largest public diplomacy efforts in recent history. Unlike past literature mainly focused on the international relations aspect of this project, this study proposed an identity-centered framework based on a discussion of attitude congruency and cultural cognition to understand the communication aspects of the CI project. The framework identifies factors which motivated people to interpret an incompatible message in a way that would not threaten their cultural identities. This research compared in-depth interviews with CI participants to interviews with other students (non-CI students) to explore how interpersonal relationships affect people's perception of China. Results from this research show that CIs' perceptions of China were different from those of other students in nature, strength, and complexity. Most aspects of

the proposed framework were supported such as identity protection and affirmation. The facilitative functions of positive affect, cognitive dissonance, and maintaining autonomous face in the process of identity incorporation were identified as possible incentives which motivate people to make efforts in fitting incompatible message into their worldviews and identities. The analysis also identified two additional factors, the complexity or sophistication of participants' perceptions and their attitudinal strength, which may provide necessary conditions for identity incorporation. Successful identity incorporation reduces the negative impact of the message on one's previously held perception. The typical outcome for CIs is an unchanged perception of China despite negative information consumption about the country. This study may contribute to the field of public diplomacy by showing how people's perceptions are affected by identity negotiation processes when reacting to incompatible information. Limitations of this study and thoughts on future research are described.

CHAPTER I: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

China's Image

The last decade has witnessed increasing criticism and negative responses toward China as it has gained power economically and militarily. People in Western countries and Asia have expressed concern about China's increasing power. Concern rose to a high point in 2012 due to disputes between China and Japan as well as disputes between China and some Southeast Asian countries. In response, the United States declared its resolution to defend its interests and allies in the Pacific Rim. This determination was shown in the Obama Administration's pivot to Asia foreign policy which is to rebalance American military and diplomatic power toward East Asia to cope with a rising China (Lieberthal, 2011).

Recently, there has been a decline in perceptions of China among residents of the United States. In 1989, total favorable perception of China was close to 80%, whereas a recent Gallup poll in 2014 indicated a 43% favorable view and 53% unfavorable. The poll also showed China was considered the United States' greatest enemy (20% vote) among all countries surpassing North Korea (16%), Iran (16%), and Russia (9%). Forty-six percent of the American population considers the military power of China to be a critical threat to the United States, and 52% consider the economic power of China a critical threat (Gallup, 2014).

China's Response: Confucius Institute ("CI")

The government in China is aware of these perceptions and understands their negative effect on China's international relations and national interests. To assure the world of its benign nature, China first proposed the concept "Peaceful Rise" to the world, and then it replaced "rise" with the word "development" due to the threatening connotation of the term "rise" (Yi, 2005). Through this campaign, China undertook many initiatives to alter negative perceptions, one of which was to utilize public diplomacy by setting up Confucius Institutes around the world (Paradise, 2009).

The creation and spread of Confucius Institutes is one of the greatest efforts by the Chinese government to foster a positive image around the globe. It is a joint venture between one or two universities in China and one university (or high school) in a foreign country to provide Chinese language and cultural education to foreign nationals. Following the first one, established in 2004 in Korea, as many as 500 Confucius Institutes and 1000 Confucius Classrooms were set up in 134 countries or regions by the end of 2015, and the United States has more Confucius Institutes (109) and classrooms (348) than any other country (Hanban, 2015).

Three motivations behind this massive project were identified by scholars: to offset hostile attitudes toward China's rise; to foster understanding of China, and to spread the Chinese language (Mandarin) and culture (Paradise, 2009; Hartig, 2012). The ultimate goal of this project is to foster a positive national image of China in the world.

Cases of Language Institutions in Public Diplomacy

Language institutions have been used by many countries as a means of public diplomacy. For instance, Germany has been setting up Goethe-Institut programs since 1951 to promote German language and culture, and France has been using Alliance Française to increase its soft power through language and culture since 1883 (Paschalidis, 2009). The idea of using Confucius Institutes in public diplomacy may come from these two older European language institutes. Therefore, it is important to examine their designated functions.

Goethe-Institut. The Goethe-Institut is a German cultural association to promote German language and culture in the world. Founded in 1950, now it operates 159 centers worldwide (Goethe-Institut, 2014). Writing on the occasions of the Goethe-Institut's sixtieth anniversary, Bach (2011) claimed that the establishment of this institute gained back the world's trust in Germany after World War II. According to the author, there were three reasons that made this project successful. First, it has been operated with complete autonomy and free of political influence. Second, it put emphasis on classicism. "The names Goethe, Schiller, Bach and Beethoven retained a positive reputation internationally, even after World War II and the Holocaust" (Bach, 2011). Third, it put more emphasis on dialogue with local publics than on cultural export. Ren (2012) believes that the name Confucius Institute developed in an effort to imitate the Goethe-Institut. Its name is not the only similarity between these two institutes. The Confucius Institute also puts emphasis on classicism because of its positive connotations.

Alliance Française. The Alliance Française is an organization based in Paris which aims to promote French language and culture around the world since it was founded in 1883. The organization considers itself a cultural network worldwide with 850 establishments in 136 countries. According to its website, “Each year, 500,000 people, of all ages, attend Alliances Françaises to learn French and more than 6 million people participate in their cultural activities” (2014) According to Nye (2008), The Alliance Française has been successful due to its promotion of French language and literature which was one of the three sources of soft power. Paschalidis (2009) stated that these cultural institutes played an important role in their host country’s cultural diplomacy and reflected the persistence of the ideology of cultural nationalism. Hartmann (2010) claimed that Confucius Institutes are designed with the soft power strategy used in projects such as Goethe-Institut and Alliance Française.

Compelling Need

Limited research on the Confucius Institute. Even though cultural institutes like Goethe-Institut and the Alliance Française have been successful in assisting public diplomacy, whether Chinese efforts in this regard have been effective is not yet clear. Wu (2011) wrote that little research had been done on the effects of the Confucius Institutes and asked for follow up research on the subject. Other scholars concluded that the full effects of this project had not yet been revealed (Paradise, 2009; Liu, 2011; Hartig, 2012). Among these few studies, only one of them conducted primary research with students and teachers at the Institutes. Therefore, in order to understand the effects of Confucius Institutes, more research, especially primary research, is in required. There is also a lack

of research concerning changes in students' perceptions, including the reasons behind changes and how change is achieved. Qualitative description is needed to understand this perception-transforming process. In the following section, this paper will show the compelling need for this research by reviewing two shortcomings in current work.

Currently used theory and its limitations. Soft power theory is the primary theory used in current research on the Confucius Institute. The concept of soft power was developed by Nye (2004) to describe persuasive power exerted by using non-coercive means mainly in the context of international affairs. This concept can be contrasted with hard power which mainly refers to the use of coercion and payment to achieve international goals.

According to Nye, there are three sources for a country's soft power. The first source is its culture because soft power often derives from cultural attractiveness. The second source is its political values, such as democracy and human rights. And the third source is its foreign policies when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority. The Confucius Institutes project belongs to the first source, cultural attractiveness. Compared to the other sources, culture is the optimal choice for China. Nye argues that culture produces soft power when it includes universal values. The core value of humaneness in Confucianism is widely accepted in East Asian culture and can possibly be endorsed by other populations as well, which makes it a good vehicle to project China's soft power.

Nye argues that soft power can be more effective than hard power because it is based on seduction, which is usually better received than coercion. Therefore, soft power

is widely used in public diplomacy. One of the benefits of using soft power is fostering a positive national image with a foreign audience. Generally speaking, countries which mainly use soft power such as Switzerland are perceived more favorably than countries using hard power such as Russia (Nye, 2004).

There are many studies exploring China's use of soft power to affect its national image overseas. Wang (2008) concluded that the use of soft power in China's public diplomacy created an increase in the perception that China was less threatening than other countries. Kurlantzick (2007) stated that China's policies promoting Chinese cinema, music, business and language abroad have helped to create a benign image of China. Yang (2007) conducted a content analysis on the relationship between soft power and China's national image and concluded that the image of China benefited from the country's increasing soft power.

Nevertheless, this theory is only useful for understanding public diplomacy at a national level or international level. Even though it is able to point out that the effectiveness of soft power in fostering a positive national image is due to attraction, it cannot explain how this positive perception is fostered, especially at individual level. Therefore, it is necessary to apply some theories at the individual level using psychology and communication frameworks; the issue will accordingly be explored with a microscope.

Lack of communication perspective in CI research. Studies of the Confucius Institute have focused on several aspects of the phenomenon. For instance, Zhao and Huang (2010) placed Confucius Institutes in the history of spreading Chinese language

and culture overseas and examined their influence on Chinese status worldwide in the foreseeable future. Liu (2011) examined the project itself and looked into how Confucius Institutes functioned internally and what challenges they were facing. You (2012) concluded that failure was looming over the project because its discourse was overloaded with “marketized languages” (discourse mainly used in the commercial field to commodify the Institutes) which contradicted the projection of soft power. Starr (2009) focused on the establishment of Confucius Institutes in the Europe. He stated, “Some critics see this as a sinister attempt to extend Chinese political control activities to Western universities. Most foreigners actually involved in the CI program reject these fears” (p.79). It is clear that more research is needed to understand the project’s actual effects.

In 2011, Wu surveyed 565 program participants from fifteen Confucius Institutes in five countries and 56.2% reported that their perception of China became better after taking a class from Confucius Institutes. However, this number did not reflect a difference among countries whereas the author claimed there was a national difference in perception change which means this change is not the same across different countries. This claim was not backed up with empirical evidence. Paradise (2009) concluded that the project’s success depended on the particular audience. It was suspected that the audience in developed countries such as the U. S. was harder to please than the audience in developing countries.

This review of literature shows that there is a lack of a communication perspective on CI. Research shared above did not focus on communication aspect in their

exploration of CI project. Research with a communication perspective can reveal why CI may be more effective in some contexts and less so in others. Findings from this research can also benefit the communication field by illuminating an important form of international government public relations. It is also important to understand how countries with relatively weak media influence such as China can utilize differing tools in projecting a positive national image.

Pilot Study

In this section, the researcher will briefly summarize a relevant study; findings of which lead to this present study. Summary of this study will show how this past study laid a foundation for this one. And how this study is built on lessons learned from the previous one.

Participants and procedures. In spring 2012, the researcher conducted a small-scale mixed-methods study with CI students at a mid-Atlantic university. It consisted of a survey (n=35) and an interview study (n=4). The goal was to find out the effectiveness of China using Confucius Institute as a means of public diplomacy to improve the perception of China with students at a mid-Atlantic university and also how this perceptual change was achieved.

In the survey, there were two groups of participants to address the research questions. The first group was the students in the Confucius Institute. Because the number of qualified participants was not large, this survey included close to 30 % students at this targeted Institute (n=16). A second group of participants were the students at the same university but without any experience with the Confucius Institute. This was

to be used for comparison with the first group. The number of participants in this group matched with the number of the first group (n=17). They were drawn from a convenience sample, students in one communication basic course.

The survey resembled the survey done by the Gallup Poll on Americans' perception of China and attitudes toward it. Main items included China's military threat, economic threat, economic status in the world, economic influence on the U.S. economy, and their rate of favorability toward China.

The interview study had voluntary participants. The students at the Institute were asked by their Chinese language teacher whether they would like to participate in a twenty-minute interview. The interviewees received a \$10 gift card for their time. Because of time constraints, the number of interviewees was four.

During the semi-structured, individual interviews, the researcher asked the following in-depth questions: (1) Describe your experience with Chinese learning. (2) How does learning Chinese increase your understanding of China? (3) Through what channels do you get information about China? (4) How does learning Chinese change your perception of China? (5) How do you evaluate your experience with the Confucius Institute?

Findings. The survey confirmed that learning Chinese could improve the students' perception of China and partly supported the idea that it could also reduce the perception that China poses a threat to the United States. The interviews revealed that interpersonal communication was a key element in the tools Confucius Institutes used to affect perceptions of China's national image. Because participants (CI students) were

well informed about China, they could look at the belief that China may be a threat more objectively than other people. One interviewee stated that more exposure between the world and China would reduce China threat perception. The other interviewee believed that many Americans were scared because they had limited knowledge about the relationship between the United States and China.

The survey and interviews suggested that Chinese culture was attractive as a form of soft power. That is, participants had positive experiences with Confucius Institutes because their programs fulfilled participants' interpersonal communication and cultural needs. For instance, one interviewee stated he would go there (CI) for "[h]omework problems, and a lot of these people just became friends with. I enjoy hanging out with them now. I have a good time" (Participant A-CI, pilot). Another interviewee expressed that she wanted to study the language because it was a way to show respect for local culture when she was there. Also, with language skills she could appreciate Chinese culture much more than without understanding Chinese at all (Participant B-CI, pilot).

Lessons learned. There were two major limitations to this study. The first limitation was the small scale of the study. The sample size in both the survey and interview component was small which prevented the study from reaching generalizable conclusions. The other limitation was the use of theory. This study was conducted under the theoretical framework of soft power theory. Even though this theory was able to explain the effectiveness of using soft power in Confucius Institutes, its inability to explain interpersonal communication and perception change was evident.

After reflecting on this study and reading other theories, the researcher found that the key concept to understand perception change and perception maintenance is identity negotiation. From the Gallup poll, one can clearly see that perceptions of China are divided among Americans, with most holding negative perceptions. According to the Gallup poll, the majority of Americans view the military power (87%) and economic power (88%) of China as a threat (critical or important) to the United States. A common negative perception among a group of people can be self-reinforcing (Braman & Kahan, 2006). For people with a minority view (favorable perception of China) to maintain or even improve their view against an opposite group view, there is a process of identity negotiation for these people to find peace between their individual identity and group identity. It is essential to look for theoretical frameworks that explain the processes involved in identity negotiation so that this phenomenon identified in the pilot study can be explored.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

This section of literature review focuses on two key terms which are very relevant to this research, public diplomacy and public relations. Differences and similarities between the two concepts, and how they are combined, is also discussed here.

Public diplomacy. The term public diplomacy originated in international relations. Public diplomacy in its modern meaning is relatively a new term which was first used in 1965 by Edmund Gullion when he established a public diplomacy center at Tufts University. He wrote that public diplomacy “deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies” (Cull, p.19). Traditionally speaking, public diplomacy refers to two main actors, government and its foreign publics. This concept of government-dominated diplomacy is generally seen not to describe the full scale of public diplomacy. Therefore, the definition of public diplomacy has evolved over recent years and incorporates more actors besides governments. Alan Henrikson, a professor of diplomatic history at Tufts University gave a new definition in 2005 in which the role of government was to initiate, not to dominate:

Public diplomacy may be defined, simply, as the conduct of international relations by governments through public communications media and through dealings with a wide range of nongovernmental entities (political parties, corporations, trade

associations, labor unions, educational institutions, religious organizations, ethnic groups, and so on including influential individuals) for the purpose of influencing the politics and actions of other governments. (Edward R. Murrow Center, 2015, para.3)

Crocker Snow, Jr. (Acting Director Edward R. Murrow Center, 2005) shared a similar definition and argued that public diplomacy was not limited to actions of governments but also actions of other active participants such as the media, multinational corporations, NGOs, and faith-based organizations (Edward R. Murrow Center, 2015). According to Signitzer and Wamser (2006), not only were there more actors in the field, but public diplomacy also involved new social relationships built through culture and economics.

Cultural diplomacy. Despite these somewhat differing definitions, the use of Confucius Institutes can be considered an exemplary case of public diplomacy. They are led and funded directly by an office under the Chinese Ministry of Education to foster communication with foreign publics and create a positive image of China which can help China's foreign policies in the long run. Van Dyke and Vercic (2009) wrote that the operation of Chinese Confucius Institutes was to "facilitate cultural diplomacy" which "relies on favorable attitudes toward a nation's culture to facilitate diplomatic relations" (p. 825).

Cultural diplomacy sometimes is used to refer to the use of cultural activities in public diplomacy. Mitchell (1986) defined cultural diplomacy as "the creation of cultural agreements in the formal sense, and its goal as the conveyance of a favorable image of

one's culture abroad with a view toward facilitation of diplomatic activities as a whole" (p. 5). Signitzer and Wamser (2006) defined it as activities and functions "of cultural section of foreign/other ministry or semi-autonomous body to create a climate of mutual understanding through slow media" (p. 439). Therefore, to be specific, the Confucius Institute can be considered an example of cultural diplomacy.

The effectiveness of cultural diplomacy is usually explained by the soft power theory of Nye (2004), which was mentioned in chapter I. This theory attributes the effectiveness of soft power to the attractiveness of a nation's culture, its political values, and its foreign policies. However, it fails to explain what this attractiveness is and how it works in public diplomacy. This limitation calls for theories from other fields such as communication and public relations.

Public relations. Public relations as a modern practice can be dated back to early 20th century (PRSA, 2015). The formal study of what began in the 1950s and 1960s originated from mass communication research (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006). The definition of public relations has evolved over time. The concept of public relations was closely related to the concept of issue management and the practice of one-way communication from organizations to publics at its early days. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2006) stated that "ideas about the management of two-way communication processes remained vague" (p. 23) until J. Grunig's introduction of symmetrical communication in 1976 and Broom and Smith's concept of the public relations manager role in 1978. Cited in Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2006)'s paper, J. Grunig (1997) defined public relations as "an organization's managed communication behavior." In

2011 and 2012, the Public Relations Society of America developed a crowd-sourced definition based on an international effort: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, 2015).

As the definition of public relations has developed, there has been a shift in paradigms in the field as well. The dominant paradigm from the late 1980s to 2000s was Grunig’s symmetrical perspective featuring the excellence theory. However, there has been a paradigm shift away from this perspective to a co-creational perspective (Botan & Taylor, 2004). Grunig’s excellence theory (2006) is a prominent theory functioning under the symmetry paradigm. There are two main arguments in excellence theory: first, “the value of public relations to organizations and society [is] based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics” (Grunig & Grunig, 2008, pp. 327-328). Second, excellent public relations work best when there are symmetrical relations and communication between organizations and publics:

Public relations professionals plan and execute communication for the entire organization or help parts of the organization to communicate. They manage the movement of message into the organization, for example, when conducting research on the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of publics and then using the information to counsel managers on how to make the organization’s policies or actions acceptable to publics. They may manage the movement of message out of the organization when they help management decide how to explain a policy or

action to a public and then write a news story or fact sheet to explain it. (Grunig, 1997, pp. 242-243)

The cocreational perspective was summarized by Botan and Taylor (2004). It “sees publics as cocreators of meaning and communication as what makes it possible to agree to shared meanings, interpretations, and goals” (p. 652). This perspective “focuses on relationships among publics and organizations” (p. 652). No matter how strategic communication practitioners treat publics, the message is always cocreated by both parties. Understanding various publics’ important role in constructing meaning in message helps practitioners to better design messages to gain mutually beneficial results. Other than organization-public relationships, theories and practice under this paradigm also include community theory, coorientation theory, dialogue theory, and accommodation theory (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

International public relations. Despite nuances argued by some scholars, this term is used interchangeably with global public relations. At its very core, the practice of international public relations is still public relations with involvement of more diverse and global actors than domestic public relations. NGOs and advocacy groups play an important role in global public relations. These actors take up a higher volume of communication than that of corporations in developing countries. The relevant publics are more diverse and global due to globalization (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003).

Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) proposed a theoretical framework for international public relations research and practice which included three elements of infrastructure, culture, and the media for the target country or society. The three elements of

infrastructure are “a nation’s political system, its level of economic development, and the level of activism prevalent in that country” (p. 4) The culture element refers to societal culture which can be measured by Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and corporate culture. The media aspect contains three elements: media control, media diffusion, and media access.

There are overlapping areas between public diplomacy and international public relations when actors are government agencies and foreign publics. This paper will next review similarities and differences in the public diplomacy practice of two traditions, international relations and public relations.

Integration of IR and PR traditions. Even though public diplomacy originated from international relations, Signitzer and Wamser (2006) stressed that public diplomacy and public relations shared much in common such as fundamental positions and assumptions. “Both public relations and public diplomacy are strategic communicative functions of either organizations or nation-states, and typically deal with the reciprocal consequences a sponsor and its publics have upon each other” (p. 441). The role played by both public relations practitioners and public diplomacy personnel is “boundary-spanning” and culture-crossing “serving as a liaison between the organization [state] and the external groups and individuals” (p. 443). Many argued that public relations and public diplomacy were in a process of convergence (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Signitzer and Wamser, 2006). Van Dyke and Vercic (2003) used a figure (below) to depict the area where public relations and public diplomacy converged.

