

The Model of Cultural Communication in Confucius Institutes in Thailand

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Abstract

This paper discusses the current situation and the model of the Chinese cultural communication of the Confucius Institutes in Thailand, with an aim to sort out and analyze the current problems. Five aspects of cultural communication of Confucius Institutes in Thailand are analyzed using Lasswell's (1948) 5W model of communication. These five aspects are: communicators, audience, contents, media and effects, which correspond to “who”, “to whom”, “say what”, “through which channel” and “with what effects” of the 5W model respectively. Through analysis, the communicators are considered to be the most important factors affecting the effects of the cultural communication. As a result, modules of human resource management are used to analyze and discuss the four aspects of communicators: planning, recruitment, selection and professional development, in order to establish causes of problems associated with cultural communication. This paper established that *Big Data* and *Internet of Things (IoT)* should be used in the field of cultural communication of Confucius Institutes in Thailand, to solve the existing problems and improve the management efficiency.

Keywords: Confucius Institutes in Thailand, cultural communication, communicators, 5W model, human resource management

1. Introduction

With the increasing national strength of China, more and more foreigners are learning Chinese language and culture. Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (2019) points out that since 2003, the number of Chinese teachers sent to Thailand has reached 17,169, covering more than 1,000 universities, secondary and primary schools in 73 provinces in Thailand. Among many Chinese language institutions, the Confucius Institutes are the largest authorities, which are dedicated to meeting the needs of people from all over the world for Chinese language learning, enhancing the understanding of Chinese language and culture among others. According to the latest data from the official website of the Confucius Institutes, the number of Chinese learners in Thailand is increasing year by year and there are currently 134 higher education institutions and 16 Confucius Institutes in Thailand.

Among Confucius Institutes in Bangkok, which provide services of Chinese language and culture. According to the *Constitution and the By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes*, Hanban, the headquarters of Confucius Institutes, is a non-profit educational organization, which is affiliated to the Ministry of Education of China. The Confucius Institutes have two major functions: teaching Chinese language and spreading Chinese culture. The world's first Confucius Institute was established in 2004, and according to statistics released by the official

website of the Confucius Institute, as of September 30, 2019, there were 535 Confucius Institutes all over the world. The selection and hiring of teachers at Confucius Institutes around the world follows the same standardized model, and their teachers have two-work directions, namely: teaching Chinese language and propagating Chinese culture.

This paper focuses on the cultural communication aspect, which can also be regarded as cultural transmission, cultural dissemination or cultural introduction. This is because most of the existing articles about Confucius Institutes focus on the Chinese language teaching, with relatively few articles on cultural communication. In addition, there is a lack of articles on the topic of Chinese cultural communication of Confucius Institutes in Thailand.

Therefore, this paper targets the cultural communication of the Confucius Institutes in Thailand and explores the existing problems by analyzing their cultural communication model. The purposes are to provide a reference for the Confucius Institutes and their teachers in Thailand and to enable the Confucius Institutes in Thailand to achieve better results in Chinese cultural communication. Lasswell's (1948) 5W model of communication is used to analyze the status of cultural communication in the Confucius Institutes in Thailand with an aim of establishing the existing problems. Modules of human resource management are used to further analyze the main aspect of the communicators/teachers.

2. The Model of Cultural Communication

Harold Lasswell (1902-1977), a political scientist and a scholar in the United States, in his paper "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society", first proposed the process of constituting communication in 1948, and arranged them in a certain structural order, forming a process mode that was later called "5 W model". These five Ws are the first letters of five interrogative pronouns in English, namely: Who, to Whom, say What, through Which channel and with What effects. In this paper, these five W's respectively correspond to communicators, audience, contents, media and the effects of cultural communication in Confucius Institutes in Thailand.

