

Analyzing the Cultural Diplomacy Functions of the Confucius Institute in Senegal: A Case Study of Cheikh Anta Diop University



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Abstract: Cultural diplomacy provides an institutional means of facilitating international cultural exchange and engagement with foreign publics. The Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University, being the only Confucius institute in Senegal offers a case for examining cultural diplomacy through institutional cooperation, Chinese-language education, and cultural activities. Drawing on a literature review, a questionnaire survey and interviews, this article examines the Institute's operational practices and learners' reported experiences of Chinese culture, perceptions of China, interpersonal interaction, and China–Senegal relations. By connecting institutional arrangements with participants' perspectives, the article offers a context-specific examination of cultural diplomacy in a Francophone West African university, while pointing out constraints and suggesting pathways for sustainable development of the Confucius institute in Senegal.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, soft power, national image, Confucius Institute, China–Senegal relations

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy has become an important part of international relations, enabling countries to establish contacts with foreign public through cultural exchanges, education and interpersonal communication. Cummings (2003) defined cultural diplomacy as the exchange of ideas, information, values, traditions and beliefs aimed at promoting mutual understanding¹. Joseph Nye (2004) went further to point out that the soft power of a country lies in attraction and persuasion rather than coercion², so the diplomatic significance of cultural resources depends on how foreign audiences interpret and respond to them. In order words, it is very important to distinguish cultural interaction, audience recognition and international influence for assessing the practice of cultural diplomacy. The Confucius

institute provides a relevant institutional background for investigating these relationships.

The Confucius Institute was established through an international education cooperation, combining Chinese teaching with cultural activities and cross-cultural communication opportunities³. Previous studies have discussed the role of Confucius Institute in shaping China's image through cultural activities (Falk Hartig, 2016⁴), (Yanwei Wang et al., 2021⁵), (Uzodinma and Wang, 2026⁶), and some others have explored from the perspective of its soft power function (Jennifer Hubbert, 2014⁷). Other

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¹ Milton C Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*. Washington, D.C: Centre for Arts and Culture, 2003:1

² Nye, J. S. (2004). *(J) Soft Power: the means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs, (pg5-6).

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³ Confucius institute, 2026. Brand: About Confucius Institute [EB/OL]. [2026-08-03]. <https://www.ci.cn/gywm/pp>

⁴ Hartig Falk, 2016. *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The rise of the Confucius Institute*. [M]. Oxfordshire: Routledge.

⁵ Yanwei Wang, Chinenye Gerlof Uzodinma and Caoyuan Niu, 2021. The path, value and limits of the Confucius Institute in carrying out public diplomacy [J]. *Economic and political studies*.

⁶ Uzodinma, C.G., Wang, S. A study on cross-cultural communication through the lens of Chinese spring festival: a case study of the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria. *Int. Commun. Chin. Cult* (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40636-026-00367-0>

⁷ Hubbert Jennifer, 2014. *Authenticating the Nation: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power* [C]//Zaharna, R. S,

studies have focused on its language teaching situation (Uzodinma Gerlof and Zhao Qichen, 2022⁸), (Xiaoyuan Ma, 2021⁹) and (Junhao Li, 2021¹⁰). These studies systematically emphasize that it is essential to not only investigate the intention and organizational arrangements of cultural institutions, but also pay attention to the experience of the audience they are exposed to.

Despite these studies, further research on specific situations is still needed to understand how the activities of the Confucius Institute are organized and experienced in different regions. Institutional arrangements, educational environment, language practice and local expectations will affect the implementation and acceptance of cultural projects. This issue is particularly prominent in Africa, because of the significant differences between African countries in terms of historical relations with China, language policies, education systems and cultural interaction patterns. As a former colony of France, French still plays an important role in formal education in Senegal, while Wolof and other ethnic languages dominate daily communication. These situations provide a unique background for investigating how Chinese education and cultural activities promote contact with Chinese culture. Therefore, the research on Senegal will help to form a more detailed understanding of China's cultural diplomacy in addition to existing academic research.

Based on the above considerations, this study

explores how the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar (UCAD) institutionalizes cultural diplomacy, its practices, as well as how learners experience the various activities of the Confucius Institute. This study revolves around three research questions: firstly, how does the Confucius Institute in Senegal promote cultural exchange through its institutional arrangements, Chinese language teaching, and cultural activities? Secondly, how do Senegalese learners experience and understand Chinese language and culture, and how do these experiences shape their understanding of China and interactions with Chinese people? Thirdly, how do Senegalese learners understand the cultural and social connections between China and Senegal by participating in Confucius Institute activities? The study further analyzed the institutional constraints faced by the Confucius Institute in carrying out these activities while offering suggestions for the sustainable development of the Confucius Institute in Senegal. This study is based on a literature review, a questionnaire survey of 41 learners, and interviews with teachers and students of the Confucius Institute.