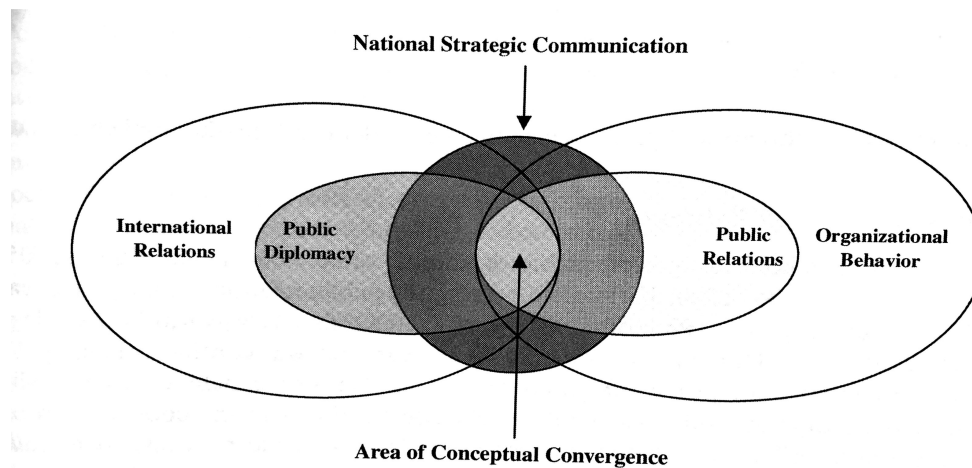


Figure 1. Van Dyke and Verčič’s model of public relations-public diplomacy convergence (Area of conceptual convergence).

There are significant differences in these two traditions as well. The tradition of public relations focuses on the communication aspect of these phenomena. Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) argued, “We recognize that at its core, public relations is a communication act” (p. 3). On the other hand, the tradition of international relations focuses on the influences of public diplomacy. Malone (1985) pointed out that the aim of public diplomacy was “affecting their [foreign people] thinking and ultimately, that of their governments” (p. 199). Public diplomacy turns to public relations for tools and techniques to achieve a positive influence. It is necessary to understand the communication aspect of public diplomacy to fully understand its process and

effectiveness. A successful study of public diplomacy phenomena calls for perspectives and tools such as theories and framework from these two traditions as well.

The pilot study for this dissertation suggested that attitude change may occur because of experience with Confucius Institutes. Therefore, the next part of this study consists of discussions of attitude congruency and change with a focus on Kelman's (1958) framework and attitude congruity theory. The second section looks at Kahan's (2006, 2007) cultural cognitive theory, which is the foundation for building a theoretical framework for this research. The third section introduces several other theories which contribute to building the framework. The justification for including these theories is also offered. In the last section, a new theoretical model centering on the construct "identity" is proposed, based on the discussion from the first three sections.

Attitude Congruence and Change

Kelman's framework of three processes. In exploring motivational and cognitive systems which induce and process attitudinal change, Kelman (1958) constructed and tested a framework of three processes: compliance, identification, and internalization. He argued that attitude change resulting from each process was due to different motivational factors and required different conditions to sustain, and the sustainability of different kinds of change varied. Change brought by compliance was usually to avoid punishment and disapproval and would not sustain without the presence of power. Change occurs in the process of identification when an individual wanted to establish a satisfying relationship with a person or group even though the content of change might not agree with this individual's internal value system. Internalization

occurred when the induced change was intrinsically rewarding and internally congruent with one's value system. Change achieved through internalization was rewarding because it strengthened one's attitude congruence and maximized one's value systems. Kelman argued that this framework could be applied into "the analysis of the effects of various communications and other forms of social influence on attitudes and actions in the international sphere" (p. 59).

Kelman's contribution to our understanding of attitude change is not only limited to this framework of three processes. In 1961, he focused on how social influence induced change in people's attitudes towards society and issues. In his analysis of Communist China's brainwashing movement, he distinguished two different kinds of change, public conformity and private acceptance, and explored how these two kinds of change related to the three processes. Antecedents of three processes were identified. For instance, two antecedents of internalization were concern with value congruence of behavior and credibility of the influencing agents. These antecedents should be considered as potential motivational factors which facilitate message repositioning and identity negotiation in the proposed framework in this research. Kelman (1961) applied his model to analyze how a year of study or work in the United States affected Scandinavian students' various aspects of self-image. Four types of private acceptance based on how well the new experience was internalized were identified: internalization, identification, confirmation, and resistance.

Other than a model of three processes, Kelman (1975) contributed to theories of attitude change by exploring facilitative and inhibitory factors of favorable attitude

change in international interchanges. Some facilitative factors were opportunities for genuine contact with nationals of the host country, treatment of equal status, and the visitor's generally positive and rewarding experience. Some inhibitory factors were pre-existing hostile attitudes, incompatible preconceptions, and sensitivity about one's national status. What was found in this paper was that a real attitude change toward a country could happen when there was a real internalization of new information of the target country. Kelman described what really motivated this process of internalization:

Engaging in friendly behavior toward nationals of another country creates a powerful potential for attitude change. The behavior itself, however, is not enough. It merely provides the motivation and openness for examining and accepting favorable information. It is the joint occurrence of friendly behavior toward the other and genuinely new information about him that makes favorable attitude change possible. (p. 99)

Attitude congruity theory. Kelman (1958, 1961) treated attitude congruency as both the motivating factor and the goal in the process of internalization. It was an important factor; however, it played a relatively limited role in his framework. Attitude congruency was a natural result of one of the three attitude change processes, internalization. To Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955), on the other hand, congruity was the focal point of their framework. They argued that the principle of congruity played a significant role in attitude change. This principle says that "changes in evaluation are always in the direction of increased congruity with the existing frame of reference" (p. 43). This framework predicts that if one must make a judgment between two

contradictory sets of information (including both incoming information and pre-existing information), the individual will experience pressure to change his or her judgment on one of the sides. However, if the two sets of information are congruent, the individual will not experience pressure of any form, and no attitude change will occur.

Kerrick's research (1958) confirmed predictability of the principle of congruity in attitude change. His research furthered understanding of attitude change and the principle of congruity by pointing out the positive effect of relevant situations and sources.

Relevant situations and sources tend to produce more attitude change than non-relevant situations and sources. Stachowiak and Moss (1965) also confirmed the predictability of the principle of congruity in terms of direction of attitude change; however, the principle failed to predict the magnitude of change. Their research could not predict or find a correlating variable for the amount and persistence of attitude change. Wetherell, Benson, Reyna, and Brandt (2015) examined predictive factors in attitudes toward other countries and identified the perceived value congruency as a prominent factor. Perceived value similarity contributes positively to a favorable attitude toward a foreign country, culture, and people, whereas perceived value threat is linked to an unfavorable and unsupportive attitude toward them.

Kahan's Cultural Cognitive Theory

The researcher also turns to Kahan's cultural cognitive theory (Kahan & Braman, 2006; Kahan et.al., 2007) for theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Kahan and his associates hypothesize that individuals are motivated by a variety of psychological processes to form beliefs about putatively dangerous activities that match their

evaluations of them, which are heavily influenced by their culture cognition. Cultural cognition refers to “a series of interlocking social and psychological mechanisms that induce individuals to conform their factual beliefs about contested policies to their cultural evaluations of the activities subject to regulation” (Kahan & Braman, 2006, p. 169). These social and psychological mechanisms are functioning around individuals’ beliefs, worldviews, and cultural lenses (Braman & Kahan, 2006).

This theory originated from two social science traditions, anthropology and psychology. From anthropology, this theory used Douglas and Wildavsky’s (1982) group-grid topology of cultural worldviews to understand people’s worldviews (cultural lenses) and claimed each worldview had its preference regarding social issues. From psychology, this theory identified three driving forces in processing incoming information (especially information that activates one’s culture cognition). These three forces are cognitive dissonance, emotions, and identity protection. Further discussion on these two origins is provided as follows. First, this study will look at the theory’s anthropological origin and the use of Douglas and Wildavsky’s group-grid topology.

Anthropology. Cultural cognition theory heavily relies on Douglas and Wildavsky’s group-grid topology of cultural worldviews (Kahan & Braman, 2006). This topology divides people into four groups according to their cultural worldview (see Figure 2, Kahan & Braman, p.5).

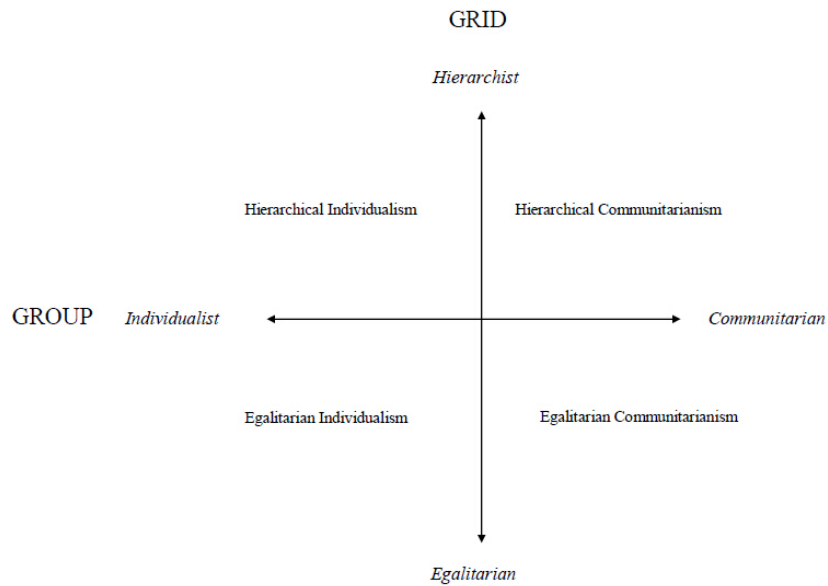


Figure 2. Douglas and Wildavsky’s group-grid topology of cultural worldviews

The “group” continuum measures how much people value group interests. People on the left end of “group” continuum have individualistic society worldview which values individual efforts and interests. People on the right end of “group” continuum have communitarian society worldview which values collective interests and welfare. People with a “low grid” worldview favor an egalitarian society, whereas people with “high grid” worldview favor a hierarchical society. The fundamental differences in their cultural worldview determine how they perceive a risk and attach their cultural meaning to risk. For instance, “egalitarians and solidarists (communitarian) are thus naturally sensitive to environmental risk. . . . Individualists predictably dismiss claims of environmental risk as specious” (p. 152).

U.S. citizens may have a negative perception of China due to their view that China does not match people's cultural worldview. For instance, people with egalitarian and communitarian views are sensitive to environmental risk; therefore, their negative perception of China may be based on China being the number one polluting nation in the world. People with individualistic worldviews may perceive China negatively for a different reason, namely, human rights violations. This worldview typology shows that people may have negative perceptions for different reasons.

Psychology. Kahan & Braman (2006) wrote that development of cultural cognitive theory identifies three psychological mechanisms. The first one is cognitive dissonance. It is discomfoting to have a perception different from one's identity (cognitive dissonance). The second one is affect. Emotions play an important role in people's perception of harmful activities. Whether these perceived emotions are negative or positive is determined largely by cultural values. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1985), all emotions are functional. As a result of cognitive appraisal of situations, emotions guide people in responding to different situations. The third one is group identity and ingroup/outgroup dynamics. Kahan, et al. (2007) maintain that there is identity protection at work in group dynamics. "Individuals tend to adopt the beliefs common to members of salient 'in-groups.' They also resist revision of those beliefs in the face of contrary factual information, particularly when that information originates from "out group" sources" (p. 6). This is to say that people's perceptions of risk and fear are determined largely by their group identity.

Process. Based on the discussion above, there are two steps in processing incoming risk or crisis information (see Figure 3). The first step is to filter information through the four different worldviews provided by Douglas and Wildavsky's (1982) group-grid topology, hierarchical individualism, hierarchical communitarianism, egalitarian individualism, and egalitarian communitarianism. One's worldview will assign cultural meaning to the processing information. After meaning is attached, one forms opinions and stance toward the information. The second step is that the three psychological forces —cognitive dissonance, emotions/affect, and identity protection — further process risk or crisis information. This two-step process formed a foundation for the proposed theoretical model for this research.

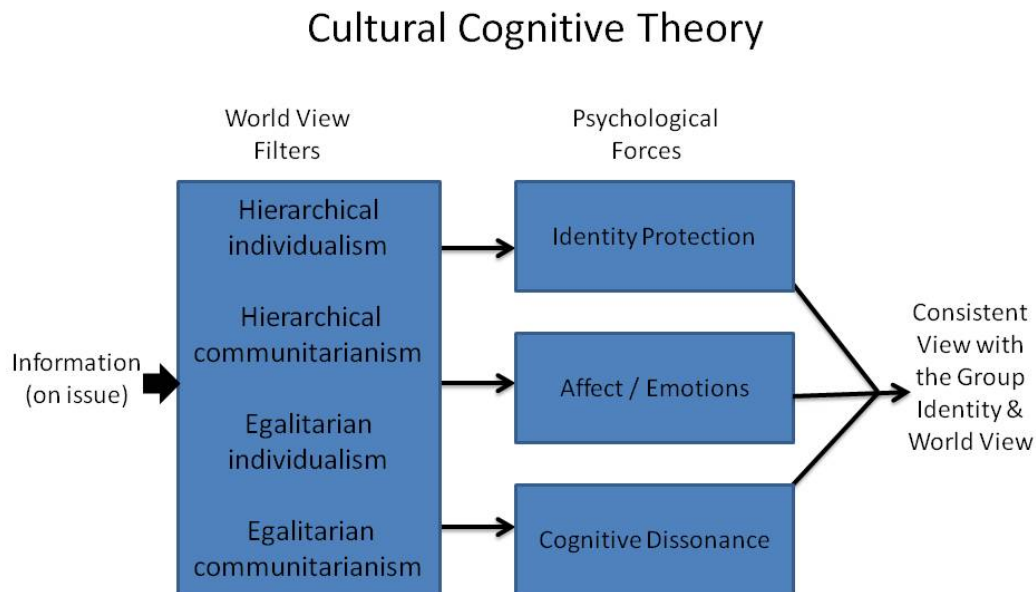


Figure 3. Cultural cognitive theory

The three forces in the second step are important to this research because they are changeable, which means that they can be influenced for communication or persuasion purposes, whereas the four worldviews in the first step are usually unchangeable for individuals. If one shares a hierarchical individualism worldview, it is very challenging for one to change it to another. However, by working on the psychological forces, one may change a person's perspective on a specific message. This is not to say that the worldviews are not important in persuasion efforts; as a matter of fact, knowing people's worldviews is a key to understand how people evaluate a message and what motivates them to process this information.

Implications. Cultural cognitive theory (Kahan, 2010) suggests negative evaluations of an issue cannot be altered by the two most popular approaches: improved dissemination of information and a cost-benefit approach. Kahan et al. (2007) suggest two effective ways to reduce people's negative evaluation of an issue based on the theory: identity affirmation and social-meaning over-determination. Identity affirmation refers to a technique that "information must be transmitted in a form that makes individuals' acceptance of it compatible with their core cultural commitments. . . . it must be framed in a manner that bears an acceptable social meaning" (p. 36).

For example, Chinese investment in American infrastructure can be perceived positively if it is framed in a way that the United States, as a mature market economy, has great ability in attracting foreign investment and improving its economic environment by improving its infrastructure. If Confucius Institutes are successful in improving

perceptions of China among their students, one explanation is that activities and messages from these Institutes affirm the students' protected identities instead of threatening them.

A second way to neutralize biased perceptions is the social-meaning overdetermination approach. "The best way to make cultural conflict recede isn't to drain it of social meaning but rather to make it so abundantly rich in meanings that members of all cultural groups can simultaneously find their values and hence their identities affirmed by it" (Braman & Kahan, 2006, p. 587). Messages should include multiple meanings so that they do not exclude any groups. For example, in order to appeal to both communitarian and individualistic groups, a story about how individuals' environmental interests are protected in China by passing a new regulation might increase both groups' favorable perception of China at the same time.

Though different in process, the two methods work towards the same goal, which is to respect people's identity and achieve consistency with their worldviews. The identity affirmation approach frames the message in a way that people feel that their identity is affirmed by information in the message. The social-meaning overdetermination approach offers multiple meanings so that people of different views can pick a meaning that is consistent with their worldview and identity.

In summary, this theory highlights the functions of cultural filters in receiving information. These filters help people form their own opinions on issues, especially controversial ones. The theory also suggests that providing more information about a topic does not lead to universal understanding among receiving audiences. In public

diplomacy, it implies that more information about one country does not establish a common understanding of the country within a foreign public. To influence foreign publics, it is not enough to disseminate more information about the host country; one must also understand how these publics process incoming information and strive for a positive influence on the process.

Other Theories

Based on the previous discussion, cultural cognitive theory acknowledges there is an identity protection mechanism at work in processing information and assigning cultural evaluations and social meanings. When a person receives information that is contradicting his or her values and beliefs, it is suspected that identity plays an important role in how one receives this information. This negative information may activate identity protection mechanisms by simply rejecting the message to reduce psychological discomfort (Kahan, 2007). Other than identity protection, this theory also identifies two other psychological forces in the process: cognitive dissonance and emotions (affect). These three concepts are used to explain why people form consistent opinions toward an issue according to their group identity and worldviews. These concepts are not used to explain why and how people change opinions about a certain issue. The two suggested approaches do not require people to change their opinions but only provide opportunities or angles for people to find in messages meanings consistent with their identity and worldviews.

Repositioning messages (to interpret message in a different way, or to look at it with a different angle) to be consistent with one's identity is not discussed within

Kahan's theoretical framework. When there is a conflicting issue between one's personal view and societal view, the researcher suspects that there is an identity negotiation process. When there is a message which is reflecting the societal worldview but is contradictory to one's personal view, one may reposition the message so that one's personal identity and worldview can be protected. For example, if one society in country A generally displays a negative view toward country B, members in country A who hold a favorable view toward country B may need to reposition any incoming messages reflecting the societal views to be consistent their individual views. This process is not captured in Kahan's framework. Other theories are needed to understand this complicated phenomenon.

This section looks at social identity theory and cognitive dissonance theory because the two concepts, group identity and cognitive dissonance, are deeply involved in Kahan's theoretical framework. These theories are also included because functions of these two key concepts are used in a limited sense in Kahan's framework and they are only functioning in certain ways. For instance, cognitive dissonance serves only as a force to drive people to form a consistent opinion toward an issue similar to their group. The researcher, however, believes that cognitive dissonance can drive people to reposition messages to be consistent with their personal views not necessarily consistent with group identity.

In the pilot study, the researcher found that people had favorable attitudes toward the Confucius Institute due to the fact that it can satisfy people's various needs which then affect their favorable level of China perception. Therefore, functional approaches to

attitude are included in this section because matched needs may serve as an incentive for people to reposition negative information to be incorporated within their identity without compromising their core values and beliefs and societal identity.

Therefore, the discussion of theories in this section includes social identity theory, cognitive dissonance theory, and functional approaches to attitude.

Social identity theory. Social identity theory is a theory expounded by Tajfel and Turner (1979) to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination and ingroup favoritism. According to the authors, successful intergroup bias creates or protects relatively high in-group status, thereby providing a positive social identity for in-group members and satisfying their need for positive self-esteem. The need for self-esteem is only thought to motivate intergroup bias that is designed to bring about social change.

According to Turner, Brown, and Tajfel (1979), ingroup favoritism refers to any tendency to favor the ingroup over the outgroup. Intergroup bias refers to differential or discriminatory intergroup behavior which brings positive promotion to group identity. These scholars attribute this phenomenon to social comparison with a goal of possessing a positive social identity.

Cultural cognition theorists (Kahan & Braman, 2006; Kahan et. al., 2007) believe that this group identity mechanism strengthens people's group cultural evaluations, which make them persuasive for ingroup members to accept as group positions. In this situation, it is very easy for people to object to any contradictory messages from where their group

stands. Kahan and Braman (2006) explain the “belief-generative power” of group identity:

The tendency of individuals to trust only those who share their orientation makes the belief-generative power of culture feed on itself....To gain the approval of others in the group, moreover, members who even weakly support what appears to be the dominant view are likely to express unequivocal support for it, while those who disagree will tend to mute their opposition in order to avoid censure. This form of “preference falsification” will in turn reinforce the skewed distribution of arguments, making it even more likely that members of the group will be persuaded that the dominant position is correct—indeed, indisputably so. (p. 154)

From this discussion, the researcher believes that unfavorable perception of China is largely a result of this group identity mechanism. In 1989, the total favorable perception of China was close to 80%, now only almost half (Gallup poll, 2014). This is not because China becomes more “evil” or “aggressive”; much of it is due to this self-reinforcing groupthink. China’s economic success, which poses as a threat to the United States, may have fueled this self-reinforcing process. Individuals are inclined to reject any contradictory messages to protect their own and group identity.