2.1 Communicators

Cultural communicators are the answers to the question "Who" in 5 W model. In the cultural communication of the Confucius Institutes, the communicators are divided into two categories, one is the deans and the other is the teachers. The deans include a Chinese dean and a foreign local dean. Since the Confucius Institutes adopt the mode of Sino-foreign university cooperation management as per the headquarters regulations, that is, a Chinese university cooperates with a foreign university to establish a Confucius Institute in this local university, there is therefore need for the two deans here to perform managerial work. Logically, the deans should be the communicators, but Ye (2010) points out that the deans are mainly busy with administration and do not have much energy for cultural communication work. Consequently, the main body of cultural communicators is therefore the teachers.

The teachers of the Confucius Institutes who are responsible for cultural communication consist of Chinese university teachers, undergraduates and postgraduates from China. With regard to teachers, Ye (2010) points out that the literacy of teachers is not enough to meet the local students' understanding of the core values of Chinese culture, and the turnover of teachers is high. Similarly, Ye (2014) indicates that there is a lack of professional team for cultural propagation. Du (2015) argues that it is necessary to improve the quality of the communicators and to stabilize the team, and strengthen the construction of the local teachers. On the other hand, Xie (2016) indicates that most of the Chinese teachers, after one year of working, return to China for work or study, as a result, the learners need to re-familiarize with the new teachers. The proficiency of teachers needs to be improved, yet the local teachers are insufficient. In addition, Li (2019) points out that language barriers have become a major obstacle to Chinese language learning. The Chinese teachers are basically using English as the mode of instruction, lacking teachers who are fluent in Thai.

From the above discussion, it is evident the main problems with communicators/teachers are: (1) the Chinese cultural reserves of teachers are not enough; (2) the turnover rate of teachers is high; (3) most of teachers do not have the ability to communicate in Thai; and (4) local teachers/natives are insufficient. These problems have not been solved for many years, 2010 through 2019, and it is therefore necessary to be studied and solved.

2.2 Audience

Audience is the answer to the question “to Whom” in 5W model. Registered university students and community members are the main audience of cultural communication in Confucius Institutes in Thailand.

Many Confucius Institutes in Thailand, such as the ones at Chulalongkorn University and Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University have cultural programs and activities for community members, which includes immigration officials, businessmen, among others. Xie (2016) indicates that in 2015, there were 1.9 million registered students from the Confucius Institutes worldwide, including 121,454 in Thailand, accounting for 6.4% of the world total registered number. Out of the 121,454, registered university students accounted for 62%, business service personnel accounted for 20%, and administrative agencies accounted for 14%.

This indicates that students are the main body of the audience, but other groups also play important roles. The spread of Chinese culture to the community not only expands its influence, but also the effects of interpersonal communication. The effects of communication will be better than just targeting college students. The audience comes from multiple areas of society. The diversity and breadth of the audience contributes to the spread of Chinese culture.

2.3 Contents

Cultural communication contents are the answers to the question “say What” in 5W model. The most representative Chinese cultural contents of Confucius Institutes cultural communication in Thailand is presented in four aspects: (1) official Chinese language competitions; (2) cultural activities; (3) cultural classes; and (4) Chinese festivals celebrations.

Competitions include Chinese Bridge and other forms hosted by each Confucius Institute. According to Wang (2015), Mahasarakham University organized the Chinese characters dictation competition that attracted 5 universities including Chiang Mai University and 30 middle schools to participate in 8 provinces in that year. Cultural activities, on the other hand, include various shows and programs. Liu (2016) indicates that Prince of Songkla University had organized cultural experience activities, including singing and dancing in that year. In fact, in addition to the above features, according to Confucius Institute Headquarters’ recommendation, there are cultural classes and Chinese festivals celebrations, which are the most common. The most recommended cultural projects by the headquarters are martial arts, paper cutting and calligraphy. In addition, the performances represented by the Spring Festival also produced a good response.