This study contributes to cultural diplomacy research from two aspects. From an empirical perspective, it examined a Chinese cultural and educational institution within a university in French speaking West Africa as a case study, thereby expanding the geographical scope of research on Confucius Institutes. From an analytical perspective, this study integrates institutional practice and learner experience into the same framework, enabling a more detailed evaluation of cultural participation and its perceived importance. The research results can also provide practical insights for language education, cultural project planning, and opportunities to promote sustained interpersonal communication.

Cultural Diplomacy, Related Concepts and the Confucius Institute

This section explains the concept of cultural diplomacy and its relationship with related concepts, including national image and soft power. It also introduces the Confucius Institute as a platform for

Hubbert Jennifer, Falk Hartig. Confucius Institutes and the Globalization of China's Soft Power. USC Center on Public Diplomacy. Los Angeles: Figueroa Press: 33-47.

⁸ Li Mingcheng, Zhao Qichen. 2022. The Current Status and Prospects of Chinese as a Foreign Language in Nigerian Education [J]. African Language and Culture Studies, (01): 71-85. (李明诚, 赵启琛, 2022. 汉语在尼日利亚外语教育中的现状及前景[J]. 非洲语言文化研究, (01):71-85.)

⁹ Ma Xiaoyuan, 2021. A Study on Acquisition Errors of the Adverbs “都” and “全” Among Intermediate Students at the Confucius Institute at Namdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria [D]. Northwest University. (马晓媛, 2021. 尼日利亚纳姆迪·阿齐克韦孔子学院中级学生副词“都”与“全”的习得偏误研究[D]. 西北大学.)

¹⁰ Li Junhao, 2021. A Study on the Current Status of Chinese Language Teaching at the Confucius Institute of Namdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria [D]. Harbin Normal University. 李君昊, 2021. (尼日利亚纳姆迪阿齐克韦大学孔子学院汉语教学现状研究[D]. 哈尔滨师范大学.)

Chinese language education and cultural exchange, laying a theoretical foundation for analyzing its cultural diplomacy function in Senegal.

The Concept of Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy plays an important role in international relations and is a crucial component of a country's soft power. It gained widespread attention in the mid-20th century, especially in the context of international cultural exchange during the Cold War. Aline Louchheim's documented the term in his 1954 article and this is known to be its earliest use in English¹¹, while Frank Ninkovich's subsequent historical research contributed to the academic understanding of the relationship between culture and US foreign policy¹². Since then, the term "cultural diplomacy" has gained widespread recognition internationally. However, despite its long history, scholars still explore this concept from different perspectives and there is no consensus on its definition¹³.

Shizuru Saeki (2005) defined cultural diplomacy as a tool for promoting mutual understanding among citizens and different countries through the exchange of ideas, information, art, and culture¹⁴. Saeki also emphasized that countries should avoid adopting unilateral cultural policies, such as imposing specific ideas or policies on other regions of the world, or engaging in cultural diplomacy solely for the purpose of promoting their own language curriculum. From this perspective, we can see that cultural diplomacy mainly aims to cultivate long-term friendly relations and mutual trust. Milton Cummings (2003) proposed a widely cited

definition that reflects similar views. He defined cultural diplomacy as the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, and beliefs aimed at promoting mutual understanding¹⁵. From a multilateral perspective, this broad definition links the concepts of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations, emphasizing cross-cultural communication and interaction. In other words, the emphasis on communication and reciprocity distinguishes cultural diplomacy from formal, government led diplomacy in terms of goals.

As one of the earliest forms of diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is widely regarded as a means for countries to advance their national interests. It constitutes an important dimension of a country's foreign policy, and like diplomacy in a broader sense, its goals are not limited to enhancing mutual understanding, but also committed to promoting national interests by influencing foreign public opinion and decision-making of foreign governments¹⁶. Cultural diplomacy can expand and enhance a country's cultural influence overseas by shaping a positive national image and promoting research on its language and culture in foreign universities. To better understand cultural diplomacy, it is necessary to examine its main participants and methods. Its participants include professional diplomats representing a country, as well as non-state and social actors such as writers, artists, officials from multinational corporations, and non-governmental organizations¹⁷. Therefore, cultural diplomacy can operate both at the official and government led levels, as well as at the non-governmental level.