Cognitive dissonance theory. This theory says that people prefer the internal psychological consistency over inconsistency which could cause discomfort (Festinger, 1962). When cognitive dissonance is present, one tends to reduce it by changing one’s perception or views or by rejecting incoming discomfort messages. Kahan and Braman (2006) believe that the need to reduce cognitive dissonance is one of the psychological

mechanisms inducing individuals to conform incoming messages to their internal identity. Individuals may totally reject the messages to maintain internal consistency or even “to renounce commitments and affiliations essential to one’s identity” (p. 153). It is unlikely for one to change identity easily; however, one may reposition one’s perspective to make incoming messages compatible to the identity. This process is what is called “identity incorporation” which will be explained in the last section.

Functional approaches to attitude. This theory centers on functional appraisal and argues that people express different attitudes to serve different functions. Katz (1960) originally proposed four functions: knowledge, ego-defensive, value-expressive, and utilitarian. This taxonomy was challenged by subsequent scholars. Social adjustive, social identity, and self-maintenance functions were also proposed and added.

This theory says matched functions produce the best persuasive results (O’Keefe, 2002). In the pilot study, the researcher found people have a favorable perception of teachers and staff at the Confucius Institute and of the Institute itself because they fulfill different functions and wants. The Institute offers opportunities for students to learn the Chinese language and culture, to join cultural events, to have social opportunities, and to go to China on scholarship. According to the theory, there is persuasion when there is matched function. Matched function may serve as a driving force for the students to rethink negative messages about China (contradictory to their worldview and identity) so that it does not cause cognitive dissonance.

Proposed Theoretical Framework

Two-step identity negotiation model. After discussion of cultural cognitive theory and other theories, this study proposes a theoretical framework for the study based on these theories. The framework provides theoretical guidance for understanding Confucius Institute students' perceptual change about China.

This framework is a two-step process model (see the first figure bellow). Information (about China or any other controversial topics) first goes through individuals' cultural worldview filters. These four worldviews describe four basic cultural identities. Each identity has its own preference and position. Based on one's cultural identity (values and worldview), information will be evaluated for whether it's compatible with identity or not. Identity is affirmed when there is a positive match between the information and identity. This will lead to a positive view of the object (China in this study). When the information is incompatible with one's cultural identity, the default path is to reject it in order to protect one's identity and avoid cognitive dissonance. This path will result in a negative view of the object. However, when there are enough incentives, information may take a different path, identity incorporation.

Two Step Identity Negotiation

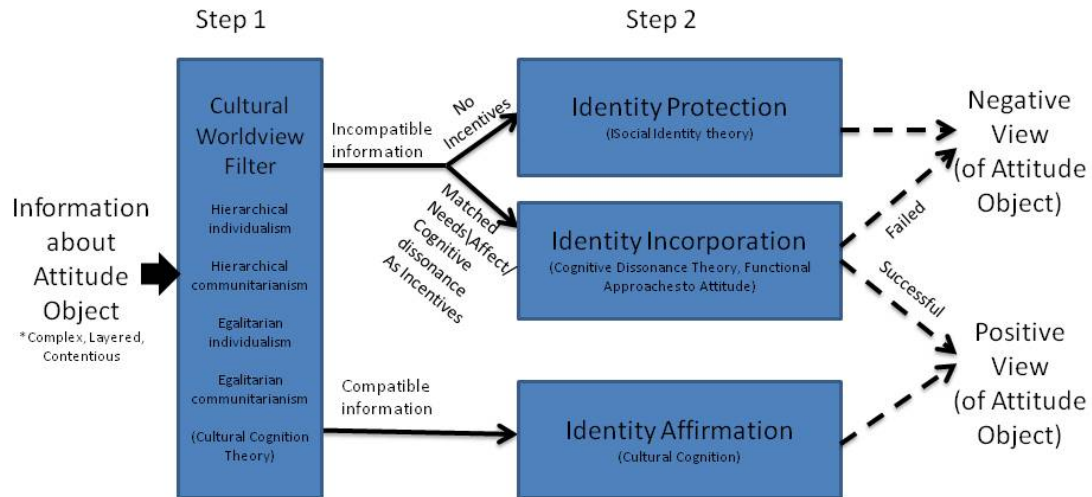


Figure 4. Two-step identity negotiation framework.

Kahan (2010) identifies three psychological forces in the process: cognitive dissonance, affect (emotions), and identity protection. The researcher believes that identity protection serves as an overall force in the process. In terms of facilitative factors for repositioning messages, the researcher proposes three of them: matched needs (functions), positive affect (emotions), and cognitive dissonance.

Matched needs in this study refer to the idea that the Confucius Institute as an attitude object can satisfy students' instrumental (e.g., learning Chinese) and symbolic (e.g., being a world citizen) needs (Fig. 5). Positive affect refers to the idea that positive emotions derive from relationships and communication between students and Confucius Institute faculty and staff. Cognitive dissonance refers to students' struggles to maintain consistency in understanding and perceiving China. An example here can be that negative

news about China may disturb students' liking for Chinese culture and language. With these incentives, students may engage efforts to reposition incoming message to maintain internal consistency and identity integrity.

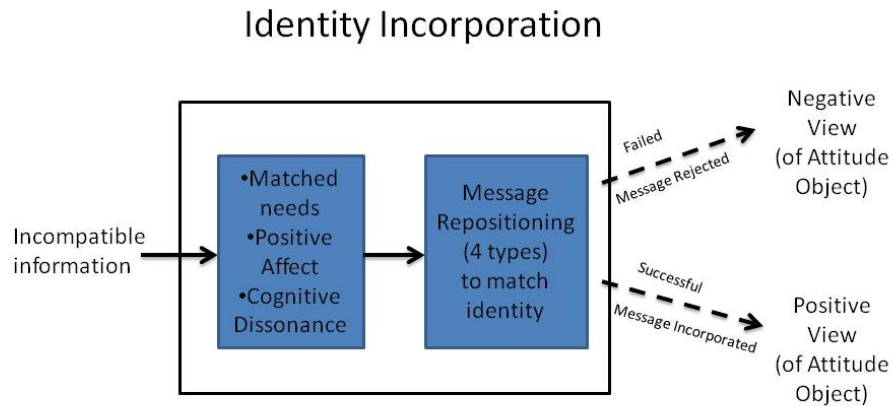


Figure 5. Identity incorporation.

Message repositioning. Message repositioning is a key element in the identity incorporation step. This concept is similar to a different concept, namely, “cognitive reappraisal,” to some extent. Cognitive reappraisal is a strategy used to regulate emotions by reinterpreting the meaning of the emotional stimulus (Ray, McRae, Ochsner, & Gross, 2010). However, message repositioning is used as a strategy not for regulating emotions but mainly for regulating message meaning which causes identity discrepancy. It is a cognitive process to reposition incoming messages so that their implications do not contradict one’s belief and values.

There are implied premises about the issue or subject on which message repositioning occurs. The issue or subject needs to be complex, layered, and contentious so that there is room for taking a different angle. Based on findings in the pilot study, there are three types of message repositioning.

The first type is to separate one element from the rest of the concept. For example, one aspect of a negative perception of China is the government. The notion of a communist authoritarian government is not usually compatible with a democratic group identity. However, one participant did not let this affect her perception of China when she eliminates this aspect from her perception of China: “It’s just politics” (Participant A, pilot). This perspective did not really separate a communist government from the rest but rather cast all governments as not good inherently. This repositioning of message made it compatible with the participant’s identity without sacrificing any positive perception of China.

A second type is similar to the first one, but takes a further step. In this type of repositioning, participants may even limit their perception of China to only people and culture. Any negative news about China’s military threat or territory dispute may have an impact on their perception of China’s military or government, but it does not affect their favorable perception of Chinese people and culture. By doing this, people may experience less discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance.

The third type is to take an empathic approach in repositioning a message. For instance, viewing Chinese faculty positively (emotion force) may encourage students to look at pollution caused by Chinese industry less negatively compared to people who

lack this emotional bond with Chinese faculty. They may reposition their perspective by thinking China is still a developing country in which fighting poverty is more urgent than controlling pollution.

The fourth type of repositioning is to use other similar life experience to justify negative information. For example, when talking about pollution in China, one participant said:

what's going on right now is interesting because China is when the United States was in 1970s, where the industries were booming, the pollution was terrible. Cleaning up the waste was a problem. And it's interesting now to watch how the Chinese government is starting to have to really handle these things like the United States government did. We had a river caught on fire. Yeah, it was so polluted, I think it was in Ohio, it was so polluted full of petro chemicals, actually caught on fire, a river. So I mean, don't think what's happening is just China, it happens in industrial process. So it would be interesting to see what's happening now, things, I think it happened in every country, to get really bad before something has to happen to make it better.” (Participant A, pilot)

This example demonstrated how people justify negative information so that it does not affect both their liking for China and their cultural identity.

It is suspected that successful message repositioning could help people to accept the message without compromising their identity, which could contribute to maintaining or improving a positive view of the attitude object (in this study, China). On the other hand, failure in message repositioning would lead to message rejection, which may

contribute to maintaining or developing a negative view of the attitude object (China). These implications will guide future research. Findings can either provide support for these theoretical implications or provide insights for any necessary revision to the model.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this dissertation research is to study the effects of the Confucius Institute as a means of public diplomacy by doing primary research with the students in a Confucius Institute at a large mid-Atlantic public university in the United States. With guidance of the theoretical framework offered in last section, this study will look at how information about China (especially negative information) is processed in two steps. First, it will look at how different worldviews interact with incoming messages, how they react to information on China differently, and how they form perceptions of China differently. Then the researcher is very interested in examining how identity incorporation works, and how the three incentives induce message repositioning to be compatible with individual identity. This research is also interested in how people reposition messages for the purpose of identity incorporation and what the effects of successful or failed message repositioning are on perceptions of China. This study intends to explore the process of information process and identity negotiation by gathering rich and descriptive data from the participants in the program. By understanding this process, this research can provide some initial answers concerning how people's perceptions of China can be maintained positively or even raised when a majority of the population considers China a threat and perceptions of this nation are largely negative.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

RQ1: What role do Confucius Institutes play in China's public diplomacy?

RQ2: What kind of experience do they offer to their targeted audience?

RQ3: How are CI students' perception of China different from OSs' (Short for other students, referring to non-CI students)?

RQ4: How were CIs' perceptions of China formed differently from OSs?

RQ5: How do CI students react to negative information about China differently from OS?

RQ6: How do the three facilitative factors induce message repositioning in identity negotiation process? Are there any other factors?

RQ7: How do the three processes of identity negotiation framework, identity protection, identity incorporation, and identity affirmation, affect participants' perceptions of China?

Significance of the Study

There are two main foreseeable benefits from this study. First, this study provides findings from primary research to understand the use of educational cooperative programs in public diplomacy. Even though there are studies about these kinds of programs, few of them employ a microscope to understand how the programs function at the individual level. Understanding this phenomenon at this level will provide a richer and more detailed account of the programs' effects than what is currently available. This

angle has not been used in research which prevents us from fully understanding the use of international educational programs in public diplomacy.

Second, research on identity negotiation process can extend current literature on identity, persuasion and cultural cognition. This research may provide further insights on how the interplay between individual identity and group identity affects people receiving information and forming opinions. It also will further the understanding of how incentives encourage message repositioning and identity negotiation. Understanding different types of message repositioning may be another contribution of this research.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell and Miller (1997), the function of a research methodology is to provide “a philosophical base or frame of reference for approaching research that complements a content area of inquiry” (p.33). The focus of this research is to provide an understanding of how CI programs achieve their persuasive effects by adopting a qualitative approach through three data collection methods: in-depth interviews, field observation, and documents analysis.

There are two main reasons for adopting this research approach. First, a qualitative approach can capture the complex process implied by the theoretical framework better than a quantitative one. There are two main steps in the process, and multiple elements in each step; the phenomenon in real life is more complex than the framework can reflect. To study such a complex phenomenon with a complex framework, a qualitative approach through interviews can provide a more comprehensive view on the process than the other methods.

Second, the proposed framework needs revisions to better depict this phenomenon in theory. It is important to explore this model through gathering rich data and description so that the model can be modified before being tested than just testing this model prototype right away. Relationships such as correlations and causality can be further tested in future research once the model is revised and reconstructed.

In-depth Interview

In-depth interview was chosen as one of the data collecting methods due to its ability to gather rich and descriptive data so that a comprehensive understanding could be achieved to further understanding of the model and phenomenon.

Participants. There were two groups of participants for interviews. Participants from the Confucius Institute constituted the main group. This study had voluntary participants from a convenience sample at a Confucius Institute located at a large Eastern public university where the researcher studied. This study included fifteen participants which comprised one sixth of the student body at this Institute. The student participants were asked by their Chinese language teacher whether they would participate or not.

The other group was used for comparing and contrasting responses from the main group. This group had fifteen college students who had no experience in learning Chinese. Their responses were compared to CI students to see whether Confucius Institute experience made an impact on their perception of China. These participants from the communication basic course at the same university were invited to participate through email. The interview lasted from thirty minutes to one hour. To encourage participation, all interviewees received a \$10 gift card for their time.

Procedure. Each participant was asked to sign an agreement form giving his or her consent to participate in the study. All the participants were informed that names would be replaced with pseudonyms as a way of maintaining confidentiality. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted in informal settings according to the participants' choice of location, such as dining halls, the library, and other locales.

Interview Questions. During the semi-structured, individual interviews, the researcher asked the following in-depth questions first (questions with an asterisk were asked of CI students only):

- 1) Describe your experience with the Confucius Institute (the Institute, programs, and faculty). *
- 2) What is your perception of China? Favorable aspects? Unfavorable aspects?
 1. If you have favorable aspects, what are the reasons?
 2. If you have unfavorable aspects, what are the reasons?
- 3) What are your core values (matters you feel strong about, things you take pride in or ashamed of)? Among these, what values do you feel are absent in China?
- 4) Do you think your perception of China is different from the media's portrayal of China? From Americans' general perception? How different?
- 5) Have you experienced discomfort when you have different opinions about China from other people or media? If yes, what did you do about it?
- 6) How does your experience at this Institute affect your perception of China? Can you give some examples? *
- 7) Is this Institute conveying a different China image to you through your study compared to a China image conveyed in media? If so, how is it different? *
- 8) Have you had any negative experience with the Institute? Does it affect

your perception of China? *

- 9) How does contacting Chinese nationals affect your perception of China?

Do they show you a different side of China? *

In order to elicit responses from participants, the researcher chose four excerpts from news articles published on the U.S. mainstream news media, the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. These four news articles were chosen to confront participants with disconcerting information about China. They may have negative information about China such as air pollution and military advancement. They may present a potential threat to the U.S. such as investment in the energy industry and military advancement. They may pose as a threat to their group identity as Americans such as investment in the energy industry and criticism against CIA from China's state media. Then the researcher picked a random short excerpt from A, B, C, or D for the participants to read. They were asked the following questions after they finished reading.

- 1) How do you respond to this article?
- 2) Does this affect your perception of China? How?

A

“China Announces 12.2% Increase in Military Budget” (Wong, NYT, 2014)

BEIJING — China announced on Wednesday that it would increase its military budget for 2014 to almost \$132 billion, a 12.2 percent rise over last year. The rapid growth in defense spending is another sign of the country's goal of becoming a dominant military presence in the Pacific, with a navy able to project power across the region....The country's military spending is the second largest in the world, behind that of the United States.

American officials have expressed growing concerns over diplomatic tensions in East Asia and Southeast Asia, much of it related to regional anxieties over China's military rise and its assertion of sovereignty over

rocks, reefs, islands, fisheries and sea lanes in the area. The United States has said it does not take sides in the territorial disputes, but it asserts it will maintain freedom of navigation.

B

“China Foothold in U.S. Energy” (Dezember & Areddy, WSJ, 2012)

Fu Chengyu's first attempt to buy a piece of the U.S. oil industry kicked up a storm of protest and ended in failure. Seven years later, the Chinese executive is pouring billions of dollars into the oil patch without even a whisper of trouble. WSJ's Ryan Dezember reports on China's growing investment in U.S. oil and gas companies, which as of 2010 had topped \$17 billion.

His new recipe for success: Seek minority stakes, play a passive role and, in a nod to U.S. regulators, keep Chinese personnel at arm's length from advanced U.S. technology.

Since 2010, Chinese companies have invested more than \$17 billion into oil and gas deals in the U.S. and Canada, according to data provider Dealogic, giving their energy-thirsty nation a long-coveted foothold in a region known for innovative new drilling techniques. North America has become China's top region for oil and gas deals. Mr. Fu has been leading the push, first as chairman of China National Offshore Oil Corp., known as Cnooc, then as chairman of China Petrochemical Corp., called Sinopec, one of the largest oil companies in the world.

C

“Chinese Coverage of C.I.A. Torture Report Says It Highlights U.S. Hypocrisy” (Feng, NYT, 2014)

A report on the C.I.A.'s interrogations of terrorism suspects released by the Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday has received extensive coverage in China, which has long accused the United States of hypocrisy on human rights issues.

On Thursday, state-run news media published photographs and analysis, including details of extreme interrogation techniques used by the C.I.A., like waterboarding. The English-language China Daily ran an editorial cartoon featuring the rolled-up Senate report funneling water over the face of a bloated man labeled “C.I.A.”

People's Daily, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, ran an article with the headline “C.I.A. Prisoner Abuse Report Reveals Details of Torture.” The article, which details the bipartisan fighting before and after the report's release, highlights earlier criticism of C.I.A. practices within the United States.

D

“Dystopian Reality of China's Smog Captured in ‘Airpocalypse’ App”

(Levin, NYT, 2015)

China's notorious smog can feel like a physical manifestation of the country's political repression: suffocating, censored and potentially lethal.

On many days, the sun is hidden behind a pale, brown veil of coal dust and other pollutants that is visible from space and smells like a chemical spill on fire. The United States Embassy's air quality readings — widely viewed as more accurate than China's official data — are censored on local smartphones. Air pollution has been linked to a spike in cancer rates in Beijing, a city made almost “uninhabitable for human beings” by smog, according to a study published last year by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

The American Embassy's air quality index, or A.Q.I., uses standards set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency to measure pollutants on a scale that starts at zero, or “good,” and tops out at 500. Anything higher, as was recorded in Beijing in mid-January, is officially referred to as “beyond index.”

Field Observations

Compared to interviews, field observations can offer first-hand experience and record things as they occur or are otherwise unnoticed (Creswell, 2009). It is necessary to conduct observations in this research because it gives the researcher opportunities to understand the Confucius Institute experience from a different perspective other than that of the students.

The researcher contacted the director of this targeted Institute and asked for permission to observe one “typical” day at the Institute. A typical day means it operates on a regular schedule, which avoids special occasions or arrangement. The researcher spent a half day at the Institute on June 11, 2015, to observe how the Institute interacted with the students. These interactions included students spending leisure time, taking classes, or being tutored at the Institute. The researcher asked questions to staff or faculty as the observation went on. Informal interviews were conducted with selected people working there such as the director, office assistant, and Chinese teachers.

The researcher also conducted observations on a cultural event organized by the Institute. A cultural workshop was chosen because it was one of most common and frequent cultural activity the Institute held. During observation, the researcher observed interaction between students and the Institute and communicated with event participants and organizers to understand the interaction and experience. Field notes were kept during all observations. Class and workshop observations were audio-recorded to provide material for later analysis.

Documents

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) identified four advantages of document analysis: informational richness, availability, nonreactivity, and truth value. All of these advantages can assist the researcher. This method aims at gathering and reading documents from the Institute and the whole project overall. Documents help the researcher to understand the Institute and the project in a broad sense compared to field observation, which provides a glimpse into the Institute experience. This method is necessary to be included in the study so that results can be interpreted in a way to understand this governmental public relations attempt. The other reason for adopting this method is to serve as a source and support for triangulation and validation. Three methods provide data and description from different perspective on the Confucius Institute experience. The interview method reveals this experience from the participants' angle. Field observation and chatting with CI faculty and staff may provide their perspective. And document analysis can help the researcher to examine the CI experience from a macro view and policy perspective.