However, Feng (2014) indicates that the contents of cultural communication are based on some basic cultural experience courses, which hardly touch the deep meaning of the culture. On the other hand, Du (2015) argues that the spread of cultural connotations is not enough. There is a lack of the spread of modern popular culture. In addition, Xie (2016) put forward that Cultural activities pay too much attention to form, and only stays on the surface of the material culture, and lack understanding of the spiritual culture.

This paper, from these and more literature, argues that the contents of the cultural communication are superficial and monotonous, because the contents are mainly based on shallow cultural symbols and lack of excavation of Chinese cultural connotations. In addition, it pays more attention to traditional culture and relatively ignores modern culture.

2.4 Media

Media is related to the question “through Which channel” in 5W model. The Chinese culture mainly spreads through various cultural activities organized by the Confucius Institutes in Thailand, followed by an auxiliary cultural curriculum.

The dissemination tools are mainly books and video materials donated by the headquarters and various equipment of the university where the Confucius Institute is located. Due to the differences in regional development and the different positioning of the Confucius Institutes, their media are also different. For example, in terms of media for cultural communication, the Confucius Institute at Chulalongkorn University has the support from the Thai royal family, television and online media, which other universities do not have. Ye (2014) points out that in 2015, Kasetsart University held six celebrations at the Confucius Institute,

with 12,750 participants, 8 lectures, and 14 performances. On the other hand, Du (2015) argues that hardware devices need to be improved. In terms of the mass media with news media and websites, Xie (2016) mentions that the Confucius Institutes in Thailand use the Internet but lack integration with new media. For example, *We Chat* usage is low, and the page in Thai is missing.

Besides, there is another dilemma in reality: large-scale events have a large impact, but the investment is large and the frequency is low, while small classroom activities have a small scope but lack of influence. It seems that there is no universality in this aspect since each Confucius Institute has different situations which can influence the type of media. However, it is certain that in order to adapt to the development of the times, cutting-edge technologies such as high-tech and 5G networks will definitely help the cultural dissemination of the Confucius Institutes, and this is also a development trend. Integrating multiple media can increase effectiveness and efficiency and exceed expectations.

2.5 Effects

Effects are related to the question “with What effects” in 5W model. It is the feedback and evaluation of the cultural communication achievements. The problems in this regard are twofold. The first is problems with the evaluation mechanism. The effectiveness of the cultural communication requires a scientific and reliable evaluation system. The effects of the cultural communication are abstract. To a certain extent, it is similar to satisfaction, so it may produce different results for different evaluations. To receive a feasible evaluation, the dimensions of evaluation, objects and scales should all be considered. In fact, the Confucius Institutes currently lack a scientific evaluation mechanism. Ye (2010) indicates that unlike exams, the effects of the cultural communication are difficult to be quantified, and there are currently no suitable standards.

The second problem is the defects in the current model, uneasy to correct. From a rational point of view, the Confucius Institutes are located in different regions of the world, and the headquarters is located in Beijing, China. Geographical and information statistical reasons prevent the verification and collection of assessment data. The headquarters needs relevant materials and basis to evaluate the cultural communication effects of the Confucius Institutes, but these data and materials are all from the evaluated Confucius Institutes. Therefore, the reliability of these materials and data is difficult to guarantee. Feng (2014) indicates that at present, photos, news and reports of cultural events are sent to the headquarters as the main basis for the assessment. Li (2017) also puts forward that the feedback on the cultural communication of the Confucius Institutes lacks informative data, and the news and reports are mostly self-proclaimed. Its model is: do cultural activities, take photos, and then write reports.

In relation to effects, lack of evaluation and feedback mechanisms, lack of standardized and scientific evaluation system, insufficiency in the supervision and feedback system poses the major challenge. To sum up, the problems are mainly focused on the

communicators, contents and effects, namely, the teachers, contents and reliable evaluation mechanism, of which the communicators are the most important factors because they are the guiders. Therefore, in order to understand the causes of the problems, it is necessary to analyze the employment and organization of the teachers of the Confucius Institutes.