The methods can also be roughly divided into two categories. At the official or national level,

¹¹ Louchheim, A. B., 1954. "Cultural Diplomacy: An Art We Neglect." *The New York Times Magazine*, pp. 16-18. <https://calder.org/wp-content/uploads/bibliography/new-york-times-magazine-1954/1-3-54.NYTimesMag.pdf>

¹² Frank Ninkovich, *The Currents of Cultural Diplomacy: Art and the State Department, 1938-1947*, *Diplomatic History*, Volume 1, Issue 3, July 1977, Pages 215-238

¹³ Li Zhi, *Cultural Diplomacy: An Interpretative Mode of Communication*. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005):4

¹⁴ Shizuru Saeki, "The Perry Centennial Celebration: a

Case Study in US-Japanese Cultural Diplomacy"

International Social Science Review, 80.

3&4(2005):137-138.

¹⁵ Milton C Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*. Washington, D.C: Centre for Arts and Culture, 2003):1

¹⁶ Li Mingcheng (UZODINMA Gerlof), 2020. A Comparative Study on the Public Diplomacy Functions of Confucius Institutes in Africa [D]. Shandong University. (李明诚 (UZODINMA Gerlof), 2020. 非洲孔子学院发挥公共外交功能的比较研究[D]. 山东大学)

¹⁷ IBID

cultural diplomacy is planned and implemented by the government through cultural negotiations, signing of cultural agreements or memorandums of understanding, organizing international cultural conferences, personnel exchanges, and hosting cultural exhibitions or trade fairs. At the societal level, cultural projects are also implemented by non-state actors, often with the aim of promoting broader ideals such as world peace, equality, and mutual understanding¹⁸. In other words, cultural diplomacy is not limited to diplomats in government diplomatic departments, organizations and other entities outside of government departments can also engage in cultural diplomacy.

Relationship between Soft Power and National Image

Power refers to the ability to influence others in order to achieve desired results¹⁹. In this global information age, power will increasingly rely on attraction (the “soft” dimension of power) and coercion (the “hard” dimension of power). Therefore, power can be divided into two hard power and soft power. The ability to effectively combine these two forms is known as smart power²⁰. The commonality between hard power and soft power lies in influence, which is an indispensable component of power²¹. A country can influence the behavior of other countries in three ways: coercion, inducement, and attraction. When other countries are willing to follow a specific country, admire its values, emulate its example, or aspire to its level of prosperity and openness, that country can achieve its expected goals in international politics through soft power. Joseph Nye (2004) pointed out that soft power not only involves influence or persuasiveness but also includes the

ability to induce and attract. Therefore, soft power can be understood as the ability to influence others and achieve desired results through attraction rather than coercion.

On the other hand, national image refers to an individual’s cognitive formation of a country in their mind. Kunczik (2003) defines national image as an individual’s cognitive representation of a specific country²². Based on this cognitive understanding, Buhmann (2016) proposed a multidimensional model of national image that covers functional, normative, aesthetic, and emotional dimensions²³. Therefore, national image can be defined as the perceptions and judgments that the international public use to form their perception of a country. The national image of a country can affect an individual’s attitude towards that country, its people, and its products. A good national image can enhance a country’s ability to establish alliances and expand international influence. The ability of a country to generate soft power in another country is closely related to its national image in that country. According to Nye’s definition, soft power is the ability to obtain desired things through attraction rather than coercion²⁴. A country can enhance its national image through the attractiveness of its culture, political ideals, and policies. A good national image can become a valuable political asset, whose value may even exceed that of territory or raw materials. Generally speaking, the better the image of a country, the greater its potential to generate soft power, on the contrary, a negative national image will weaken its ability to attract other countries and its soft power.

Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, National Image

¹⁸ Aoki-Okabe et al, “National Commitments to Cultural Diplomacy within Regional Frameworks”. In *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*. Eds by Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried. (Berghahn Books: Reprint edition, 2013): 204-215.

¹⁹ Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs, p. 2.

²⁰ Nye, J. S., Jr. (2011). *The Future of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs, pp. 22-23.

²¹ Nye, J. S. (2004). (J) *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs, (pg5-6).