Documents included in this study were the website of the Institute, curriculum, textbooks, website of Confucius Institute Project, objectives, official announcements and other documents. Text in these documents provides different aspects of the research phenomenon and will help the researcher interpret responses from the interview and field notes from observations.

Analysis

This study used thematic analysis to examine gathered responses from the interviews, notes from observations, and gathered documents. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within a data set. It brings out identifiable patterns and themes of living or behavior (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clark, 2006). In the beginning, the researcher started to analyze the codes and considers how different codes might combine to form an overarching theme. Then the researcher read all the collated extracts for each theme, and considered whether they would appear to form a cohesive group. The next step in the process was mapping out the candidate themes in a systematic and logical way. In the end, the researcher was able to provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting interpretation of the responses from the participants which was organized around the identified themes.

During the process of thematic analysis, the researcher was guided by earlier theoretic discussion and research questions. Special attention was given to themes like attitude congruence, facilitative factors for attitude change, cognitive dissonance, positive affect, cultural cognition, and perceptual change.

Research Validity

First, due to a qualitative research approach and a convenience sampling method, this research may produce speculative conclusions. To reduce speculations and ensure research validity, several strategies were deployed to seek for a high level of both internal validity and external validity. According to Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000), internal validity “concerns the accuracy of the conclusions drawn from a particular research study” (p. 109), whereas external validity “concerns the generalizability of the findings from a research study” (p. 109). Internal validity was secured through rigorous research design including theory/methods consistency and research validation. Theory/methods consistency refers to maintaining a consistent flow in designing a research study from its theoretical framework to research methods. Both research questions were raised and methods were designed based on the framework being used in the study. According to Creswell (2009), research validation is achieved through several methods such as triangulation, member checking, and using rich, thick description. For instance, this research used three data collecting methods which might provide evidence from different sources and could be used “to build a coherent justification for themes” (p. 191).

As for external validity, this study enhanced it in two areas. First, field observation was a great way to strive for ecological validity, which refers to describing “what actually occurs in real-life circumstances” (Frey, Botan, and Kreps, 2000, p.133). Second, even though this study used a convenience sample (Confucius Institute in researcher’s university), according to Hanban (2015), all Confucius Institutes were set up following the same guidelines and mechanisms, which implied a great similarity among

most Confucius Institutes. Findings from one institute might carry great representativeness of this project in the U.S. The strength of this study was to provide rich data and description so that this issue could be understood in depth. Data gathered in this research could provide a comprehensive view on the issue with a fair level of representativeness.

Validation Strategies

Creswell and Miller (2000) proposed nine procedures to ensure internal validity, three of which will be employed in this study: member checking, clarifying research bias, and peer debriefing. Those measures can provide perspectives and lenses from study participants and people external to the study other than the researcher.

First, the researcher asked the participants in the study to check the researcher's notes and transcriptions to ensure accuracy.

Second, the researcher created an open and honest narrative to clarify the bias. Comments were included to address how the researcher's interpretation of the findings was shaped by his background.

Finally, the researcher located two peers who reviewed and then asked the researcher questions about this study to ensure the objectivity of the account.

Ethical Considerations

All of the participants were treated in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures. There were no identifiable risks for participating in this study. The participants might have felt uncomfortable sharing their negative opinions about China. All participants were reminded of their right to refuse to answer any

question or to withdraw from the interview process. As for maintaining confidentiality, as stated before, the researcher used codes instead of participants' names to make sure they cannot be identified.

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this research is important due to a potential for bias in a qualitative study. Due to the researcher's Chinese ethnic identity, some kind of subjectivity and emotions might be introduced in data collection and analysis. That's why these validation strategies were employed to ensure objectivity.

The researcher also had previous experience in teaching Chinese to second language learners. This knowledge could assist him with insights in understanding the phenomenon. However, this knowledge could also undermine a neutral and objective understanding of the collected data. Coded themes were verified with a second coder.

CHAPTER IV: PERCEPTION FORMATION AND STRENGTH

Results and Discussion Overview

Discussion on research findings will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter discusses two main concepts: perception formation and perception strength. In this section, the researcher will provide a holistic view on the Confucius Institutes by examining the website of its parent organization, Hanban, or the Confucius Institute Headquarters. Then, a description of a Confucius Institute experience will be shared based on observation and conversation with staff and faculty at the target Institute. The next section will focus on interview results, specifically looking at demographic information, interviewees' perceptions of China, channels of knowledge, effects of media, and effects of interpersonal communication to understand CI participants and non-CI participants' perceptions of China. The analysis of perceptions considers the nature of these perceptions (positive or negative), how they were formed, and how strong they are (strong or weak). The second chapter of discussion will focus on the proposed framework, examining identity affirmation, protection, and negotiation. The analysis in that chapter will discuss how identity interacts with compatible and incompatible information and how this interaction affects perceptual change.

Role of Confucius Institutes: Addressing RQ1

RQ1: What role do Confucius Institutes play in China's public diplomacy?

Through examining the website of the Confucius Institutes headquarters, the researcher attempted to understand the nature and role of Confucius Institutes (Hanban, 2015). Documents on this website clearly suggested the public diplomacy nature and role of the Institutes. This public diplomacy nature and role was evident in the following three aspects.

First, Confucius Institutes projects are a government-supervised and funded program. The Confucius Institutes organization is an independent non-profit public organization overseeing the operation of these institutes. This organization reports to Hanban (the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language), an office under the Ministry of Education. According to the constitution and by-laws of the Confucius Institute, Hanban funds 50% of operational cost of all Confucius Institutes (foreign partners fund the other half) and also provides funding to send teachers and supplies (Hanban, 2015).

Second, the mission of Confucius Institutes is to foster a good relationship with other countries by using cultural and language programs. This mission is clearly stated in the constitution and by-laws of this organization:

Confucius Institutes devote themselves to satisfying the demands of people from different countries and regions in the world who learn the Chinese language, to enhancing understanding of the Chinese language and culture by these peoples, to strengthening educational and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other countries, to deepening friendly relationships with other nations, to

promoting the development of multi-culturalism, and to construct a harmonious world. (Hanban, 2015)

Third, the public diplomacy role of the Institutes is shown in the news section on Hanban's website. Most of the news reports on the website feature cultural and exchange activities. One example of a cultural activity is that the Confucius Institute in Quebec hosted a Chinese New Year gala. An example of an exchange activity is that a group of delegates from San Diego State University visited China to learn about Chinese culture and its educational system. In this report, these delegates toured Beijing and Xiamen, visited many educational sites such as Xiamen University and local high schools and cultural sites such as UNESCO sites, the Forbidden City, and Fujian Tulou. It clearly indicates one of the most important roles CI plays is cultural outreach and exchange. The other point which is worth noting is that one of the essential expectations Hanban has in selecting directors for Institutes is his or her ability in public relations. The guide for Confucius Institutes Directors on Hanban's website clearly stated the following two requirements in their selection: "Being passionate about the work of Confucius Institutes with a strong sense of mission to promote friendly relations between China and the country where the Institute is located" (Hanban, 2016, para. 2). "Having a strong ability to conduct public relations and deal effectively with emergencies." These requirements for Directors imply a public relations nature in the operation of these Institutes (Hanban, 2016, para. 7).

Description of Confucius Institute Experience: Addressing RQ2

RQ2: What kind of experience do Confucius Institutes offer to their targeted audience?

To answer RQ2, the researcher will describe the overall impression of the Institute at the research site and provide analysis based on the researcher's observations and examination of the Institute's website. Observations on language classes happened on June 11, 2015, and the observations on cultural activities were on March 16, 2016. This section will first look at language programs offered by this Institute, then will describe its cultural program experience, and lastly will mention other programs sponsored by the Institute.

First, this Institute offers non-credit multiple levels of beginner's Chinese language classes to its university community and any interested publics. Taking the summer of 2016 semester for an example, the Institute is offering four levels, eight classes (eight different time to meet), fifteen-hour long courses at a very low cost (including book fee) of \$70 for its university community, and \$150 for general public (Confucius Institute at Mason, 2016). Offering beginner's Chinese with different time options and affordable fees shows the Institute's willingness and efforts to reach more potential students.

The size of its classes is relatively small, four to ten students (Confucius Institute at Mason, 2016). The small size of CI classes may increase interaction between teachers and students, which contributes to building close interpersonal relationships. The researcher witnessed these close relationships in his observations. At the beginning of the

class, the teacher chatted with her students and exchanged stories about events that happened since the previous class. The teacher recently visited Alaska; therefore, the main topic for the first few minutes of chatting centered around her travel experience. During the class, both the teacher and her students seemed to really enjoy the class. The teacher encouraged her students by giving praises for their trying of new words or sentences. Students joked about each other's practice and gave exaggerated compliments on the other's good use of new words. The atmosphere was relaxed, and relationships among them were friendly and close.

Second, this Institute offers multiple types of free cultural programs to its university community and the general public. The most prominent cultural program is called Chinese Cultural Workshops which is offered every other Friday throughout each semester. These workshops invite participants to experience Chinese culture with hands-on activities such as Tai-Chi, seal carving, paper cutting, and Chinese games (Confucius Institute at Mason, 2016). At the beginning of the paper cutting workshop, the instructor introduced the cultural meaning and background behind paper-cutting. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and interact with the instructor. Then the instructor showed them how to cut a basic Chinese paper-cutting pattern. The workshop ended with students doing their own paper cutting. The researcher observed that the participants enjoyed this workshop because they received both knowledge and hands-on experience. In addition to these workshops, the website also listed other cultural activities conducted at this Institute such as performances by acrobats and musicians from China, and seminars and lectures

by well-known scholars on Chinese philosophy, Chinese calligraphy, history and current affairs (Confucius Institute at Mason, 2016).

Third, this Institute offers opportunities for learning Chinese outside the classroom. One popular program offered at this Institute is called Language Buddy, which refers to a gathering of Chinese native speakers and anyone who wants to learn the language (Confucius Institute at Mason, 2016). During the interviews, some CI participants spoke fondly of this program because they were able to practice their Chinese with native speakers and meet new friends. Other programs include Chinese Corner which offers free Chinese tutoring from CI teachers and Chinese Pedagogy Workshop which offers training in teaching Chinese to American teachers. The website also lists online learning resources and opportunities to learn Chinese in other regions (Confucius Institute at Mason, 2016).

Judging from the programs offered at this Institute, one could find that this CI makes great efforts to reach targeted audiences. The fact that they conduct courses with high frequency at affordable rates indicates their willingness to encourage the American publics to learn Chinese. Offering cultural seminars and workshops helps to cultivate interests in China and Chinese culture in American audiences. They also utilize interpersonal communication and relationships in reaching these people with the small class sizes, instruction methods, hands-on experience in cultural workshops, and opportunities to meet Chinese students in Language Buddy programs. These practices and daily operations clearly indicate cultural diplomacy performed by this Institute.

Demographic Information

There were two groups of respondents in the interview study. One group were students from the Confucius Institute at a large mid-Atlantic public university. The other group were students at the same university who had not received any Chinese training from the Institute. In order to protect the privacy of participants, coded acronyms will be used to refer to them. CI refers to the first group, and OS to the second one. The following tables provide the basic demographic information about the thirty interviewees.

Table 1: Demographic information of OS participants.

	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Occupation, or Major
OS-1	Female	20	Asian (Southeast)	Undergraduate, Information Technology
OS-2	Male	19	Asian (Middle East)	Undergraduate, Finance
OS-3	Male	23	White	Undergraduate, Computer Game Design
OS-4	Male	18	White	Undergraduate, Media Production
OS-5	Male	21	Asian (Southeast)	Undergraduate, History
OS-6	Female	18	African American	Undergraduate, Government
OS-7	Male	19	Asian (South)	Undergraduate, Chemistry
OS-8	Male	19	White	Undergraduate, Mechanical

				Engineering
OS-9	Female	24	Asian (South)	Graduate, Economics
OS-10	Male	29	White	Undergraduate, Chemistry
OS-11	Male	20	White	Undergraduate, Environmental Science
OS-12	Female	24	African American	Undergraduate, Global Health
OS-13	Female	24	Asian (Middle East)	Undergraduate, Neuroscience
OS-14	Female	18	White	Undergraduate, Elementary Education
OS-15	Female	18	African American	Undergraduate, Global Affairs

Table 2: Demographic information of CI participants.

	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Occupation, or Major
CI-1	Male	20	African American	Undergraduate, Finance
CI-2	Female	53	White	Professor
CI-3	Female	51	White	Language Teacher
CI-4	Male	22	White	Undergraduate, Economics
CI-5	Male	22	Asian (East)	Undergraduate, Finance

CI-6	Male	29	Asian (South)	Undergraduate, Global Affairs
CI-7	Female	48	White	Researcher
CI-8	Female	55	White	Culture Consultant
CI-9	Female	58	White	Education Administrator
CI-10	Male	22	White	Undergraduate, ESL
CI-11	Female	21	White	Undergraduate, Chinese
CI-12	Male	27	White	Education Administrator
CI-13	Female	18	White	Undergraduate, Accounting
CI-14	Male	65	White	Retired Professor
CI-15	Female	18	Asian (East)	Undergraduate, Accounting

Comparing these two tables, there was one major difference between the two groups in terms of demographics. This major difference lay in the respondents' age. Participants from the OS group were mainly young undergraduate students with an age range from 18-29. However, other than some undergraduate participants in the CI group, the first group also had a number of participants whose age was much older. This was due to how Confucius Institutes operate. Teachers from the Confucius Institutes teach both credit courses to undergraduate students and non-credit courses to non-college students in the community. Therefore, participants from different types of classes

represented different age groups. This age difference may have led to distinctions in the responses such as news media consumption patterns.

Both groups had a balanced representation in gender. However, compared to the general American population, the selection of participants did not give an accurate presentation in two areas, races/ethnicity, and occupations. A 2014 national census indicated the following composition of races/ethnicity in the American population: White 62.1%, Hispanic 17.4%, African American 13.2%, Asian 5.4%, and others. (US Census Bureau, 2015). Both groups displayed an overrepresentation of Asian, a fair representation of White, under-representation of African American, and a lack of representation of Hispanic individuals. In terms of occupation, most of the respondents were from academic fields, mainly students and teachers. Therefore, application of the results from this study could be undermined due to a skewed representation in races/ethnicity and occupation.

Perception of China: Addressing RQ3

RQ3: How are CI students' perception of China different from OSs'?

To answer RQ3, this section will use seven key words to describe each group's perception of China. Those fourteen words were identified by looking at how important they were in their responses. The importance was also shown in how many participants talked about these terms. The following table showed these key words and the number of participants who talked about them.

Table 3. Key words in perceptions of China

OS Group Key words	Number of Participants	CI Group Key Words	Number of Participants
Communists/communism	8	Culture	13
Birth control/one child policy	6	People	12
Stereotypes	6	Friends	12
Internet censorship	6	Experience	11
Take over	5	Government	8
Pollution	5	Comparison	7
Ancient	5	Similarity	5

OSs' perceptions of China: 7 key words. When asked about perception of China, most of the OS participants responded with a neutral perception. They expressed that they did not have a very clear perception of China with limited knowledge on the country. No respondent gave an answer with a negative perception. However, some said their perceptions were positive or slightly positive mainly because their admiration of China's culture and people. The Chinese government was mainly viewed negatively by the majority, with one exception. A few respondents felt neutral or had no opinions towards the Chinese government. Some key words were mentioned from time and time again among responses. These words might give a glimpse of what their perception and understanding of China was.

Key word #1: Communist/communism. Most of respondents mentioned this when they were sharing their perception of China, although some were not quite sure whether China was still a communist country. This knowledge mainly came from their high school history class. They mentioned that China was a part of a communist alliance with the Soviet Union and other communist countries. Except for one respondent, nobody mentioned that China was an ally of the United States during the World War II. Some said that the media reminded them of the fact that China was still a communist country because it was always mentioned or involved in the news about North Korea or Cuba. Most of them felt negatively about China being a communist country or about communism. Some of them felt neutral about this because it did not affect their life in this country.

Key word #2: Birth control/one child policy. The second key word was mentioned almost as often as the first one. Like the first one, respondents learned about this policy in their history class. This notorious policy was negatively received by all the respondents who shared opinions on this issue with one exception. This exception will be further discussed in the framework discussion. The negative reception by the respondents was caused by a violation of what they considered human rights and personal values. More analysis will be given in the framework discussion as well.

Key word #3: Stereotypes. Due to limited knowledge on China, respondents admitted that their description of China could be influenced by typical stereotypes shared within the society of the United States. One common notion many participants mentioned was that Chinese people are hard-working. The other common idea mentioned was that

Chinese students were smart and good at tests. There were also some less shared descriptions such as Chinese eating bizarre foods, even bugs, or Chinese being bad drivers. The respondents understood their limitation in their knowledge on China, so they freely admitted that their understandings of Chinese culture and people could be very stereotypical. Reversibly, the sharing of these stereotypical perceptions of China also showed how limited their knowledge on China was.

Key word #4: Internet censorship. Internet censorship and lack of freedom in speech was well shared in responses from this group. This is a common theme in the Western news media about China. Even though this group of participants admitted a low consumption of the news media, many of them learned this fact about China. This was unanimously received with negativity by the group. And most of them believed this did more damage to the reputation of the Communist Party of China than many other concerns such as corruption. This generation relies on the Internet to express their opinions more than any other generational group. It was understandable that such acts of the Chinese government would elicit a negative image.

Key word #5: Take over. This phrase came up very frequently in the responses of the OS group. It indicated their uncertainty, worry, and fear of the military power of China. This fear and negativity derives from their negative perception of the Chinese government and its authoritarian nature. Most of them did not worry about China being a threat to the United States military. They had good faith in the capacity of this country's military. However, they did have concern over China's powerful presence in Asia and worried about its small neighbors being taken over by China. OS-1 felt that the

government of China was very secretive and might want to take over other nations in Southeastern Asia and spread communism. OS-13 had a similar reason to worry: “Because just their nature, from what I understand, they are communist governments. I think they just take over the land, add it to their territory. Maybe it could be a threat to a small region around it.” OS-6 also reported that China could be a threat to its neighboring countries and also expressed a concern over China’s potential economic invasion in the United States. OS-7 worried that China could take over Southeastern Asian countries if they were in its way of achieving hegemony.

Key word #6: Pollution. Most of the respondents were aware of China’s pollution condition, especially its air pollution. Some learned about this problem from high school class, others from the news. Air pollution is another common topic in the Western news media about China. In terms of air pollution, China gets more media attention than do other pollution-suffering countries. Even the news media seems surprised to learn that Beijing is not the most polluted city in the world. It actually did not even make to the top seventy (Rice, 2015). As a matter of fact, there are thirteen cities in India on the top twenty most polluted cities list, with Delhi being the number 1, and no Chinese cities are on the list (the most polluted city in China is Lanzhou, ranked thirty-six in the world) (Rice, 2015). Even though China’s pollution is indeed horrible and deserves media attention, there seems an over-representation or focus on China’s pollution in the Western news media compared to a focus on pollution in India or Pakistan (three of whose cities being in the top ten most polluted cities) (Rice, 2015). And this over-focus affected the participants’ perception of China.

Key word #7: *Ancient*. Respondents who used this key word to describe China got their knowledge on the country mainly from their secondary history education. This word indicated an old civilization which had a long history and culture; however, it may be somewhat outdated. When OS-3 was asked about his perception of China, he said, “The only thing I really know about it thus far was ancient history. And I believe it was an ally of USSR during the Cold War. Other than that, I don’t really know a lot.” OS-4 referred China as “a very old civilization.” OS-10 said his perception of China was “really old” and said his perception had not been updated until he met a few Chinese friends. OS-14 remembered the Terra Cotta army when asked about her study of China in high school.

Even though respondents denied a negative perception of China in general, it is clear to see from this list of key words that China in their description was less positive or neutral than they claimed. With limited knowledge on China, their exposure to history class and media had important impacts on their understanding of the country. It is interesting to see that the country they are describing is a very similar country to the one described in U.S. history books and media. Even when they were expressing positive aspects of Chinese culture and people, they admitted they were usually stereotypes and were not sure how true they were. Limited knowledge on the country affects their ability to form their own opinion about China and makes it hard for them to refute negative information about China from the news media.