3. The Employment and Organization of Teachers

As discussed above, the key to the problems of the cultural communication in Confucius Institutes in Thailand is that the communicators/teachers do not meet the requirements very well. Therefore, the employment and organization models of teachers and their shortcomings are worth to be discussed in depth.

In this paper, four factors from the modules of human resource management theory are used to analyze the selection and training mechanisms of the Confucius Institutes in Thailand to find out the reasons that generated the problems above. These modules of human resource management include: human resource planning, recruitment, selection, professional development, performance appraisal, and compensation. Since the first four factors are closely related to the selection and training of teachers, whereas the latter two factors emphasize the evaluation and the reward, therefore, only the first four factors will be discussed in this article.

3.1 Human resource planning

The Confucius Institute Headquarters, Hanban, is located in Beijing, China, and is under the direct control of the Ministry of Education of China. The headquarters is responsible for the management of more than 500 Confucius Institutes worldwide. The model of operation used by Confucius Institutes is Sino-foreign cooperation, which is implemented between the Confucius Institutes at the universities abroad and universities in China. The Confucius Institutes abroad applies to the headquarters according to their own needs, and then the headquarters plans the quota and time for dispatching teachers, and informs the cooperative universities in China of relevant requirements, these universities in China will then formulate plans to select and assign teachers.

The planning is also related to the whole selection process, which lasts for six months in accordance to the regulations of the headquarters. Its unified basic structure is that candidates can sign up and participate in university selection interviews. Those who qualify proceed to the second round of interviews and other assessments at the test sites designated by the headquarters. Those who qualify will then participate in the training organized by the headquarters at the designated training base. Finalists are then eligible for assignment. Such plans and procedures are the standardized design and implementation methods of the Confucius Institute headquarters.

3.2 Recruitment

The targets of recruitment are the university teachers and graduate students who will act as main communicators of the cultural communication. The Confucius Institutes have two

functions: teaching Chinese and cultural communication. However, there is only one selection and assignment process. In other words, the Confucius Institute does not have a specialized recruitment and selection plan designed to select cultural communicators. Therefore, all the teachers shoulder the two missions of teaching Chinese and spreading culture. According to the regulations of the Confucius Institute, the two are equally important. This has caused problems such as the professionalism of cultural communication teams. In order to achieve the expected results of cultural communication, the communicator must have two characteristics. One is that the communicator should have considerable cultural reserve, and the other is that the communicator should have communication skills. However, these two characteristics have never been examined during the recruitment and selection process of the Confucius Institute.

In addition, in terms of educational background, the majority of communicators are with Chinese language major, instead of culture-related or communication professionals. Wang (2016) established that 74% of Chinese language teachers at Confucius Institutes at four Thai universities, including Chulalongkorn University are Chinese language majors, 8% are foreign language majors, and 6% are education majors. The function and purpose of the Confucius Institute are teaching Chinese language and cultural dissemination, but the teachers selected are more focused on the former, which has led to the problem of insufficient professionalization of the cultural dissemination team. Furthermore, unreasonable distribution of teachers in different professions is another issue.

This is reflected in the fact that teachers with Thai language communication skills are sent to non-Thai countries, while teachers sent to Thailand do not have Thai language communication skills. This further creates difficulties for in-depth interpretation of cultural contents. Cao (2013) indicates that all three postgraduate teachers sent to Confucius Institute at Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University cannot speak Thai at all. Therefore, the reasonable allocation and deployment of teacher resources need to be paid enough attention.

3.3 Selection

Selection is carried out through assessment. This link can be divided into two parts, universities' interview and selection and headquarters' interview and selection. These two rounds of assessment and selection have procedurally prevented malpractices in favor of universities. However, the effect of cultural communication fundamentally depends on people. If there is something unreasonable in the selection process, then the selected communicators will not meet the actual needs, even if the procedure is fair and just. Therefore, the key to selection is not only the fairness of the process, but also the practicality of the selection content.