²² Kunczik, M. (2003). *Transnational Public Relations by Foreign Governments*. In K. Sriramesh & D. Vercic (Eds.), *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

²³ Buhmann Alexander. *Measuring country image[J]: A New Model*. University of Southern California Centre on Public Diplomacy. Sept, 2016.

²⁴ Joseph Nye. *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 616, 2008, pp.95-109.

and the Confucius Institute

Cultural diplomacy is an important means for countries to enhance their international influence and national image. The relationship between this form of diplomacy and the Confucius Institutes can be understood through two interrelated dimensions: the means to achieve diplomatic goals, and the outcomes that these activities aim to achieve. The first dimension involves the operational methods of cultural diplomacy. These methods include how a country communicates with foreign audiences, what resources it mobilizes, and through what channels it achieves its international goals. Countries usually reach foreign audiences through education, cultural activities, media, and people to people exchanges. Through these channels, they introduce their own society, spread their own values, and promote mutual understanding among international audiences. Cultural diplomacy places special emphasis on cultural resources and exchanges. Under this framework, Confucius Institutes play an important role as an institutionalized channel for China to promote Chinese language education and cultural exchange overseas. By offering language courses, organizing cultural activities, and promoting interaction between Chinese and local participants, Confucius Institutes provide opportunities for foreign audiences to experience Chinese language, culture, and society through education and interpersonal communication.

The second dimension involves the desired outcomes of these activities. Cultural diplomacy aims to promote a country's interest and enhance its international status. These goals are closely related to soft power, which stems from the ability to attract and influence others' preferences. In this context, cultural diplomacy aims to shape a positive national image and enhance the country's ability to attract international support and cooperation. Confucius Institutes can contribute to achieving these goals by creating opportunities for learners and other participants to understand China, engage with Chinese cultural practices, and establish interpersonal connections with Chinese teachers and students.

Therefore, the contribution of Confucius Institutes to cultural diplomacy lies not only in the dissemination of cultural knowledge, but also in the educational relationships and cross-cultural exchanges facilitated by their activities.

However, these activities do not automatically generate positive impressions or soft power. The effectiveness of cultural exchange depends to some extent on how foreign audiences interpret their experiences and whether they perceive a country's culture, values, policies, and behaviors as attractive. For example, attending Chinese language courses does not necessarily mean a positive evaluation of the country's image, just as having a positive view of China does not necessarily mean a substantial understanding of Chinese society. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relationship between Confucius Institutes and Chinese cultural diplomacy through learners' personal experiences, their evaluations of cultural learning, interpersonal interactions with Chinese participants, and their views on China and its relations with the host country. These dimensions provide a basis for evaluating the contribution of Confucius Institutes without assuming that the institution's activities will directly produce specific results.

The relationship between cultural diplomacy, soft power, national image and the Confucius institute can be summarized as follows: cultural diplomacy provides a means to attract foreign audiences and shape national image, while a good national image contributes to the development of soft power. Through language education and cultural exchange, Confucius Institutes provide an institutional mechanism to transform China's cultural resources into opportunities for international exchange and cooperation. Its potential contribution to national image and soft power depends on how participants experience and interpret these opportunities, rather than solely on the existence of the institution or the number of activities organized by it. By distinguishing between institutional methods and reporting results, this article provides a more accurate basis for evaluating the role of

Confucius Institutes in China's cultural diplomacy in Senegal.

Confucius Institute's Cultural Diplomacy in Senegal: Institutional Development, Operational Framework, and Implementation Mechanisms

Senegal has only one Confucius Institute, which is the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar. This section introduces the Confucius Institute, analyze its operational structure and mode, as well as its mechanism for promoting cultural exchange.

Historical Account of the Confucius Institute in Senegal

Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar (Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, UCAD) is a public university in Senegal and a member of the International Forum of Public Universities. The history of this school predates Senegal's independence, and its predecessors were several French educational institutions established during the colonial period. In 1918, the French colonial authorities established École de médecine de l'AOF (Afrique Occidentale française). In 1936, during the rule of the French Popular Front government, the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) was established in Dakar with the aim of conducting research on African culture. In the early 1950s, several other research institutions were established. On the basis of these institutions, the University of Dakar was established on February 24, 1957, initially under the jurisdiction of the University of Paris and the University of Bordeaux. It was officially inaugurated on 9 December 1959. In 1987, the institution was renamed Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar in honour of Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese physicist, historian, anthropologist, and political figure²⁵. UCAD has long been regarded as one of the most prestigious universities in Africa and among the largest French-speaking universities

in West Africa²⁶. Its educational system follows the French academic model, with oral and written examinations at the end of the academic year. French is the language of instruction for almost all programmes, except courses offered by departments specializing in other languages.