This underlying negative perception held by the OS participants might have been formed by internalization which helped them to maintain a consistent inner value system

(Kelman, 1958). What they have learned about China from secondary history class and the news media usually contradicts with their values; therefore, forming a negative perception would help them to achieve congruency between their perceptions of China and their values. According to Kelman (1975), pre-existing hostile attitudes and incompatible preconceptions were two inhibitory factors to prevent favorable attitude change in international exchanges. These factors were evident among the OS participants. According to Kahan and Braman (2006), this negative perception might be explained by “belief-generative power” of group identity (p. 154). People who are sharing the same group identity may form a self-reinforcing groupthink which self-reinforce a negative perception in their group.

CIs’ perceptions of China: 7 key words. When asked about perception of China, all of the CI participants responded with positive perceptions. For example, CI-1 simply replied, “I love it!” Compared to OS, CI participants were clearer in describing their perception of China, and they did not need time to give a definite answer. Most of them had high praise for Chinese culture and people and showed them great affection. The government was not well received by this group either; however, they thought that people should look at it from a historical perspective. In any case, their perception of the Chinese government did not affect their perception of Chinese people and culture.

Key word #1: Culture. Respondents showed a great appreciation for Chinese culture, which was one of the main reasons they developed a positive perception of China. They used words like “fascinating,” “amazing,” and “great” to describe Chinese culture and considered it as one motivation to learn the language. In this group, older

respondents showed more enthusiasm about culture than the young ones. Young students study Chinese mainly for career purposes while their older peers decided to learn Chinese mainly for culture.

To CI-3, studying Chinese “opened up a new world” to her. She was fascinated by Chinese characters and culture and wanted to read more books about the country. She also wanted to learn characters so that she could read signs if she went to China. She remembered how she was amazed by Chinese culture on her first trip. “On my first trip to China, it was utter fascination. Because it’s a very old, beautiful country with lots of history and culture.” CI-5 found Chinese culture very interesting because it was unique. She was not able to attend many cultural activities organized at the Institute due to her schedule. However, she really appreciated how her language teachers integrated culture into her class. It also showed her “beautiful history and traditions.” CI-9 listed things that first drew her into Chinese learning which were characters, culture, history, social customs, and worldview. CI-11 said that she appreciated and respected Chinese culture and thought it had a lot to offer to the world. CI-15 was fond of Chinese traditions, arts, and celebrations.

Key word #2: People. Respondents mostly gave a positive view on Chinese people. Most of the them had made at least one trip to China and therefore had an opportunity to interact with Chinese people in the country. Many were surprised at how welcoming Chinese people were towards them which they did not expect. CI-3 was a little concerned about how Chinese people would treat her because of political differences before her first trip to China. However, she was surprised to see how friendly

they were. The hospitality they showed was beyond her expectation. CI-7 also enjoyed her first trip and found people there were gracious and friendly. She said, “I enjoyed it. I felt very comfortable...I like the people, I thought everybody was friendly. I liked the food. Everybody was very gracious and helpful.” CI-11 spent one year in China when she was in her study-abroad program. She said that she met some wonderful people, and she was always fond of the nice interactions with them.

Other than sharing positive experiences interacting with Chinese people, they also made it clear they viewed people and governments separately. CI-13 called them “two different entities.” CI-7 expressed the importance of separating people from government so that people and culture could be greatly appreciated despite differences in politics and governance.

Key word #3: *Friends*. Interacting with Chinese people had an impact on CI students’ perceptions of China; however, having some Chinese friends impacted their perception even further. A friendship with Chinese nationals usually would increase the positivity in their perception. This positivity usually came from experiences involving positive emotions and feelings. CI-3 made some friends with local high school teachers in her trip to China and maintained this friendship thereafter. Together they organized a class- to- class book exchange program to keep the relationship going. CI-7 developed a close friendship with her former colleague who works at the Science Academy of China. This friendship facilitated her first trip to China (a fifteen-day work trip) and helped her to see China from a different angle. CI-11 recalled her time with her best Chinese friend in China. She went to her family with this friend to celebrate Chinese New Year. Her

friend's hometown, Linshui, was a small city in Sichuan province. She had the most authentic experience when she lived with this pleasant family. And she said, "many positive feelings come from her (and her family)."

Key word #4: Experience. Unlike OS participants, most of the CI students in this study had been to China to see it for themselves. Even though this is not true with all of the CI students, it still was the case for a large number of them. This experience of visiting China contributed heavily to forming their perception of the country. CI-1 formed his perception of China mainly from his three-week trip to China in 2013 and his experience with Chinese people. He was surprised to see a different China from the martial arts films he watched growing up. CI-3 mentioned that she had little knowledge on China from occasional news and her two trips to China helped her to form a positive perception of China. During her trips, she toured around China, went to some cultural sites such as Longmen Grottos and the Forbidden City, and interacted with different people, including teachers and students there. This experience showed her a China which existed beyond news and reports. CI-9 still remembered her first trip to China in 1979. It was striking to her because China only existed in books, but now it became real, which also made learning more real.

Not all of these experiences were positive to CI students. If they saw good side of China, they saw the other side as well. Compared to what she saw in the 1970s and 80s, CI-9 saw a change in Chinese culture which made her sad. She saw Chinese society was losing its traditions and only focused on money. CI-11 was not happy with the Chinese media nowadays. It focuses too much on money and superficial things such as how thin

you are. She believed it was due to the Cultural Revolution and this unhealthy culture would pass eventually. CI-15 saw how crowded and polluted China was. However, most of them expressed that their positive outweighed the negative experiences. CI-11 said that she would never have antagonistic feeling against the Chinese because of her travels there.

Key word #5: Government. Respondents' negative aspect of perception mainly came from their views of the Chinese government. Similar to the OS group, CI students hold negative perceptions of the Chinese government because of governmental actions that conflict with their values. CI-15 did not like how Chinese government' censorship and its endeavor to cover things up. However, this only affected her political, not her cultural perception of China. CI-13 expressed her dislike towards the Chinese government; however, she appreciated its recent effort in dealing with climate change, which was something she valued. Unlike the OS group, the CI group understood why the Chinese government behaved as it did and expressed deep concerns over its people. CI-7 listed things she did not like about the Chinese government, such as hacking, Internet censorship, and pollution, and felt sorry for people in the country. However, she also showed an understanding of the Chinese government. In terms of hacking, she said, "We do the same thing." As for the Internet censorship, she said that China was acting out of fear. Many respondents such as CI-1, CI-7, and CI-13 said that they tried to understand China's pollution in historical perspective which was something the U.S. and other developed countries all experienced. Nevertheless, they felt very concerned for people's health and how that affected China's image among potential visitors.

Key word #6: Comparison. In their responses, CI students compared their current perception of China with two other perceptions, their prior perception before learning Chinese and the general American's perception. When asked about their prior perceptions, there were two types of answers. The first type was basically a no perception and a very superficial one. CI-1 imagined China to be what was represented in Hong Kong movies from the 1970s and '80s. CI-3 said she was very ignorant of China. CI-7 said that she did not expect anything before her first trip to China because she had no prior perception. The second type of prior perception was a slightly negative one, a result of the news media's influence. CI-5 thought about a huge population when he thought of China. CI-14 imagined a lifeless communist country with no human rights. CI's perception of China before his trip was "less developed" and he was very surprised to see a very westernized China when he made his first trip. He attributed this inaccurate perception to a biased media. He said that Americans did not hear much about China, and most of the information was politicalized. "When people hear about communists, they would think that it must not be developed. That I think surprises most of Westerners when they go over there for the first time."

The respondents also compared their perception of China with the general American's perception. They expressed that perception of others who had no exposure to Chinese culture and China would have much worse perception than theirs. CI-1 shared some typical opinions of China from his peers, which involved eating dogs, wearing masks, and being racists. In their imagination, China was a country with no human rights and no choices in life. CI-13 claimed that people in the U.S. had a lot of stereotypes and

prejudices towards China. She would come across opinions from her friends who had never been to China saying, “The Chinese are communists. The Chinese eat dogs. The Chinese want to take over the world and fight America and kill us all. Like stupid stuff like that.”

Key word #7: *Similarity*. Unlike OS’s perception of China and the Chinese, which mainly emphasized differences, CI participants saw more similarities between their country and China as they deepened their understanding of the country. Based on the discussion on attitude congruency and identity affirmation, similarities would help the formation of a positive perception of the country or culture. CI-10 had a good impression of China when he first went there; however, it was not until the third time that he felt a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging came to him when he saw something similar to what he used to see at home, the change of seasons. He stated:

I think the thing (change of seasons) that strikes me is that, we also think these people are completely different; they live in the other side of the world; you do things differently, but for the most part, we are all the same. We think the same way. We have the same emotions for the most part. The way we express the emotions may be different, like how we celebrate holidays. I went with a family to celebrate Chunjie (Chinese New Year), and we made jiaozi (Chinese dumplings) and everything. But just how they have many friends and family over to celebrate the time just like we do in America.

This positive perception held by the CI group could be explained by Kelman’s framework of three processes (1958). Their perceptions of China could be formed by

identification and internalization. Perceptions formed based on identification usually are results of a satisfying relationship with a person or group from a culture or country even though perception holders do not necessarily agree with some aspects of this culture or country. It may explain why these CI participants can still hold positive perceptions of China despite that they disagree with some aspects of this country. A satisfying relationship with people from this culture may contribute to formation of this positive perception. Perceptions formed based on internalization could be more persistent than perceptions formed in other ways because of intrinsic rewards and value congruency brought by internalization. Most of CI participants shared that they found similarities and rewards as they gradually learned about China and its culture. Their perceptions should be more persistent than perceptions formed only by compliance or identification.

With the understanding of both groups' perception of China, this discussion moves to examining how this perception is formed and what channels are used to acquire knowledge on China.

Sources of China Knowledge: Addressing RQ4

RQ4: How were CIs' perceptions of China formed differently from OSs?

Research findings show that participants' knowledge of China has an impact on how they process incoming information concerning China either from media or other sources. Understandably, CI students' knowledge of China exceeds the other students' in both depth and breadth. Differences in sources and motivation may cause this disparity.

OSs and their sources. OS's knowledge on China derives from limited channels and experience as listed below. Many of the participants mentioned that the main

knowledge they had was from their secondary school history education. At least five participants considered high school history class as their only source of knowledge on China. OS-14 said, “Mostly, my U.S. history course in my 8th grade class. We studied the ancient world, and one of those was ancient Asia; China was a big section of that course.” Because this knowledge contributes to the construction of their perception of China, the image of China remains outdated, inaccurate and partial comparing to the current nation. There were some examples from the responses. All OS-14 remembered was that China had a terra cotta army. OS-3 remembered from his history class that China was an ally of the USSR and was not sure whether China remained a Communist country or not. OS 10 reported that the teaching he received from school was limited to ancient China. “I feel like China was not discussed more. It was this communist country, was allied with Cuba and Russia. And it had not been brought up. I never did a modern history class. We never get to the modern history as much.”

News media is another channel for some participants to get their information on China. When asked about sources of their China knowledge, at least one third of participants mentioned this channel. However, respondents also stated that they usually did not purposely seek for this kind of information due to lack of motivation and their avoiding negativity in the news media. Both OS-1 and OS-10 expressed that they had very limited news consumption. OS-10 said, “I watch the news channel when my grandparents have it on. But other than that, I don’t have time to keep up with the current events.” The use pattern of media among this young generation and their attitude towards media also limits the consumption of news media; therefore, it limits how much they

consume news and reports on China. Discussion on how OS interact with media will be further shared later.

The third main source for OS to get information on China is through limited interpersonal communication. Some mentioned that they had known someone from China either when they were in school or at work. However, the majority of them had no close relationship or friendship with Chinese acquaintances. Nevertheless, they did learn something from them about China. OS-6 mentioned that she met some Chinese students when she was in a boarding high school. Through interaction with them she was able to understand the distinction between Chinese and Korean culture. She gave one example of the celebration of Chinese New Year and shared that personal elements helped her to understand China better. OS-7 had a Chinese friend from high school, and this friend showed him that Chinese student could also be artistic; he did not care only about books and tests. This limited interaction with Chinese people played a role in the construction of China perception. OS-10 said that interaction with Chinese people made him change his perception of China that was formed through high school history class:

My perception of China was really old. I feel like it's a communist country, not our enemy, but not an ally, not a friend. And after met people from there, I feel like it's still a communist there, but it's getting some capitalism views there. It's actually a lot modern than I thought. After meeting with these people, they teach me stuff, I realize that there is different culture stuff, but I am just surprised how friendly they are.

Lastly, some participants said their main source of information on China was major related courses from higher education, especially participants who majored in international relations or economics. Those participants have extensive knowledge of China's economy, its economic policies in the world, and its foreign policies and relations with other countries. Most of them still lack knowledge in other aspects of China such as culture and people. OS-15 majored in global affairs and shared her knowledge on China's economy and how it affected the U.S. economy when asked about her perception of China. But she could not say much about other aspects of China. She said that the picture of Mao Zedong on a building was her main impression of China. CI-5 majored in history and had extensive knowledge on China's ancient and recent history; however, his knowledge was limited to this subject and classroom study.

CIs and their sources. CI students have much more interests, motivation, and opportunity to learn about China and therefore have a deeper and better understanding of the country than OS. Interpersonal communication plays an important role in constructing CI students' perception of China, which was also the main finding in the pilot study. Other than interpersonal communication, there are also other sources that contribute to understanding China. Four channels of information will be discussed here below.

All CI participants have extensive experience in communicating with Chinese people in different settings. This kind of communication happens frequently in their life such as going to Chinese language classes, attending culture events at the Institute (language buddies, culture workshops, etc.), and talking with Chinese friends outside of the Institute.

Interpersonal communication channels help the participants to see China in a micro, intimate, and “soft” way. It is not really about China on a grand scale dealing with national policy, economy, or politics. Through interpersonal communication, CI students learn about the country from other people’s personal experience and opinions, which is usually shared in a close relationship such as teacher-student relationship or friendship. It’s more about people, culture, and traditions which can be considered the “soft” sides of a country. Knowledge and information gathered from this kind of channel is lacking for the other students and the general U.S. population. The micro, intimate, and “soft” knowledge on China empowers CI students to construct an image of China with depth and breadth and may produce a balanced view on issues related to the country.

A second channel for CI students is media. Because they have more motivation and interests than OS, they usually pay more attention and consume more China-related news and reports. However, this can have a complicated effect on how they view China. On one hand, negativity in the media about China may affect their views on China in a negative way. On the other hand, CI students have a better understanding of China-related issues, which enables them to think critically about any new information.

The third source of information on China is class lecturing which is different from teacher-student communication outside the classroom. Even though students mainly learn the language in the class, they also receive knowledge on Chinese culture and other aspects of knowledge on China. Academic learning in a classroom setting can give learners a systematic knowledge on the subject that other forms of information

acquisition cannot give. CI students who are equipped with knowledge on China can process incoming information with a balanced and critical view.

The last source of information acquisition on China is travelling to the country. Personal experience is very powerful and usually affects emotions and feelings. This kind of experience usually has a tremendous impact on people's views towards related issues. Many of CI students had experience of travelling to China and lived there for different amounts of time. From interviews, the researcher found that this experience usually laid an emotional foundation for their perception of China. This foundation of emotions was at work when they experienced different views or new information concerning China.

Media Consumption and Attitude

This section of the analysis focuses on the media consumption patterns of Confucius Institute students and other students and how that contributes to their understanding and perception of China, respectively. The negativity of the U.S. media on China was mentioned by both OS and CI respondents. This discussion will first look at the expressed negativity of China in the media.

China in the U.S. Media. Most respondents from both groups said that they found the portrayal of China in the U.S. media negative in nature. They said that the news media tended to focus on negative subjects in order to attract viewership. CI-9 found the news media changed to be more negative compared to when she was young. According to her, news nowadays wanted to find problems, looked for stories that could sell, and be dramatic. Some participants who had intercultural experience in other countries found the U.S. media focused more on negativity than media from other countries. CI-3 immigrated

to the United States from Germany in 1985 and shared her opinions on the differences between the news media of the two countries. She stated that the U.S. media viewed China as a danger and a threat, whereas the German media viewed China more positively, with a focus on maintaining a good economic relationship. The German society saw China with more open-mindedness, acceptance, and respect than American society did. The other example was from CI-13 who spent three years of her childhood in Hong Kong and most of her teenager years in other Asian countries. She had not heard of any biases about China in the media until she returned to the United States for college. She argued that these biases were unsound and untrue because she lived there and did not witness them. This biased negativity was echoed in most of CI's responses. For example, CI-11 stated:

I think that the American media often portrays China as an antagonist and as some a country diametrically opposes the U.S. with opposing interests. As an aggressor, we really think we do have differing motives in certain areas. I think that it's a really important international relationship, actually a pretty stable one. Many of the things we see as aggressive on China's part, like in the South China Sea for example, are not the big deal we make them out to be.

C-1 gave other examples to show how the U.S. media was biased against China: They emphasize China's relationship with North Korea. They emphasize China's cracking down on Tibetans, or protesters. Even the way they portray the China and Japan dispute over the island, they made it seem as China after forty years just wants to get it back for no reason. Americans tend to be very sympathetic

towards Japan. I think a lot of our media just show China very negatively. I guess the biggest one is every time you hear about China's growth, there will be articles about what's the implications for the America, what is going to happen, will they attack us or anything like that... They always seem to show as China is getting ready for this fight against us. I don't think that's what's going to happen.

This negative representation was also sensed by the OS group. Most of them said that China was portrayed negatively in news and reports despite their limited knowledge on the country. Like CI-13, OS-13 also spent her teenager years overseas and came back to the United States for high school and college. She only came across stereotypes and negative representation of China after she came back. She said:

Before I moved here, I did know all these stereotypes about Chinese people. Here the media is really strong; they will say whatever their opinions. I didn't know any of these stereotypes back then. If I see this media, a lot of other people probably see it. Then the perception [of China] is really distorted.... The stereotypes—I was not introduced to them until I came here, exposed to the Western media.

Many other OS respondents shared a similar opinion about the U.S. media. OS-12 pointed out the news media here tended to focus on China's repression and its evil communism nature. "They really focus on the repression. China is considered as a very bad communist country. It has a big bad wolf image in the media. They love to focus on negative things." OS-6 expressed that the U.S. media was too fixated on China's past to give an accurate portrayal, "I think the media portrays China as still the 1950s

communists, everything was completely stripped, 100% government control over everything. It might be too true to extent. I think the media portrays China a different way than I see it.”

It was almost a unanimous agreement from both groups that the portrayal of China in the U.S. media was negative. How this negativity impact the perception of China needs an examination of how each group interacts with the news media. The media consumption patterns of both groups and their attitudes towards the media will be shared here.

OSs and media. China’s image in the U.S. is worrisome for the Chinese government. According to a national poll conducted by Gallup in 2015, only 44% of participants expressed a favorable opinion of China comparing 50% expressing unfavorable opinions. This result, however, failed to provide insights into group difference. A recent poll done by Pew Research showed a more promising picture for the Chinese government. Young people and minorities showed a more favorable opinion than older generation. For example, 52% of American young people and non-White population considered China to have a fair trade policy comparing to a 37% approval in general population. Even though only 25% of the U.S. population expressed their trust in China (only 21% for age sixty-five and older), 49% of people who were between eighteen to twenty-nine felt that China could be trusted.

One of the causes for this generational difference may be due to the young generation’s attitude toward the media and how they consume it. Most of the OS

participants displayed one or more of the following media consumption patterns and attitudes.

First, they did not keep up with news media and expressed a lack of interest in it. Respondents did not find there was a need to be news literate and found that many other forms of programs such as entertainment more attractive than news. OS-1 answered honestly with a bit embarrassment: “I don’t watch the media that much.” An almost similar response came from OS-10: “I don’t watch the news too much.” OS-5 mentioned that he did not keep up the current events, and even so less with news about other countries. OS-14 expressed that she did not keep up with the news media as much as she should. She prefers to watch some “feel good,” “less realistic,” “everyone is happy in the end” type of entertainment such as feel-good movies and other similar shows to the news.

Second, some of the participants mainly got news from social media and usually did not deliberately seek news. OS-13 said, “From the media, I guess the social media, Facebook or Twitter, that’s mainly where I get my every thing from. I don’t really watch the news that much.” OS-14 also got news from the social media: “I get lot of my news from Facebook.” Because of low news consumption, the chances are lower for them to come across negative news about China, which explained why almost 39% of the U.S. population had never heard of China’s islands disputes with its neighboring countries (Pew Research, 2015). Because negative news about China are prevailing in Western media’s China-related reports, the saying “no news is good news” is probably true for China.