Interviews and assessment at individual university depend on the university itself. The selection and assessment organized by the headquarters is uniform and standardized. Experts and scholars in related fields form a jury to evaluate the candidates. The assessment consists of three sessions: Chinese interview, English interview and psychological test.

The specific contents of the assessment include: (1) Chinese teaching ability; (2) adaptability to the foreign life; (3) English communication skills; (4) psychological test; and (5) Chinese cultural talents. Candidates will be asked to teach a demonstration lesson, which is randomly assigned by the examiners. Several questions related to Chinese teaching and linguistics will be discussed. The motivation and willingness of candidates to participate in interviews will also be asked.

In addition, some cases, namely how to deal with conflicts caused by cultural differences, will also be asked to test the candidates' adaptability to the foreign life. In English interviews, foreign examiners will communicate with Chinese candidates in English on certain topics. Candidates must not only pass the above tests, but also complete a psychological test questionnaire to ensure that candidates who pass the tests have a healthy psychology and good psychological quality to handle emergencies.

In the test of Chinese cultural talent, candidates are only required to demonstrate a skill related to Chinese culture, e.g. Chinese knots weaving or traditional water-ink painting, yet it is not easy to determine the authenticity of this cultural talent assessment. For example, candidates can provide paintings prepared in advance as the evidence of their ability to paint because the test rooms cannot be fully equipped with all relevant equipment and tools. This point can be confirmed based on many literature discussions and the researcher's personal experience.

From these, it shows that although the assessment of Chinese cultural talents is also included in the selection process, it is secondary to Chinese teaching ability and English communication skills. In fact, the assessment directly leads to the problems of the lack of professionalism of communicators because it does not really target the candidates with the Chinese cultural talents.

3.4 Professional development

The specific manifestation is training. Those who pass the selection and assessment organized by the headquarters will participate in the training, usually for two months. Experts in related fields train teachers, including language teaching training and cultural skills training, which includes Chinese teaching theories, cultural courses and demonstration, in which the culture courses are about cultural experience and skills training, including paper cutting, Taichi, calligraphy. The training contents on culture selected by headquarters are the cultural symbols above, because it is impossible for one to master these skills in a short-term. For example, calligraphy by writing brush, some people spend the whole life to practice, the cultural representatives are simply presented without in-depth interpretation. It has led the superficiality of cultural communication when the communicators work abroad.

In summary, there are some limitations regarding the professional development. These are: (1) the professional skills of the teachers are mostly concentrated in the Chinese language

field, not in the cultural field; (2) short-term training cannot meet the needs of cultural communication work; (3) training contents are not focus on the core value of Culture; and (4) the deployment and distribution of teachers are unreasonable. The defect of human resources management of the selection and assessment of communicators has fundamentally caused the problems of cultural communication. Although there are many other reasons, the decision-makers and administrators' policy-making have great responsibility.

4. The Latest Ideas and Technique

Judging from the years of publications of the literature, these problems have existed since the establishment of the first Confucius Institute and have not yet been resolved. The Confucius Institutes are huge and complex educational and cultural organizations. They are scattered all over the world, located in countries with different cultural backgrounds and national conditions. The geographical dispersion and long distance pose severe challenges to management and evaluation. These problems are difficult to solve by traditional management methods. But at present, the rapid development of science and technology has provided new ideas and technical support, which make problems solving possible

Tian (2018) indicates that in today's era, how to effectively use big data to help enterprises manage human resources— talent recruitment, job placement, performance evaluation, to optimize the matching of personnel and positions, improve the efficiency of human resources management while improving efficiency— is an important topic worth studying. In addition, Hayden (2019) points out that *Internet of Things (IoT)* applications in education will be the foundation on which classrooms operate. Students will be automatically counted as present or tardy when the bell rings. Wearable devices will determine when the class is too tired or disengaged and may need a break, and whiteboards will record all notes taken in a class. Smart-microphones may even recognize when a teacher mentions there is a homework assignment due and update students' planners accordingly.