Chinese-language teaching at UCAD began in 2007, initially delivered by Chinese teachers appointed through official programmes. In September 2009, Cheng Wei (程伟), president of Liaoning University, visited Senegal as part of a Liaoning provincial education delegation. During the visit, the two sides held discussions on establishing a Confucius Institute at UCAD and reached preliminary understandings concerning its objectives, functions, prospective scale, building plans, and model of cooperation. In March 2011, a delegation led by UCAD, visited the Confucius institute headquarters (formerly known as Hanban, now replaced by International Chinese Language Education Foundation) and signed an agreement to establish the institute. In the same month, the delegation visited Liaoning University and signed an implementation agreement for the joint project. The Confucius Institute at UCAD was officially inaugurated on 3 December 2012 in Dakar.

The inauguration ceremony brought together more than 200 participants, including Xia Huang (夏煌), China's ambassador to Senegal, and other embassy officials, representatives of Senegal's Ministry of Higher Education, the president of UCAD, a delegation from Liaoning University, prominent Senegalese figures, a delegation from the University of Guinea, representatives of Chinese-funded enterprises, members of the Chinese community in Senegal and faculty members and students from UCAD. The event attracted considerable media attention in both China and Senegal. More than 20 Chinese media outlets and online platforms, including Xinhua, China Daily,

²⁵ Université Cheik Anta Diop de Dakar. Historique.[EB/OL].[2023-11-22]. <https://www.ucad.sn/node/96>

²⁶ Université Cheik Anta Diop de Dakar. Die Civiisallianz.[EB/OL].[2023-11-22]. <https://civis.eu/de/african-partner-universities/universite-ch-eikh-anta-diop-de-dakar>

People's Daily Online, and other news and cultural exchange websites, reported on or republished coverage of the ceremony. In Senegal, one of the country's main government newspapers, *Le Soleil*, and 12 other media outlets reported on it shortly after the inauguration ceremony²⁷. The Confucius Institutes started offering Chinese language courses since March 2013. Its main activities include three aspects: teaching Chinese language and culture, organizing cultural activities, and holding the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) and the Chinese Proficiency Oral Test (HSKK)²⁸.

Enabling framework for Cultural Diplomacy: Organizational structure and Operational model

The cultural diplomacy function of the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar is through an organizational mechanism that integrates institutional coordination, educational participation, and public communication. This college is not only a Chinese language teaching venue, but also connects China's educational resources with Senegal's academic and social environment. Its organizational structure provides an institutional foundation for the continuous development, localization, and extension of cultural exchange beyond universities.

Firstly, institutional coordination provides an organizational foundation for cultural diplomacy. The college implements a joint director system, led by a Chinese director and a Senegalese director, while maintaining contact with the host university and the International Chinese Language Education Foundation. This arrangement closely integrates the resources of Chinese partners with the institutional

environment of the host country. The two directors jointly coordinate the overall operation of the college, promote educational cooperation, and maintain contacts with government departments, industry associations, enterprises, and other relevant organizations. This cross institutional coordination extends the scope of cultural diplomacy beyond the activities organized within the college, creating opportunities for collaboration with a wider range of local actors.

Secondly, educational participation provides a lasting channel for cultural exchange. The teaching team of the college is composed of Chinese language teachers sent from China, Chinese volunteer teachers, and locally recruited lecturers. The Institute have a core team of seven teachers who are responsible for language education²⁹, curriculum design, development of teaching materials, cultural activities, and student evaluation. These functions enable cultural diplomacy to be regularly integrated into students' educational experiences, rather than being limited to occasional cultural events. Language learning can also serve as a starting point to guide students to have a broader exposure to Chinese cultural customs and ways of thinking. The participation of local teachers further strengthen this process by combining Chinese language education with Senegal's language and educational background. From this perspective, the diplomatic significance of the Confucius Institute lies not only in disseminating cultural knowledge, but also in creating sustained opportunities for cross-cultural exchange.