Third, many of the participants are fully aware of the negativity in news reports. As a group of young generation, they may have developed negative groupthink towards the news media. According to Braman and Kahan (2006), groupthink is self-reinforcing which has an impact on people's group identity. As members of the young generation, people may just accept a negative perception of the news media without investigation because the perception comes from the group. Some of them said that they tended to avoid news media just because most of them were negative, which might affect their emotions. They claimed that most news reports focused on negative news or the negative sides of the issue. Respondents felt that positive news about certain issues was not given correct proportional attention. OS-3 said, "I try to actively avoid it because news nowadays just gets really depressing." OS-10 expressed his anger at the news media, "I am pretty disconnected. I stopped like, I just get very angry when I watch news media. It's so opinionated. I don't really watch that much."

Lastly, participants reported that their generation of the Millennials had more critical thinking than any prior generations. Even for people who receive news on a regular basis, their perception of negativity in news keeps them critical of what news reports try to convey to them. OS-7 expressed his distrust in the news media: "The thing is that the media, I have a tendency not to trust the media that much. There is always propaganda. The media is so corrupted now that you can not always trust it." OS-8 tried not to be judgmental and quick to conclusions when he encountered news reports. "A lot of media tries to portray communism as bad, they are communists. I think I have a bit more relaxed view, not so judgmental. I just don't like to be quick to conclusions. I like

to let the stuff sit a little bit before I make a decision; whereas the media, they really like to give people a certain image.” Because they feel that reporters and news agencies tend to use negative tones in reporting, they are usually questioning what they read or heard. It’s easier for them to disagree with media so that media may have less effect on them.

Most of U.S. news reports about China have been negative from China’s standpoint. For instance, news about China this year mainly focuses on “China aggression” in the South China Sea and strict online speech regulation. From this research, the negativity in China related news may have a limited effect on the general U.S. young generation due to their news consumption pattern and attitude toward news generally. However, this does not mean that they will respond as well as CI students when they are exposed to negative reporting about China. Further analysis and comparison will be provided on how these two groups respond to negative reporting on China.

CIIs and the media. There is an age difference between the two groups of participants in this study, Confucius Institute students and OS. The OS group shared homogeneity in age range, which the CI group did not share. Most the OS were undergraduate students, and the rest were young graduate students. Even though some CI participants were also young college students, there were many participants who were in their forties and fifties. This age difference contributed to the difference in media consumption and patterns. It was previously discussed that the young generation consumes relatively little news media and how the negativity of news turns some of them away from media and how that contributes to less exposure to a negative image of China

portrayed in media. From my interviews, older participants consume media on a regular basis and their media sources tended to be non social media outlets such as newspaper, news magazines, and news agency websites. Several participants mentioned that they read the newspaper every day. CI-9 listed her news sources, *the Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *the Economist*. This helped them to be informed about news events. Because they were learning about China and were interested in the country and culture, they paid more attention to China and East Asia related news and reports.

Even though there is a difference in media consumption between the older and younger generation, young CI participants expressed that they also paid special attention to China-related news and consumed it on a regular basis. For them, motivation lies in the need of understanding China and China related-issues for their chosen major and future career. CI-1 stated, “[I keep up with media] a lot. Yes, because Chinese is my minor. I want to be a diplomat there so I always keep up with China current events and stuff like that.” The other participant, CI-4, reported: “When I watch the news, most definitely. I see a news article about China. I almost always click on just read, definitely if I am interested in the topic. So they always catch my eye.... I am definitely interested in economic development, probably my main focus. I want to be part of it. I want to spend my time in a country that is developing more than a country that’s been developed.”

Due to high media consumption of China-related news and reports, CI participants were inevitably exposed to how China was portrayed in Western media. There are two common themes among CI participants in how they reacted to Western media. First, almost all of them agreed on its negativity in nature with its reporting styles

and content, especially when it was related to China. CI-1 said, “But I tend to look at international coverage of it because American coverage can be biased towards it.” CI-3 said, “Unfortunately, the Western papers try to portray China as a danger. They have become too powerful, or it’s going to be economically more powerful than us. The Americans are very afraid of that. In the papers, unfortunately, it’s quite negative description of China.” CI-5 expressed this point of view, “I think the American news focuses on negatives of course. They focus on negatives of us, too.” CI-9 identified a sense of negativity in media:

Yeah, I think media in general now, again different from when I was younger, media now wants to find problems. They want to find dramatic stories, someone did something wrong, you know. So even with the recent news about China changing the policy on the number of children, a lot of Western media’s focus has not been on the good news about this, it’s been focused on the past policies and why it’s bad, the terrible stories people had, they only had one child, they had to have abortions or whatever. This is media now in general. They usually don’t talk about success stories.

Second, they utilized critical thinking when they consumed media. Awareness of negativity in the media cautioned them against accepting what the media conveyed at face value. Participants expressed that they read and watched reports on China with a critical approach. CI-1 shared that his approach: “I tend to view all the media with “a grain of salt.” I don’t know if you know that idiom, just like, you look at it very critically, so like you don’t take anything at face value. You have to do more research.”

CI-9 stated that she could use her knowledge and experience to be able to consume China-related media critically. “I guess I think, when I read it, it’s a great article, it’s great description, but why they can’t also have another article to give another side of story. But I tend to just read it to learn, and then take in with my perspective. But for people who don’t know anything about China. I worry that the final feeling they get is.... the ending feeling for them must be ‘Wow, it’s such a terrible government....’; it’s more a focus on negatives.”

Two Different Perceptions: A Summary.

Through examining the two groups’ perception of China, one can easily see the striking differences. OSs’ perceptions tend to be vague and lack substance. They either expressed that they did not have a clear perception or no perception at all. A lack of knowledge and exposure to the country leads to a vague and shallow perception of China. On the other hand, CI respondents gave a very solid, clear, and complicated perspectives due to their extensive knowledge and experience on the subject. One may say that they displayed different levels in cognitive complexity in terms of their perceptions of China. In psychology, cognitive complexity refers to the amount of traits one can use to describe another person (Nidorf & Crockett, 1965). In public diplomacy setting, cognitive complexity refers to the amount of traits or characteristics one can describe a country or culture.

The other difference lies in the nature of the perception. By listing key words from their responses, one can find the perception of OSs is negatively toned while the tone of CIs’ perception is overwhelmingly positive. This difference can be attributed to

how respondents acquire knowledge of China and how their perception is constructed. Due to lack of personal experience, OSs' perception of China was mainly based on media portrayals, movies, and books, whereas CIs' perceptions were largely constructed through human interaction. The negativity of news media on China affects the tone of OSs' perceptions while the positivity of interpersonal communication made a positive impact on CIs' perceptions. This point was shown in the discussion on respondents' media consumption and their attitudes towards it.

In summary, the comparison between two groups highlighted the distinctive perception of China among CI students. Opportunities and motivation brought by their experience at the Confucius Institutes helped them to gain a deeper, clearer, and more sophisticated perception of China than the OS group. Interpersonal communication and their experience of Chinese culture created a positive perception of Chinese people and culture. It also gave them soft, intimate, micro knowledge on the country. As for the OS group, China remained a vague, irrelevant country to them and their knowledge of it was superficial, outdated, and stereotypical. Even though most OS participants claimed that their perception of China was neutral, their responses and descriptions indicated a negatively toned perception probably due to the influence of the U.S. news media. The next chapter will focus on how respondents' perceptions interact with their values and identities and what motivates and facilitate a change in perception.

CHAPTER V: IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AND PERCEPTION CHANGE

Reacting to Negative Information about China: Addressing RQ5

RQ5: How do CI students react to negative information about China differently from OS?

OSs' Reactions. In the end of each interview, participants were asked to read one of four excerpts from U.S. news articles which contained negative information about China. Reactions from the OS group were largely divided. Nine out of fifteen participants responded that they did not change their perception of China after reading these articles. Five responded that their perception of China was affected and changed due to reading. One participant gave a mixed response that his perception of China's environment worsened and his perception of the Chinese government remained the same. Another participant responded verbally with no change; however, her non-verbals showed the opposite. After reading the excerpt about China investing in the U.S. energy industry, her voice and demeanor showed surprised, nervousness, and defensiveness. She said, "The first thing, I was, where did they get all that money? [nervous laughter] But I was kind of surprised, because, how like, [long pause] we have troubles with oil, how were they, why China is looking to us? Why they are investing in us...instead of the Middle East where we are getting lot of our oil from?" It is obvious that she, as an American, felt threatened

by China's investment in U.S. energy, which in fact affected her perception of China negatively.

The following discussion focuses on factors which contribute to participants' responses. There are three common factors behind participants' "no change in perception" response. Two of them may correlate with this generation's attitude toward the Western new media. First, they sensed negativity in these news excerpts, which made them question the credibility and neutrality of the news articles. OS-11 noticed that the author tried to establish a false connection between smog and Chinese government. "They try to associate smog to how the Chinese government is bad. Basically, they say, the smog is bad, so the government is bad." OS-7 expressed how he felt that the U.S. news media was biased against the Chinese government:

They are talking about the smog issue, and how, the three words, "identified with the country's government" which I thought that's really biased to put it into the newspaper...that line attacked the country. It is a blind attack. I don't like that...They put their own negative view towards China because they talk about the Chinese government being... Can I read the word again? They said, "the country's political repression: suffocating, censored and potentially lethal." Just there, you knew that the guy who ever wrote that was biased. He did not like China for whatever reason. It thought that's stupid. He should not put it there. That had no relevance to the topic.

Second, participants expressed that they utilized critical thinking in analyzing and processing news information so that they do not accept everything at face value. OS-4

utilized critical thinking in the response and argued that the reality reflected in the article could not represent the whole country; therefore, the perception of the country remained unchanged. OS-11 stated, “Everything I read, I like to analyze at a deeper level...Everything you read, you see try to persuade you something...I understand that things can be stretched. I’ve seen the same topic stretched so differently.”

Third, participants who responded with no change in their perception might be due to the third-person effect. The third-person effect hypothesis (Davison, 1983) predicts that messages from mass media tend to have greater perceived effect on others than on themselves. This personal bias leads to overestimate of media effect on others, and underestimate media’s effect on them. Participants who answered “no change” in perception may be trying to show that they are less susceptible to the news than the general public especially considering the fact that they only read a few paragraphs. If that’s the case, their real reaction to the article and attitude change may well be hidden and accounted for by the third-person effect. There was no direct evidence to know whether the third-person effect played a role here. The researcher suspected this because many of them claimed that they were free of influences from the news media influence or less susceptible to them than their peers.

CIs’ reactions. CI respondents did not show a divided reaction to the reading. Most of them clearly stated that their perception was not affected by the reading. Two respondents said that their perception of China did not change; however, their perception of China’s pollution got worse after reading the pollution excerpt. Two respondents expressed their concern over China’s military power and admitted that their perception of

the country was affected slightly in a negative way. For example, CI-15 expressed that she felt threatened by Chinese's military advancement, but just slightly: "It does not say they are going to do anything. So I am not fully afraid. They are also behind the U.S. still in military. So I am a little OK with that." In her case, she felt that her American identity was threatened by the new information on China's military improvement. However, when she remembered that the U.S. was still stronger than the Chinese military, she felt better. This reaction suggests her identity protection mechanism was at work, which will be further discussed later.

Most of the CI participants did not change their perception after reacting to the news articles possibly for two reasons. First, the reading did not present new information due to their extensive knowledge on China so that there was no new threat or negativity. For example, CI-5 stated that he had no concern over China's investment in the U.S. energy because it's understandable for a large economy like China to invest in energy and it also was a natural result in a global economy. CI-7 expressed her concern over the Chinese health situation when she read about pollution in the country. However, it did not change her perception of China because she was already aware of the situation.

Second, they implied what they read only constituted a very small part of their large and sophisticated perception of the country. Reacting to the news articles did not make that much of an impact compared to OSs' perceptions because their perceptions of China were more solid and broad, being based on extensive knowledge and experience. This knowledge and experience would balance things out. CI-11 said that she understood why China felt an urgency to advance its military. This urgency was mainly due to a

humiliating history China experienced when foreign powers invaded and took advantage of the country when it was vulnerable. What China is doing is not much for expanding, but more of being active defending, she said. After reading about China criticizing the U.S. human records in CIA interrogations, CI-13 expressed she was bothered a bit by it. However, it did not affect her perception of China because she lived there and knew China.

The description of respondents' reactions serves as a good transition to the next section, which focuses on the three aspects of interplay between identity and incompatible information. These three aspects are identity affirmation, protection, and incorporation. The first aspect to be discussed here is identity affirmation.

The rest of this chapter will address RQ7: how do the three processes of identity negotiation framework, identity protection, identity incorporation, and identity affirmation, affect participants' perceptions of China?

Identity Affirmation

The proposed framework indicates that incoming information which affirms a receiver's value and identity will be received positively and the perception of the information object will be viewed positively as well. This identity affirmation process was confirmed by cases from both groups. Analysis will be given on the following respondents.

OS-11/Birth control. OS-11 is a twenty-year-old college student who is majoring in environmental science. The distinctive aspect of this respondent is his worldview and attitude toward population. He believes that all the major problems we are having are

caused by overpopulation. If the population can be reduced by half, most of the problems will disappear.

I'd like to think the big picture. That's how I came with my opinion. I know the true roots of evil or problems is population. I learned that in all my environmental science classes. It just makes sense. If we only need to feed thousands of people instead of eight billion people. We can easily feed thousands of people. And there will be no conflict. If you change the population from eight billion to eight million, none of the problem that is happening right now would be happening...I think a lot of problems just happen when population gets big. That helps me maintain my opinion a lot. Most people are not willing to see the fact that they are willing to reduce the population of Earth down. Even if it meant thousand of millions of people will die, I am a person that would want to go for that.

With this worldview, his attitude towards China's One Child policy is drastically different from the rest of respondents. He not only thinks birth control is necessary but also smart. This policy was viewed very positively by him. When asked whether China was a threat to neighboring countries, he said no because China was smart. He called China smart because of its birth control and said that China would be a threat only if China's population was "growing like crazy." Because China's birth control policy is in accordance with his worldview, he thinks highly of this policy even it has been received negatively by most of his peers and the U.S. media. Therefore, he expressed his frustration over the news media focusing on small things and admired the Chinese government for taking necessary measure to control population:

They [the news] worry about little things too much...I'll watch media more if they are more concerned about the big picture. I think the U.S. needs to really start doing population control. The U.S. should be a leader. That's why I really respect China. They have already started knowing that we can not handle this many babies. If you guys did not have the laws you had, your population will be so big, not enough resources, it's really smart your government to put this control on. I wish the U.S. did that, every other country did that.

The framework predicts that identity affirmation leads to a positive reception of the information and then a positive perception of the information object. Response from OS-13 demonstrates how his worldview on population leads to a positive perception of China's birth control policy and also a positive perception of China as well. When asked his opinion on China's one child policy, he said, "I find having a control on population is positive in my mind.... I think China does the right thing, even it looks negative." He used words like "smart", "efficient", and "resourceful" to describe his perception of China and its governments which indicate a positive perception of them:

That's probably the biggest positive of the Chinese governments. They can do what they want, which allows them to do things people don't want them to do. Which sounds bad, but when it's for the greater good, especially with the population stuff, I think you can view these very negative things positively. If they did not put a limit on it, I don't think China would be where it is. I think they would be very overpopulated. They were not able to provide enough agriculture to feed everyone... They are geniuses for putting the one baby per couple policy.

A main criticism on China's birth control policy is human rights violation. The importance he places on population control outweighs any human rights violation. Therefore, this criticism on China's policy does not affect him negatively. In his response, he defended his stance on human rights violation issue: "It [birth control] violates everyone's basic rights. Reproduction is very human rights. I understand it's human rights. But if we want to survive as human population, I think we need to sacrifice that human rights for the future."

It's human rights to have kids. But I don't think we should have it just because we want. If you meet every couple only be able to have one kid, I think it would be beneficial because they still get to have at least one kid, they at least get to experience being parents. But if everyone has one kid, we can technically half the population...I think that would be very beneficial in causing a lot less wars. When people talk about wars, diseases going crazy, anything, every problem I associate, [is because] there are too many people.

His approval of China's birth control policy extended to the Chinese government and the communist nature of it. Unlike his peers, he spoke highly of communism and how communist government worked. He was not happy with the two-party system in the United States because it took too long to get things done. He used the word "dumb" to describe people fighting for power in the U.S. politics. Instead, he praised China's communist government for being efficient.

I compare governments through effectiveness than what they do. To do anything in America takes forever. But being a communist country, you can make change

fast. I think to adapt to the changes in environment, you are going to be fast. Bills can not be waiting to be passed for five years. Let's just say it's a bill about depleting water, by the time it gets passed, all the water almost gone. If it's a more communist-based government, they can just switch right way and save the water. I think it's just a more effective way to run.

The example of OS-11 demonstrated how identity affirmation could successfully lead to a positive reception of the affirming information then to a positive perception of the information object as well. A different example on identity affirmation from the Confucius Institute will be shared next.

CI-1/Finding similarities. CI-1 is a twenty-years-old college student who is majoring in global affairs with Chinese as his minor. He has been studying for five years since high school. He identifies himself as African American with one quarter of Chinese from his grandmother. That's why he started learning Chinese by himself in high school to be more connected with his grandmother's heritage. Since he came to college, he has been taking Chinese courses every semester. Some of his Chinese instructors are from the Confucius Institute at his university. He went to China in 2013 for three weeks as a tourist. This China experience, along with his other experience in learning the language, has an impact on his perception and understanding of China.

There was a clear theme in his responses which was the importance of similarities. Like many other people, his perception of China before the visit was a typical one which was somewhat stereotypical and outdated. He worried about pollution and heard that people needed to wear masks and could not breathe there. He also heard

about the one child policy and how Chinese could be very racist towards foreigners especially as an African American. Growing up watching Hong Kong kung fu movies, he also expected to see a China in the films where people dressed and acted differently. Instead, he saw a very different China with many similarities as America, and he also felt welcomed there. He said, “I think a lot of people’s opinion is that they are a communist nation, there is no human rights. Everything is controlled by the government. People can not choose live the way they want to. Their life is kind of assigned to them. That’s not really what I saw when I went there.”

He encouraged people to do the same thing as he did. “I think Americans should really go there, especially Shanghai, or Beijing. You see the cities that look like our cities so they can get a better understanding of what’s really going on there.” He further explained his point and stated the importance of seeing similarities in perceiving a misunderstood country or culture.

I think it’s really misunderstood especially by other people here. I think a lot of people think that it’s really a tyrannical nation that people are robotic, don’t have choices in their own life. Once you go there, you see people a lot just like us. Especially my generation there, they have the same cell phone, same clothes, same music. I think China is just misunderstood. If more people went there, more people try to learn about it, they’ll realize that we are much more like with them than we are different.

The similarities he saw were not only limited within the outside looks such as people’s clothing and buildings in cities, but also in values and ways of life as well. The

similarities in values helped him to appreciate China more. He said, “I think China has very strong family units. They have great value in their ancestors, elders, and grandparents. They’ll take care of them as they age. That’s how my family works, we never leave them behind.” This appreciation of similarities also helped him to view differences less negatively than without the experience. Even though he did not admire how the Chinese government worked, he found similarities between the Chinese government now and the American government in the past. Therefore, he could view the Chinese government with more understanding and tolerance. He stated:

I am someone who is really for countries having their own sets of rules to be able to self-determine what they want to do. I don’t think it’s really fair that America expects China to act the way it acts now because China is still developing.

America went through a long process of development with slavery, discrimination, and pollution, all the stuff that China goes through today. But America kind of forgot that part of its past and expects China to automatically jump to the next level. I don’t think it’s really fair to them.

He also admitted that if China changed certain behaviors and agreed with America more on some international issues, he would appreciate it more than now. This is to say that an increase in identity affirmation will increase one’s perception of the information object. He said:

I would have them take more stances with the Americans. Especially in the United Nations, a lot of times they vote against a lot of resolutions that the Americans want. It seems like they are antagonistic towards us. I think if they

agreed with Americans more, or had more transparency in their thought processes for why they do certain things, I think that would help...also, I think China should sever its relationship with North Korea.

What he expressed was a preference of China's becoming more American in how it dealt with international issues and the way it worked. This preference indicated a liking for similarities in values which lead to identity affirmation. A similar opinion was expressed by a different respondent. OS-4 said, "I would say greater cooperation with the U.S. president [would help China's image in the U.S.] because everyone's opinion is really coming from the media. The general public's opinions come from the media because they don't study in China, probably they have never been to China. I would say that more cooperation with the U.S. government would show a positive portrayal in the media."