The emergence of new technique such as the *Internet of Things (IoT)* and *Big Data* have demonstrated its vast data analysis capabilities in agriculture, industries, and transportation. In the future, the *Internet of Things (IoT)* and *Big Data* will be linked to the matching of personnel and positions, to solve more waste of human resources, mismatch problems, and optimal allocation of social resources.

With the increase of the input into the multimedia classroom and other teaching resources in colleges and universities, how to make the teaching environment comprehensively intelligent so as to effectively use and manage multimedia teaching equipment has become a major concern. Through the use of these techniques, the data of the cultural communication of Confucius Institutes can be transmitted to the headquarters in real time, and the characteristics and special sessions of the teachers will also be analyzed by the *Big Data* system and the optimal assignment plan will be obtained immediately. These can ensure the authenticity, efficiency, effectiveness and immediacy of cultural communication.

Overall, there are problems with the cultural communication of the Confucius Institutes in Thailand, and the key to the problems is the communicator/teacher, and the latest ideas and technique like the *Big Data* and *Internet of things (IoT)* can help solve these problems. However, the *Internet of things (IoT)* is currently not connected to the management of the Confucius Institutes, therefore, the future researchers can contribute in this area.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

From the above discussion, the most important conclusions of brevity can be drawn. These are: (1) the cultural communication of the Confucius Institute in Thailand is facing long-standing unresolved issues; (2) there are problems in the selection and deployment of cultural communicators-teachers of the Confucius Institute, and the content and media need to be upgraded; (3) new ideas and technique, such as *Internet of Things (IoT)* and *Big date*, should be and could be applied to the management and implementation of cultural communication in Confucius Institutes in Thailand. The details are as below.

5.1 In terms of the cultural communication model of the Confucius Institute in Thailand, the main problems are in the following:

- 5.1.1 the teacher's Chinese cultural professionalism is not enough;
- 5.1.2 the turnover rate of teachers is high;
- 5.1.3 most teachers do not have the ability to communicate in Thai;
- 5.1.4 local teachers in Thailand are scarce;
- 5.1.5 the contents of culture communication are superficial and monotonous;
- 5.1.6 the contents of culture communication are mainly based on the shallow cultural symbols;
- 5.1.7 lack the excavation of cultural connotations;
- 5.1.8 lack of new modern culture;
- 5.1.9 lack of evaluation and feedback mechanisms;
- 5.1.10 the effects lack a standardized and scientific evaluation system; and
- 5.1.11 the supervision and feedback system is also insufficient.

5.2 In the terms of selection and training mechanism, the main problems are as follows:

- 5.2.1 teachers' professions are mostly concentrated in the Chinese language field, not in the cultural field;
- 5.2.2 short-term training cannot meet the needs of cultural communication work;
- 5.2.3 training contents do not focused on the core value of Culture;
- 5.2.4 the distribution of teachers is unreasonable.;

5.3 In terms of the use of new concepts and technology specifically reflected in the cultural communication of the Confucius Institutes, the following are some suggestions:

- 5.3.1 optimize teacher selection and recruitment, big data can assist the headquarters to compare and analyze teacher data, and pre-select the most suitable teachers for interviews;
- 5.3.2 it can select professional teachers for cultural communication and conduct targeted training for cultural communication;
- 5.3.3 the use of the Internet of Things (IoT) and big data technology can achieve efficient and rational distribution of teachers' human resources, and accurately supervise facts and effects of the dissemination in real time, and can improve the authenticity, efficiency and supervision of information feedback; and
- 5.3.4 the contents of cultural communication would not be restricted by communicators and places of communication and traditional textbooks. More cultural forms and connotations should be included.

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