Thirdly, administrative capacity helps to ensure the sustainability and public visibility of cultural diplomacy. The administrative staff of the research institute are responsible for student recruitment and management, financial management, logistical support, and communication related work. The administrative team helps disseminate information about the college beyond its direct educational environment by releasing news, producing promotional materials, promoting activities, and

²⁷ Confucius Institute Affairs Office. (2012). Overview of the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, Senegal. Liaoning University. (孔子学院工作办公室, 2012. 塞内加尔达喀尔大学孔子学院概况. 辽宁大学. [EB/OL]. (2012-12-27) [2023-11-22] <https://ci.lnu.edu.cn/info/13237/46309.htm>)

²⁸ Su, J. (2015). A Survey of the Current State of Chinese Language Teaching at the Confucius Institute of Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal [Master's thesis, Shenyang Normal University]. (苏静, 2015. 塞内加尔达喀尔大学孔子学院汉语教学现状调查报告[D]. 沈阳师范大学.)

²⁹ Data was obtained from an interview with a local teacher at the institute

maintaining contact with media organizations in China and Senegal. These activities can increase public awareness of their projects. However, publicity should not automatically be equated to public participation, its broader diplomatic value depends on whether this visibility can encourage public participation, interaction, and sustained interest in the Chinese language and culture.

Practical Mechanisms of Cultural Diplomacy: Language Promotion, Cultural Transmission, and Artistic Exchange

The cultural exchange activities of the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University revolves around three interrelated practices: Chinese language promotion, cultural dissemination, and artistic exchange. Firstly, the promotion of Chinese language has laid a solid foundation for cross-cultural communication. The Confucius Institute offers Chinese language courses covering HSK levels 1 to 6, with intensive reading and listening modules included in each level of instruction. The HSK Standard Curriculum textbook provides a structured framework for language learning and advancement³⁰. This systematic curriculum system enables learners to gradually improve their Chinese proficiency over time, providing them with necessary language resources to access Chinese cultural materials, communicate with native Chinese speakers, and integrate more directly into Chinese society. Therefore, language education not only has teaching objectives, but also creates a regular platform where cultural knowledge can be introduced, discussed, and gradually deepened.

Chinese language competitions complement classroom teaching by enhancing the interactivity of learning and increasing its public visibility. On June 8, 2022, the Dakar Institute jointly hosted the National Finals of the 21st “Chinese Bridge” Chinese Proficiency Competition for College Students with the theme, “One World, One Family (Tian xia yi jia

天下一家)”³¹. This type of competition provides students with opportunities to showcase their language skills, sing Chinese songs, give speeches, and participate in Chinese cultural themed activities in front of an audience. By combining language learning with performance, participation, and recognition, these activities encourage students to use the Chinese language outside of the classroom and enhance their interest in continuing their studies. The local teacher training has also expanded the scope of language promotion beyond the student population in the college. This training pathway enables qualified Senegalese graduates and university students with solid Chinese language skills to continue their studies. Candidates who meet the relevant scholarship application requirements can receive the “International Chinese Language Teacher Scholarship” to pursue a master’s degree in international Chinese language education at Chinese universities. After completing their studies, some students will return to Senegal to teach Chinese and contribute to local language education. This path combines language learning, advanced studies in China, and subsequent teaching work in Senegal, allowing the educational experience gained in China to be disseminated within the local community. During an interview with a student from the Confucius, he emphasized the importance of this firsthand experience, citing a Chinese idiom, “Seeing is believing (bai wen bu ru yi jian 百闻不如一见)”. The student explained that although classroom learning can provide a wealth of knowledge about China, studying abroad in China provides an opportunity to experience Chinese society and culture firsthand. Therefore, this scholarship program has built a bridge between language education and personal experience. Returned teachers can then apply their language proficiency, educational training,

³⁰ Information was obtained through interview with local teacher at the institute

³¹ Wang, Z. Z. (2022). The Senegal Regional Final of the 21st “Chinese Bridge” Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students Held. China Belt and Road Network. (王子正, 2022. 第21届“汉语桥”世界大学生中文比赛塞内加尔赛区决赛举行。中国一带一路网。[R/OL]. (2022-06-10) [2024-04-29]. <https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/251073.html>)

and first-hand understanding of China in their teaching. Through this approach, the cultivation of local teachers not only contributes to the continuation of Chinese language education, but also opens up a channel for cross-cultural knowledge to be shared with generations of Senegalese learners.