These examples confirmed the function of identity affirmation and how it could affect respondents' attitude toward the attitude object. The similarities he found in China helped him construct a positive perception of China and helped him maintain this positivity against the negativity in the media portrayal of China.

Identity Protection

According to the proposed framework, identity protection happens when people reject incompatible information, which poses a threat to their identities. Because there is a failure in accepting incoming information in the process of identity protection, people maintain their negative perception of the information objected to before. Identity protection was observed when respondents shared values which were not honored in

China's society, or when they discussed how some practices in China went against their values. Here is a list of value discrepancies.

One child policy. This practice in China was not received well among most of participants. Many said this policy and practice was unacceptable and incompatible with their value systems. They were two main types of values when respondents showed an opposing attitude toward it. One was the value of family. Respondents said the policy was inconsistent with valuing family. OS-4 gave this response:

I can not say I favor that [one child policy] either. I grew up around encouraging bringing new life into the world. If for whatever reason a child is borne, they should be cared for, they should be given special care, they should not be given up. Respect for life, that's a very good way to put it. I would say that's an unfavorable aspect for me.

OS-15 viewed China's one child policy negatively for a different reason. When she was asked about negative aspects of China, she mentioned one child policy and how it contradicted her values both on family and gender equality. She expressed her concern over the girls' situation caused by the policy in China.

I would say one child policy. I know they don't really value the girls to be first born there. I know back at home, I helped out at a daycare. There were two girls who were adopted. Their parents said that they were found on the street. Sounds like, oh my gosh! Do they leave kids on the street often?... I think that you should be able to have as many kids as you want. You should have many kids, the more, the merrier.

OS-15 expressed her feelings when she saw something related to the one child policy in the news media: “If it’s something about the one child policy, I feel really bad because I love kids. I will be very sympathetic towards it.” This constituted one major negative aspect in her perception of China. OS-4 said that this policy might have cost China a positive perception among the American public: “I am sure it would not hurt to get rid of the one child policy. I don’t know any of American citizens or Chinese citizens who would be happy about it [the policy]. But it’s very easy to learn something about a country and use them as grounds to dislike them as whole.”

Internet regulation. Many of the respondents were from a younger generation in the American society. As young Americans, freedom of speech on the Internet was extremely important. Being able to express themselves on the Internet without worrying about authority and punishment was essential in their value system. Naturally they expressed an opposing attitude towards how the Chinese government limited people’s freedom of speech by strict online regulation. This opposing attitude accounted for their negative perception of the Chinese government. OS-3 reported that respecting others’ privacy, including online privacy, was an important value to him: “Respecting other people’s privacy is important. Going through their search history on the Internet is not a thing you should do without their expressed permission. That’s a big one.” Then he said that he did not appreciate how the Chinese government monitored the Internet and clearly stated this would affect his perception of the Chinese government for the worse. “From what I understand, online censoring is a big issue over there. Honestly, censoring anything or monitoring people’s Internet activity is something that really should not be

done in any way. Outside of a criminal investigation capacity, the governments should stay out of it.”

OS-8 identified himself as liberal in values, and therefore, did not like how China was strict on regulating the Internet: “The government [of China] seems really strict. I lean more liberal. So that’s something I don’t quite agree with. One major thing is the restriction of the Internet access, how they block certain websites... restrict freedom of speech.” He also associated the Internet regulation to a bad image of China. “I definitely think the Internet thing; I think that has a bad image in most places. If they were to lift that, I think it would probably help out. That’s one of the things pretty much everyone knows about China. They block Facebook, they block YouTube. If you can do that simple thing, everybody would say they are loosening up.”

Human rights violation. The value of human rights was identified in several participants’ responses. Human rights violations were one of the main reasons for participants to have a negative perception of the Chinese government. When OS-12 was asked what China was doing that violated her values, she made the following comment: “Yes, I think they do violate human rights. The way they imprison people and journalists. If the media is controlled there, what kind of free speech is that? I think they are violating basic human rights.” She also gave an example of how the Chinese government treated the dissident artist Ai Weiwei to show its oppressive nature and said “it was not OK” to her.

OS-4 valued dependence and self-determination and found the way the Chinese government limited the rights of its citizens intruding on his values. “In comparison to

the U.S., it's the fault of the Chinese government for pushing certain things [government policies] to the people. Also, the value of letting people do what they want in terms of their own life like something as basic as having children...to not have that value, I think it's something that it's for worse lacking."

The example of OS-13 was different from the other two because she was offended not by the Chinese government but her own government. The value of human rights was extremely important to this respondent. She would post her opinions on social media if she saw human rights violations such as the Palestine/Israel conflict and discrimination against Muslims. She stated, "I am very active on social media. If I see human rights or that kind of thing on social media, I would post about my opinions." She then gave two examples of what she would post on Facebook. One was the issue with Israel cutting off Palestinian water. The other one was the shootings of three Muslims in North Carolina. Because human rights were an important value to her, the information of human rights violation by the CIA was not received by her when she read the excerpt at the end of the interview (Excerpt C). In the article, China highlighted the hypocrisy of the U.S. government by examining the open records of CIA's interrogations of terrorists. She showed her support for China's accusation and shared how she was disgusted by these violations:

I think they are very violent; the way they go above using their power. I agree with the cartoon they made. I would probably post something that kind of would go with what they are saying. I think the U.S. having human rights issues is right...The interrogations, I always see that in movies, for example, the

waterboarding. They'll dump their faces in a bucket of water. I just see so many ways the U.S. interrogates in such a violent way.

The way she disliked the U.S.'s wrongdoings showed how she held to her values. Her response indicated a negative perception of the U.S. government and an appreciation of China. She clearly stated that her perception of China was raised after reading this excerpt, which became more positive. She shared the reasons behind her better perception of China "I think it does because I didn't know China's stance on the human rights with the U.S. To see that they don't agree with what the U.S. was doing, I think that's good because they are encouraging change for the better." This change in perception of two governments showed the importance of values in guiding how people respond to incompatible information and how that would affect their perception of the information object.

Identity Incorporation: Addressing RQ6

RQ6: How do the three facilitative factors induce message repositioning in identity negotiation process? Are there any other factors?

Interviews with students from Confucius Institute indicated that there were different ways of keeping their identities protected and intact in constructing a positive perception of China even though the country might not honor the same values as the students held. There is no doubt that China under a Communist regime can be seen negatively because of its authoritarian leadership, lack of freedom on the Internet, and lack of human rights from the perspective of citizens in democratic nations. It requires motivation and efforts to maintain one's identity when one's values are inconsistent with

China's. The following analysis identifies some prominent motivators and strategies in facilitating identity incorporation.

Identity incorporation motivators. The proposed framework identified three facilitators in the process of identity incorporation: matched needs, positive affect, and cognitive dissonance. This section of analysis first examines the actual functions of these facilitators in the respondents' experience, then it will discuss a possible new facilitator identified in the research.

Matched needs. The discussion in the literature review section indicated that matched needs between attitude and functions of objects could lead to successful persuasion. This match can be a utilitarian match which brings concrete rewards to individuals, or a match in values which brings intrinsic and intangible rewards (Katz, 1970). Confucius Institutes were designed to meet different types of needs of foreign publics regarding China and Chinese culture (Hanban, 2015).

Responses from the CI group reflected a positive perception of Confucius Institute as a result of matched needs. First, Confucius Institutes meet their concrete needs in learning the language and culture and offering opportunities to experience China with government scholarships and organized trips for students and educators. CI-4 started learning Chinese at a different university and decided to transfer here for better programs in both his major and Chinese. He stated, "Then I started taking courses here. I noticed much more improvement with the instructors here than I did in New Mexico. All the Confucius Institute teachers are from BLCU (Beijing Language and Culture University).

They developed a system. It seems successful. It helped me.” He specifically described his rewarding experience with the Institute:

Now when I go there, it’s like it has somebody that can help me, that’s always nice, I don’t have to try to do homework if I can’t do it, then I just give up. Like, I can always go to CI, and everyone there is willing to help me. It’s no problem. So without CI, I don’t think I can improve my Chinese at all. I could, but it would’ve been that much. And a lot of these people just became friends with. I enjoy hanging out with them now. I have a good time. They learn stuff like American culture, and I can just listen to Chinese in the room and try to understand; they are always doing something there for me to learn. I definitely go there for educational purposes. But most of these people become friends in there.

Both CI-4 and CI-11 were offered Chinese government scholarships through CI and studied abroad in China. CI-11 wanted to become a diplomat like her mother which was why she studied Chinese, a critical language to the U.S. government. Her stay in China helped her to advance her language skills and deepen her understanding of the culture which would help her to launch her future government career.

Second, the experience at Confucius Institutes brings intrinsic rewards to CI students as the Institutes meet their value expressive needs. CI respondents shared some values as a group. They are open-minded, adventurous, and appreciative of diversity in cultures and ways of life with an ethno-relative cultural perspective. Learning Chinese and venturing to China helped them to express their values in these aspects. CI-3 expressed a keen interest in learning about languages and cultures in her interview. She

showed a special appreciation of Chinese language and culture because they were distinctly different from Western languages and culture. As a German immigrant, she said that she shared the open mindedness characteristics of German culture. This open-mindedness was shown in the fact that many Germans visit China and Asia and show acceptance and respect for other cultures. Learning Chinese at the Institute and venturing to China several times helped her to express the value of open-mindedness and appreciation for diversity. CI-7 also held similar values partly due to her training as an anthropologist. Opportunities offered by the Institute met her value expressive needs.

Even though matched needs was a positive factor in establishing a favorable perception of the Institutes and China, the responses did not show that matched needs lead to identity incorporation directly. No message repositioning was directly induced by matched needs which might indicate an indirect role played by this factor. As far as the findings from this research can demonstrate, there is only a direct positive relationship between matched needs and a positive perception of CI and China.

Positive affect. Positive affect was identified by the research of Kelman (1975) and the pilot study as a prominent factor in facilitating an attitude change towards other countries and cultures. The proposed framework in this study listed it as one of the three facilitative factors in identity incorporation, and responses from participants supported this claim.

First, this research showed that CIs' positive affect towards China helped them to establish a positive perception of the country. It showed that this factor played an important role in affecting the nature of intercultural perception. In CI-7's interview, she

mentioned a very good friend of hers many times. This friend was a Chinese scientist who worked with her in the U.S. before and also invited her to China on an academic trip. She learned many things about China from this friend and her positive perception of China was formed partly due to this close friendship. The way her friend became a top Chinese scientist from a humble rural background kept the respondent positive about Chinese government and society. CI-11 also mentioned her best Chinese friend when she was recalling some good experience in China. This friend was her co-worker in China when she worked as an English teacher. She took the respondent home and gave her an authentic experience with her family in her hometown during Chinese New Year. CI-11 reported:

I went on vacations with her family over Chunjie [Chinese New Year]. I went to her hometown with her family outside of Sichun in a little town called Linshui. It was just amazing. It was really authentic experience. I learned a lot about Chinese culture. I did not understand a word her family were saying because they were speaking Sichuanhua [Sichuan dialect]. They were really nice to me. It was a great experience. I just spent a lot time with her. I lived with her for a while, with her family. A lot of my positive feelings towards China are really because of her.

Second, this study demonstrated that positive affect acted as a motivation factor in facilitating identity incorporation. CI-11 stated very clearly that she would not develop antagonistic feelings against China because of the friends she made in her trips to China. “Having lived in China for accumulatively for over a year, I can really never have antagonistic feelings towards China. I have a lot of friends there, had a really great

experience there. I really appreciate it the people I met there.” Another example from CI-7 illustrated how she was motivated by positive affect to defend China against a negative perception of the Chinese government. In the process of defending, she interpreted the negative perception in a way that did not affect her identity and values:

I was at a dinner a year ago. It was a bunch of friends and one of them was a Korean man. He asked me what I was working on. At that time, I was working on a project with my Chinese colleague. I was talking about it. And he just started saying that China is terrible to its people, the government is bad. I said the same thing that I said to you. Xiaoyan [her very good Chinese friend] would not be a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences were it not for communism, she and her husband both. They are children of farmers. They would be slaves. She might be dead by now. Say what you will, conditions for a lot of people are better than they were before.

Unlike OS participants, CI students usually have some Chinese friends, and some of them are really close ones. Having good relationships and friendships with Chinese nationals not only increased their knowledge and understanding of the country, but also helped to form a generally positive perception. This genuinely positive affect serves a motivational factor for individuals to process negative information which contradicts their values and identities.

Cognitive dissonance. The discussion on theories from Chapter II showed that several theories identified cognitive dissonance as an important factor which induced attitude change (Kahan, et.al., 2007; Kelman, 1958, 1961; Osgood & Tannenbaum,

1955). Even though attitude congruity theorists do not use the term cognitive dissonance, it is clear to see that attitude congruency is one type of cognitive dissonance. First, responses from participants demonstrated the existence of cognitive dissonance they had about China. While the general perception of China was positive for all of CI respondents, none of them was free from negativity and criticism. CI-1 had a great view of China; however, there were things that happened in China that bothered him. For instance, some women's rights activists were arrested by the authorities due to their efforts in LGBT and anti-sexual harassment campaigns. Also, as a religious person whose family practiced religion on a daily basis, he found how religious activities were curtailed upsetting. These criticisms over human rights violations were broadly shared among CI participants. CI-7 said that she had "two Chinas" in her head. One was a positive one created through exchange with her Chinese friends and teachers. The other one was a negative one influenced by the U.S. news media. And she found herself sometimes trying to reconcile those two perceptions.

Second, the function of cognitive dissonance in facilitating identity incorporation was also evident in the study. The facilitative function of cognitive dissonance was caused by discomfort that the respondents were experiencing. CI-11 expressed that she experienced discomfort when she encountered a biased perception of China from the media or her friends. When she shared her reaction to the news excerpt on China's military advancement, it took her a while to explain why this did not affect her positive perception of China. She used her knowledge on China's century of humiliation to justify its advancement. Finally, she settled on a claim that all governments did that, which

seemed to justify her positive perception despite the existence of negative information. Pollution was a main concern to CI-7 as she recalled her last day in Beijing. She recalled that the sky was grey with the sun only glowing, the air was hard to breathe. When she read the news excerpt about Beijing's smog, she showed a deep concern over people's health: "I think it's sad. I feel really bad for people with children. I can not even imagine what it is doing to the children to breathe this air when they are developing. I think China is going to have a very terrible problem with disease related to this pollution in the future." However, as she was talking, she was able to position the message in a way with a result of downplaying this negative perception by looking at pollution in U.S. history. She gave an example of the Ohio river that once caught on fire to show how the U.S. was terribly polluted. The final thought she came to was, "sometimes, things need to go bad to get better."

This discussion on cognitive dissonance demonstrated that it existed in CIs' perception of China and caused discomfort when they were forced to face the dissonance in their perceptions by being asked to read news stories about China. The discomfort and the need for a more integrated and consistent perception may have driven CI respondents into identity negotiation process.

Autonomous face. Despite of OSs' shallow and slightly negative perception of China, most of their perceptions did not get worse when receiving negative information about China. The analysis in the beginning of the chapter attributed this phenomenon to the third person effect which may indicate that maintaining an autonomous face is a motivating factor in processing incompatible information. Autonomous face as a

facework dimension refers to a desire to appear in control and independent (Lim & Bowers, 1991). It is understandable that participants' desire to display autonomous face when receiving challenging information to their perception might skew research findings. They might not want to appear susceptible to a single piece of information from the news excerpt. Therefore, they were forced to engage in identity incorporation when they justified their unchanged perception to the researcher. It is questionable that the effect from this forced identity incorporation will last when the pressure to justify disappears. Nevertheless, striving for autonomous face in a social setting may serve as a motivator in facilitating identity incorporation.

Nine out of fifteen OS participants insisted that their perception of China did not change after reading negatively implied information about the country. Judging from non-verbals and the way they justified their unchanged perception, it was suspected that autonomous face played an important role in the process. When OS-14 responded to the reading, she showed nervousness and worries about what she learned on China's investment in the U.S. energy. It took her a while to give an unassertive response that her perception remained the same even though her non-verbals suggested differently. During the interview, she said that she would not accept the news media without fact-checking the source which might contribute to her answer on perception not to show susceptibility. As a matter of fact, many participants said that critical thinking and analytical skills were their approaches towards the news media, which in a way demonstrated how they wanted to display their independence and in control of their minds. OS-11 displayed his autonomous face by showing that he could analyze the excerpt on a deeper level. He

pointed out the persuasive nature and biased stance of the news media and claimed that he could be free of its influence. He expressed that he did not change his perception on China because he was aware of the media's intentional persuasion. These two examples demonstrated how striving for autonomous face could serve as a facilitative factor in identity incorporation.

Identity incorporation conditional factors. Findings from this research identified two conditional factors which were not anticipated in the stage of designing the framework. These two conditional factors, perceptual complexity and perception strength, do not induce identity incorporation like the motivators discussed above; however, they still influence the process of identity incorporation from the beginning to the end. The following discussion will look at functions played by each factor respectively.

Perceptual complexity. This factor serves as a necessary prior condition for identity incorporation without which the process of identity protection is likely to happen instead. Discussion from the previous chapter indicated that the CIs had higher level of cognitive complexity in their perceptions of China than the OSs. Research by Nidorf and Crockett (1965) showed that people with high level of cognitive complexity could integrate conflict information about the other person better than people with less cognitive complexity. They stated,

Ss (subjects) high in cognitive complexity have more interpersonal traits available in their response repertoire than do Ss low in complexity. From the viewpoint of probability, then, we expect that the Ss with a high degree of complexity, in his

repertoire of interpersonal concepts, is likely to have traits that will rationalize conflict and enable him to reduce dissonance while retaining the initially conflicting traits in his description. (p. 168)

In a relevant research, Mayo and Crockett (1964) concluded that people with high complexity were able to use ambivalence to maintain a consistent perception of someone who was described in conflicting terms. These research indicated that cognitive complexity served as a necessary condition for people to maintain a consistent perception of some one despite conflicting information.

Cognitive complexity could serve a similar function in maintaining intercultural perceptions. One important step in the process of identity incorporation is the repositioning or reinterpretation of the incompatible message. This repositioning/reinterpretation step is hard to realize if one's perception is not complex enough for reinterpretation with a different angle. The more complex one's perception is, the easier one can find a different angle or a different dimension to process the information. This may be why identity incorporation seems to happen more often among CI participants than among OS participants because of their more complex perception of China. To OS, their simple and undifferentiated perception of China does not provide them with more room to maneuver their understanding of the message; therefore, a simple rejection of it is more likely to happen.

Perceptual strength. This factor has a great influence on how successful the process of identity incorporation will be. Some of the CI participants who held a strong positive perception of China were more likely to succeed in identity incorporation in

receiving incompatible information without harming their own values and identity than those with weak positive perception of China. It seems those who have weak perception are less motivated to protect the perception when facing incompatible information and threatened values and identity. Therefore, less effort will be given to ensure successful identity incorporation. After looking at these factors which affect the process of identity incorporation, the next section looks at four strategies employed by the respondents to realize the process.

Identity incorporation strategies. The following analysis highlights four ways of how people's identity may interact with their perceptions of China.

First, when some of their values are violated by news from China, they focus on other values and outweigh the violated ones in order to maintain both their identities and a positive perception of the country. When asked about why they are fond of China despite things they disapprove of, participants would emphasize how this fondness was based on some values they cherish. For example, CI-3 expressed her disapproval of China's political system. She said, "I would like China to become more democratic and give more freedom to the people. You know like we can do anything here, go on the Internet. I wish some things like that would also be possible for Chinese citizens." And she felt that this system does not honor some of her values such as freedom of expression. However, the way she handles this conflict is to emphasize her other values such as respect for culture and people. She said, "I always try to separate it [people from government]. You can't say, don't go to this country because of their political system.

People are people, they are just like us. They want to be friends with us, and they are humans.”

Second, participants try to reduce cognitive dissonance by changing other people’s minds when they experience different opinions about China between them and their friends. Confucius Institute students usually understand China much better than their friends or family members who have no previous experience of the country. They may come across different opinions when they communicate on the topic of China and that may cause these participants discomfort when they feel a fondness for China that is not shared between them and others. One way to reduce this discomfort is to change the others’ opinion so that their own opinions and identities are protected. CI-3 said;

I try to tell them to be more open-minded. I say, just because the political system is not like ours, you shouldn’t avoid travelling there and make friends with Chinese. There are lots of opportunities and there are tons of Chinese people living in this country. So that would be the first step, reach out to them, try to talk to them, learn how they feel, what they have to say. Then you’ll realize, on a human basis, we are all on the same level. ...I feel like I tend to be on the side for China, because I know the other side too. I try to defend the Chinese.