Secondly, cultural dissemination links language learning with the experience of Chinese cultural practice. At Dakar College, cultural knowledge is integrated into language teaching and taught through practical activities. Although the college does not offer independent and regularly scheduled cultural courses, teachers often introduce relevant cultural information in language classes and occasionally organize activities related to traditional Chinese art, including mask painting and calligraphy. This method links cultural interpretation with the language and context in which students come into contact with these cultures. These activities do not simply present culture as abstract information, but allow learners to personally experience selected cultural practices through observation and participation. The college also organizes various activities around traditional Chinese festivals, including the Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. This type of celebration provides participants with an opportunity to learn about Chinese customs, symbolic meanings, and social traditions in a collective environment. Its significance lies in extending cultural learning beyond the classroom, where students and other participants can experience traditional Chinese culture firsthand through collaborative activities, live demonstrations, and interactions with organizers and teachers. This festival format also allows audiences who have not attended formal Chinese courses to participate in cultural exchanges, thereby expanding the interaction between the institute and Senegalese society. Cultural activities also extend to areas of daily life that are closely related to local audiences. On October 20, 2023, the Dakar Institute invited the 19th Chinese medical team to Senegal, to jointly hold a cultural lecture titled “Understanding Traditional Chinese

Medicine and Caring for Life”³². This event introduced participants to traditional Chinese medicine and combined cultural learning with health and well-being issues. By integrating the educational platform of the college with the practical experience of Chinese medical professionals, this lecture created an opportunity for participants to engage with traditional Chinese medicine through a dual approach of cultural interpretation and professional interaction. This also vividly demonstrates how cultural activities connect educational exchanges with broader areas of Sino-Senegal cooperation.

Thirdly, artistic exchange integrates Chinese cultural expression into the broader cultural environment of Senegal. Compared to regular courses and internal college activities, public art activities provide opportunities to introduce Chinese culture to audiences outside of the learning community. Through exhibitions and cultural displays, the college is able to present these contents to the public in situations where Chinese artistic traditions and material culture directly interact with Senegalese cultural life. This exchange places Chinese cultural elements in a broader environment of cultural diversity and public participation. A noteworthy example occurred on May 19, 2022, when the Dakar institute was invited to participate in the 14th Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art at the *Musée des Civilisations noires* in Senegal³³. The college planned an exhibition with Chinese cultural elements as the theme, featuring painted opera masks, traditional “Four Treasures of Study” - pen, ink, paper, inkstone, and the Chinese character

³² Fujian Provincial Health Commission, 2023. Medical Team Invited to Share Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture with Confucius Institute Teachers and Students[R/OL]. (2023-10-25) [2026-08-12]. https://wjw.fj.gov.cn/jggk/csxx/dwhzc/gzdt/202310/t20231025_6285184.htm

³³ Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar. (2022). The Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University Supports the 14th Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art. WeChat Official Account of the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar. (塞内加尔达喀尔大学孔子学院, 2022. 达喀尔大学孔子学院助力第十四届达喀尔非洲当代艺术双年展。塞内加尔达喀尔大学孔子学院微信公众号。[EB/OL]. (2022-05-20) [2024-04-29]. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/4lwEm6rEqEd_RuDUJclr5A)

fu (福) that usually symbolizes good luck and blessings. Through these visual and material elements, visitors are able to engage with various aspects of Chinese cultural traditions in art and public settings, not just limited to formal teaching activities. This exhibition also incorporates Chinese cultural symbols into cultural activities centered around contemporary African art, creating an opportunity for the intersection of Chinese cultural expression and Senegal's local art environment.

Overall, these practices constitute an interconnected cultural exchange mechanism. These three dimensions mutually promote each other, language learning provides a starting point for understanding culture, cultural activities endow language learning with practical and experiential significance, and artistic exchange brings cultural expression to audiences outside the classroom. Therefore, the actual contribution of the Dakar Institute to the cultural relations between China and Senegal is reflected in the continuity and diversity of these educational and cultural exchanges.

Evaluating the Cultural Diplomacy of the Confucius Institute in Senegal: Cultural Understanding, Interpersonal Engagement, and Bilateral Awareness

This section evaluates the cultural diplomacy function of the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) in Dakar, Senegal, through three interrelated dimensions: cultural understanding, interpersonal interaction, and understanding of Sino-Senegal relations. This analysis is based on questionnaire responses from 41 students, supplemented by interviews with teachers and students, as well as a review of relevant literature.

Cultural Understanding: From Initial Perceptions to Learning about China

Questionnaire responses show the students have different motivations and varying levels of prior knowledge about China before they went to study at the institute. Curiosity about Chinese was the most commonly mentioned motivation, accounting for

31.7% of respondents. Other motivations include interest in Chinese language and culture, employment opportunities, encouragement from family or friends, and the possibility of studying abroad in China (see Table 1). These findings suggest that in Senegal, contact with China often begins with personal curiosity and educational or career aspirations, rather than a clear interest in international relations. One interviewee recalled watching Chinese movies during his childhood, which sparked his interest in Chinese language and culture. After discovering the Confucius Institute in Senegal, the student enrolled in its courses. This example illustrates how the image of China in popular culture can inspire interest and promote its development into formal educational participation. Confucius Institutes provide learners with a platform to further explore their initial curiosity through systematic language teaching and interaction with Chinese teachers.