A third way to incorporate negative information into one’s positive perception without damaging the identity is to look at it from a different angle or view it from a different perspective. For example, CI-1 tried to look at China in a historical perspective so that its negative aspects could be “forgiven.” He said, “I don’t think it’s really fair that America expects China to act the way it acts now because China is still developing. And

America went through a very long process of development like slavery, discrimination, then pollution, all the stuff that China goes through today. But America's kind of forgotten that part of its past and expects China to automatically jump to the next level. And I don't think it's fair for them." When he looks at China this way, he does not need to be defensive of his values being violated by China because China is "forgiven." His favorable perception of the country is not harmed and his values and identities remain intact.

The fourth way to deal with incompatible negative information is to use information gathered from interpersonal communication to outweigh the information from the general media. Therefore, even though the information from media is possibly negative in nature and incompatible with the students' favorable perception of China, it has minimal impact on the perception and maintaining their identities because it is deemed not as important as information from personal channels. CI-7 said:

Probably the most information I've received about China during my life has been from American news sources. But the information that is more important to me, in terms of just people and culture has come from my friends and colleagues...I think the American news focuses on negatives of course. They focus on negatives on ourselves. But also through my friends, I came to understand how people make things work even under completely different circumstances than I live in. For example, we've always been taught when we grew up that communism is bad, it's bad for people, it's bad for your country, it can't last. But, one of my dear friends, she is at the Chinese Science of Academy. She is the daughter of a farmer. She is a

Ph.D., and a nice position, works hard. You know, that would never have happened before communism. Women, in particular [can move up]. I see this again and again.

It is interesting to see the power of interpersonal experience in the example. The participant's personal story of her friend helped to form her own view on communist regime and made her view persistent when confronting negative information about the regime from the news media.

Rethinking the framework. Findings from this study largely supported what was depicted in the framework regarding identity incorporation. Two factors, positive affect and cognitive dissonance, played a facilitative role in initiating identity incorporation. The other factor matched needs did not act as a primary facilitator but as a secondary factor. Its influence was limited within establishing a positive perception of the country which could influence the process of identity incorporation afterwards. Two conditional factors were also identified in the process. Perceptual complexity serves as a prior condition for engaging identity incorporation, whereas perception strength affects the possibility of successful incorporation. There are still four identity incorporation strategies reflected in the responses which are somewhat different from what was proposed in the theoretical discussion chapter.

Identity Incorporation (Revised)

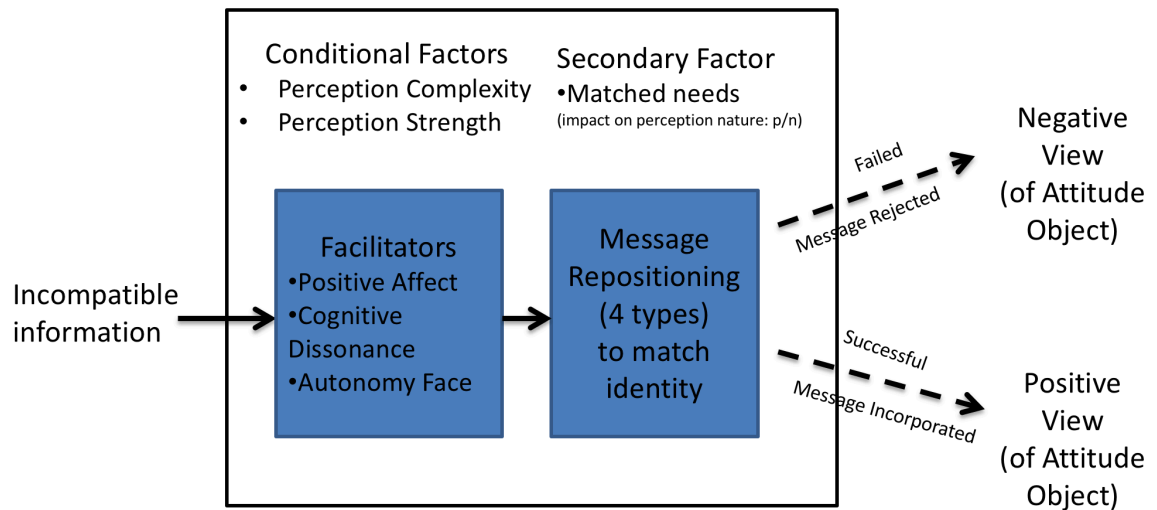


Figure 6. Revised identity incorporation framework.

Other than identity incorporation, the use of worldviews and values was rather limited compared to what was first proposed in the framework. The original framework adopted Douglas and Wildavsky's group-grid topology of cultural worldviews used in Kahan and Braman's (2006) research. The researcher did not anticipate that differences in issues could play a significant role when interacting with incoming information. Kahan's cultural cognition theory deals with how people perceive social issues, such as gun control and climate change. These are single issues compared to perceptions of a culture or country which can be more complex. People with a certain type of worldview may react to climate change in a certain way; however, they may not perceive a country in one way because a country or culture has many aspects, such as government, culture, people, and places. Therefore, Douglas and Wildavsky's group-grid topology of cultural

worldviews could not predict how people with one of the four worldviews perceive China because they may react to information about different aspects of China differently.

Douglas and Wildavsky's group-grid topology of cultural worldviews is no longer useful or suitable to be included in the proposed framework. Unfortunately, there is no better topology of worldviews or values to replace it at this point which may rely on future research.

The Use of Theories in Understanding Perceptual Change

The theoretic foundation for this study is based on two major concepts, attitude congruence and cultural cognition. The proposed framework which was based on these two concepts guided this research and analysis. In this section, the researcher will discuss these theoretical elements, attitude congruence and cultural cognition, in terms of their assistance to this research. This section will also examine how this research and the proposed framework contributes to the development of theories in the communication field.

First, two important theories on attitude congruence, Kelman's (1958) framework of three processes and Osgood and Tannenbaum's (1955) attitude congruency theory, both helped the researcher to understand the phenomenon in different aspects. Kelman's theory points out that attitude change brought by the process of internalization is due to intrinsic rewards and congruency to one's value systems. This theory helped to explain why Confucius Institutes experience could have great impact on people's perceptual change on China. It was also helpful to use this theory because it was mainly applied in the same intercultural settings. Kelman's research in 1961 and 1975 applied his

framework in analyzing intercultural encounters, and findings from these research helped to analyze findings from this study. Even though this framework identified these processes leading to attitude change and how they were different, it did not explain why some factors could trigger a certain process and not the other one.

Osgood and Tannenbaum's (1955) attitude congruency theory indicated that perceived value congruency contributed to a positive perception of a certain country or culture, and striving for attitude congruency acted as an incentive to introduce attitude change. The concept of perceived value congruency helped to form the identity affirmation step in the proposed framework. The desire for attitude congruency was understood as cognitive dissonance which served as an incentive to introduce identity negotiation in the proposed framework. This theory helped to predict attitude change by using attitude congruency in past research; however, it did not explain how this change was facilitated and realized.

Second, Kahan's (2006, 2007) cultural cognitive theory helped to form the proposed framework and guided the analysis process of this research. This theory indicates that people attach meanings to their understanding of the world through their cultural filters. The goal of interpretation according to cultural filters is to have a consistent view on issues with their own worldviews and group identity. This theory explains that more information on certain issue does not necessarily change people's opinion because of their cultural identities. In this study, this theory helped to explain how people managed to maintain a consistent perception of China despite incompatible information. The focus of this theory is not necessarily how people change their

perceptions, but how cultural identities function in interpreting information on different issues. Therefore, it could not explain why people's perceptions of China were elevated or became worse in this study. It simply suggests that work should be done on message, not on recipients. Kahan's theory was largely used in risk communication and focused on single issues such as climate change or gun control. Because perception of a country is much more complicated than single issues, the use of this theory to understand this complex intercultural phenomenon is limited.

Third, the proposed framework of identity negotiation deals with a more complex perception (like the perception of a country) than single issues and perceptual change which is not addressed by Kahan's cultural cognitive theory. It is able to explain how people deal with compatible and incompatible information regarding their identities and values and how the results impact their held perceptions. It also points out what motivates people to incorporate incompatible information to maintain or raise their previously held perceptions. This framework showed its effectiveness in understanding attitudes and perceptions in intercultural settings. Potentially, this framework could be used in other settings as well. For instance, this framework can be applied to examine the perception of a person and information about this person which is incompatible with the recipient's identity and values. It is yet unclear how these motivational factors in the process of identity incorporation would function as well in other settings, and whether there are other factors to be revealed.

The Importance of Public Diplomacy

The importance of public diplomacy was thoroughly shown in this study on Confucius Institutes. This importance was not only pointed out by the CI students, but also was indicated in the responses from OS group. This section of discussion will look at the importance of public diplomacy in forming a positive perception of China in three ways: hypothetically, theoretically, and empirically.

First, most of OS participants, despite of their limited contact with Chinese nationals, argued that one of the best ways for foreign publics to view China positively was to increase public diplomacy activities. OS-10 suggested that public diplomacy was a key in fostering true understanding: “I think Chinese students coming over here and Americans going over to China is actually a very good way. It’s like a one-on-one grassroots thing...The best way to learn about China is talking to people from China. Make friends with them, and possibly go to China, go on tours, meet the locals.” OS-15 shared a similar thought: “I feel like going to any country opens your eyes and makes you a better person. You will see how people live and how the media portrays them. I think the media shows you what they want to show you. But when you go there, you will see it all.”

Some OS respondents had limited contact with Chinese individuals and the contact positively impacted how they look at China. OS-5 claimed that talking to a Chinese friend did not necessarily change his perception for better or worse, but made him interested in China in general and he really wanted to visit China to experience it himself. Some students mentioned that their interaction with Chinese friends and

acquaintances provided them with a different view on the country compared to the media. OS-6 shared that she was able to learn things from her Chinese friends and classmates which were not typically portrayed in the news media. OS-10 knew a few Chinese friends and classmates and admitted that interacting with them enabled him to receive news about China critically. He said, “I catch myself because sometimes I am kind of scared of hearing about China doing things in the news. Then I remember that the people I met are Chinese. They are good people. They must come from good home, a good society. That makes me think differently.” When he was responding to his reading about China’s military advancement, the interpersonal communication he had with Chinese friends enabled him to process the information more critically than people without these interactions. “Yes, that would make me think it’s scary. But think about the people I met and my current relationship with Chinese people, not so much....I would be very afraid if I do not have these friends.”

Second, the discussion on identity incorporation and its facilitating factors indicated the importance of public diplomacy. Two conditional factors, perceptual complexity and strengths, may be encouraged by multiple channels. One of the most important sources which contribute to a complex and strong perception is interpersonal communication. Interactions offered by public diplomacy can also positively impact two facilitative factors, positive affect and cognitive dissonance. This impact then can translate into motivational force to drive identity incorporation. Outcomes of successful identity incorporation will enhance one’s positive perception of the country.

Third, experiences from CI participants demonstrated the importance of public diplomacy in fostering a positive image of China. According to Kelman (1975), a real change in attitude toward a country usually comes out of a real internalization of new information about the country. He concluded in his research that the joint occurrence of friendly behavior toward the other was what could facilitate a real internalization which lead to appreciation for each other's cultures. This claim was supported by this research as well. A genuine contact in joint occurrence usually may produces friendship and positive affect which then can facilitate a real internalization and an attitude change for the better. CI respondents shared many activities of this type in their responses.

First, there are government scholarships to study in China offered through Confucius Institutes. Participants were offered opportunities to study in Chinese universities for one or two semesters. They were able to interact with Chinese people on a daily basis in their home stay, dormitory, classroom, campus, and society. Many of them developed close relationships with their Chinese counterparts and were able to see China with their own eyes.

Second, the Confucius Institute sponsored educational and cultural trips. Typical participants in these trips are students and educators. CI respondents who went on these trips mentioned that they were involved in many cultural and educational activities with local schools and Institutes. Therefore, they were able to have meaningful exchange with people and also saw China in their own eyes.

Third, the Confucius Institute sponsored cultural outreach programs. Many mentioned that CI tried its best in its cultural programs. These programs included culture

workshops, language buddies, and cultural celebrations. CI respondents were able to learn Chinese culture from the natives and meet Chinese students at these events.

Fourth, regarding Chinese language programs. CI participants shared that they were able to see China through their teachers' views on language and culture. This tended to have greater impact on their perception if CI students had not been to China themselves.

Through these four main programs, CI students were able to form a more complex and positive perception of China than OS because they were given opportunities for positive and genuine interactions with Chinese nationals. This was why Confucius Institutes were able to have a greater impact on a real attitude change towards China than the media or simply sightseeing.

Limitations of Confucius Institutes

It is important to acknowledge Confucius Institutes' positive impact on China's image overseas. However, it is also important to see its limitations as a form of public diplomacy. First, CI has limited influence on general public in the United States. Even though classes and cultural programs offered by Confucius Institutes are open to general public, only a small number of people would join CI classes and other programs. From this research, it seems that it may also have limited influence on college students. The Confucius Institute in this research only has less than 100 students in a university with a student population over 30,000. One should not overestimate CIs' role in fostering a positive image among the American population.

Second, even though Confucius Institute has been expanding since it was introduced in 2004, it has met resistance and drawbacks especially from the Western countries. Two university in the U.S., University of Chicago and Pennsylvania State University, decided to end their partnership with Hanban and closed their Confucius Institute respectively. Pennsylvania State University attributed the closure to incompatible goals between Hanban and the university (Inside higher ED, 2014). The American Association of University Professors issued a statement in 2014 urging universities to renegotiate their contracts to ensure academic freedom and integrity (AAUP, 2014). These examples indicate that it is very likely for China to experience more resistance in using these Institutes as a tool in public diplomacy.

CHAPTER VI: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

Four main limitations are exposed through this study on perception and identity. The first limitation lay in the Chinese background of the researcher, which might introduce biases in the interview process and interpretation stage. During interviews, it might have elicited inaccurate responses and suppressed some true opinions due to my background. During the analysis stage, my background as a Chinese might have hindered my ability to interpret responses with objectivity and neutrality.

A second limitation of this study lay in the scope of this research. This study only examined one Confucius Institute and the number of CI participants were very limited. There are hundreds of these Institutes around the world. Results and findings from a single Institute may have limited representation for all CI endeavors. Future research should be conducted at multiple sites to produce a better representation.

A third limitation lay in the tools used in this research. Qualitative tools, interviews, observations, and analysis on documents, were used to provide rich descriptions for analysis to understand this phenomenon. This descriptive data allowed the researcher to understand theoretical frameworks in real life contexts, and responses and opinions shared by the participants offered important insights as to understand and modify the proposed framework. However, these qualitative tools do have their

limitations in terms of producing theoretical conclusions with great validity. Therefore, the researcher could only speculate about how the mechanism of identity negotiation works. In the next section, the researcher will point out how future research could use different tools to reduce speculations.

The last limitation could be seen in lack of systematic understanding functions of worldviews and values in the phenomenon. As mentioned in previous discussions on rethinking the framework, the functions of worldviews and values in the framework was limited to determining whether incoming message is compatible with them or not. The framework could not really use Kahan and Braman's (2006) adoption of Douglas and Wildavsky's group-grid topology of cultural worldviews because their theory mainly dealt with single societal issues. For example, egalitarians and solidarists (communitarian) who are naturally sensitive to environment risk will react positively to climate change issue. However, because perception of a culture is more complex than a single issue, it is hard to predict how egalitarians or solidarists react to information about China. This research was not able to adopt a systematic understanding or topology of worldviews and values which could interact with incoming information about China in a predictable way.

Future Research

Despite the limitations, this study explored an important concept, perception and its interplay with identity, in a public diplomacy setting. Future studies can build on the current study with two recommendations.

The first recommendation is to have collaboration with the international relations field. Because public diplomacy is an overlapping area between IR and PR, it only makes sense that a collaboration between the two fields can advance our knowledge in this area. Even if the researcher attempted to build this research on both traditions and provide two perspectives to explore the issue, true experts from IR field will contribute significantly to refine the approach and produce substantial results.

The second recommendation is to employ a quantitative method or mixed methods in future research. Interview responses provide essential feedback to confirm and refine the proposed identity negotiation framework. To understand the validity of this framework requires a strong support from data analysis. Future studies may design instruments to test the three aspects of identity negotiation and how they affect people's reception of the incoming information and perception of the information object. The basic design could start with the use of news excerpts to elicit responses. Instead of using open-ended questions, future research could use Likert scale questions or semantic differential scale questions to measure some relevant variables such as cognitive complexity, cognitive dissonance, positive affect, and perceptual change.

Research Summary

Public diplomacy is an exciting field studied by both strategic communication and international relations scholars. With more than 500 Institutes established in 134 countries, the Confucius Institute project (CI) has become one of the largest public diplomacy efforts in recent history. Unlike the fact that the past literature mainly focused on the international relations aspect of this project, this dissertation proposed an identity-

centered framework based on a discussion of attitude congruency and cultural cognition to understand the communication aspect of the CI project. The framework was to make sense of factors which motivated people to interpret an incompatible message in a way that could no longer threaten their cultural identities.

This research compared in-depth interviews with CI participants to interviews with other students to explore how interpersonal relationships affect people's perception of China. Results from this research show that CIs' perceptions of China were different from those of other students in nature, strength, and complexity. Most aspects of the proposed framework were supported such as identity protection and affirmation. The facilitative functions of positive affect, cognitive dissonance, and maintaining autonomous face in the process of identity incorporation were identified as possible incentives which motivate people to make efforts in fitting incompatible message into their worldviews and identities. The analysis also identified two additional factors, the complexity or sophistication of participants' perceptions and their attitudinal strength, which may provide necessary conditions for identity incorporation. Successful identity incorporation reduces the negative impact of the message on one's previously held perception. The typical outcome for CIs is an unchanged perception of China despite negative information consumption about the country. This study may contribute to the field of public diplomacy by showing how people's perceptions are affected by identity negotiation processes when reacting to incompatible information. Limitations of this study and thoughts on future research are described.

As the researcher was doing this research, pondering upon Confucius Institutes and public diplomacy, he often recalled a poem by a great *Tang* poet *Du Fu*. The poem is called “Pleasant Rain on a Spring Night.” The first two verses read, “the rain falls down with the spring breeze on a night, and silently nurtures everything in the season.” Public diplomacy in a way can be compared to a pleasant rain on a spring night. Even though it causes little obvious change, the plants are nurtured to grow and blossom sooner or later. Every intercultural interaction is like a raindrop, small but significant. To understand public diplomacy, to understand the effects of Confucius Institute, it is futile not to focus on those raindrops. Just like spring rain, a country should not expect to see changes right away in implementing public diplomacy. Instead, it should slowly nurture a healthy and organic relationship with foreign nationals which is rewarding in the long run. When there is a flowering of positive perception blooming, it is the result of many small but significant raindrops of interaction.

APPENDIX: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identity Negotiation and Perceptual Change: Examining the Confucius Institute's Effects on Perceptions of China

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand the use of intercultural education programs as a means of public diplomacy and its effects on perception of China. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do a face-to-face interview and it takes about 50-60 minutes to complete. This interview will be audio recorded with your permission. You may refuse to be audio recorded.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in Communication.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely for 5 years and only the researchers will have access to the

records. You will be identified by pseudonyms. All the research materials will be destroyed after the 5-year period. Research materials stored in computer will be completely deleted, and the paper materials will be destroyed with paper shredder. They will not be used for future research purposes.

PARTICIPATION

You need to be 18 or older to participate. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

All the participants will receive a \$10 gift card as a compensation for their time.

COMM100/101 participants, in addition, will receive 1 course credit. If any COMM 100/101 students wish not to participate in this study, there are many other options for them to earn their course credit.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Dr. Katherine Rowan and Yuxiang Du of Communication Department at George Mason University. They may be reached at krowan@gmu.edu or ydu4@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

Please check one of the following responses:

____ I understand I will be audio recorded during my interview and agree to have my interview recorded.

____ I do not wish to be audio recorded during my interview.

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

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BIOGRAPHY

Yuxiang Du received his Bachelor of Arts in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language from Beijing Language and Culture University in 2002. He was employed as a teacher in China for four years and received his Master of Arts in Communication from Liberty University in 2011. He then received his Doctor of Philosophy in Communication from George Mason University in 2016.