However, there were significant differences in the initial impressions of the students. 34.14% of the students stated that they knew very little or nothing about China before participating in Confucius Institute activities. 29.26% of respondents associate China with characteristics such as diligence, enthusiasm, or rapid economic development. 24.39% of respondents believed the stereotype that all Chinese people know *kung fu*, while 12.19% of respondents associate Chinese people with monks. No respondents chose the negative opinion option (see Table 3). These answers reveal three rough starting points, limited understanding, good impression, and simplified cultural representation. They also highlight the difference between having a positive impression of China and having a substantial understanding of Chinese society. Cultural diplomacy conducted through education must balance these two dimensions, introducing unfamiliar information and enabling learners to examine existing assumptions. The students generally have a positive evaluation of their educational experience. 87.8% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the courses and teaching of the college (see Table 5), while

53.65% believe that Confucius Institutes are both language and cultural institutes (see Table 2). 60.97% stated that studying at Confucius Institutes helps Senegalese people understand China and Chinese culture, while 39.02% of students believe that this contribution is not yet sufficient (see Table 6). No respondents indicated that the college did not provide any assistance at all. The difference between these two indicators is significant. Satisfaction with teaching reflects learners' evaluation of educational services, while perception of cultural understanding involves what they believe they have learned. The research results indicate that positive evaluation of teaching does not eliminate the need for deeper cultural learning. The preference of the students for additional courses further confirms this point. 34.1% hope to increase cultural activities or specialized cultural courses, 26.8% hope to obtain more internship or exchange opportunities, 12.19% hope to receive scholarships, and 9.75% hope to offer business oriented courses. 17.07% of the students indicated that no additional courses were needed (see Table 7).

According to the questionnaire findings, by participating in activities at Confucius Institutes, learners' impressions of China have become more positive. 70.7% of the students stated that their impression of China has improved after studying at Confucius Institutes, while 21.95% reported a little improvement in their impression. 7.3% stated that they had no opinion (see Table 4). Therefore, 92.7% of respondents indicated that their views on China have improved to some extent. These feedbacks indicate that Confucius Institutes provide an educational environment that enables learners to connect their own experiences with a more positive view of China. Interviews show that contact with Chinese teachers and friends, as well as language teaching and cultural activities, are important components of these experiences. The relationship between positive attitudes and cultural understanding is particularly intriguing. Although 92.7% of respondents indicated an improvement in their perception of China, 39.0% believed that the

college's contribution to their understanding of China and Chinese culture was still insufficient. Learners are able to form more positive impressions while recognizing their own knowledge gaps. Therefore, when evaluating the cultural diplomacy effectiveness of the institute, both the cognitive changes reported by students and the opportunities it provides for continuous cultural learning should be taken into account.

Interpersonal Engagement: Language Learning and Cross-Cultural Interaction

All 41 students reported making Chinese friends after studying at the Confucius institute (see Table 9), and all stated that they would recommend the institute to others (see Table 10). These results indicate that interpersonal communication is prevalent in the sample population and highly recognized for the learning experience. Interview records help clarify the importance of these interactions. Some students described that they had little or no direct contact with Chinese people before enrollment. Subsequently, interactions with Chinese teachers and friends provided them with opportunities to practice Chinese, ask daily life questions, and learn about cultural customs through personal experience. Some students also mentioned that they introduced certain aspects of Senegalese culture to their Chinese friends. These interactions create opportunities for reciprocal cultural exchange. Senegalese students have access to Chinese language and daily life perspectives, while Chinese teachers and other participants can learn about Senegalese society through interactions with students and local communities. In this context, cultural diplomacy is not limited to conveying information about China, but also involves interpersonal contacts, through which participants share experiences and interpret cultural differences.

Interpersonal interaction is also of great significance for the design of cultural education. The students' demand for more cultural activities and communication opportunities indicates their desire to extend interaction beyond formal language teaching. Cultural activities, student exchanges, collaborative

projects, and ongoing communication between Senegalese learners and Chinese participants can all provide more opportunities for two-way learning. Such measures will combine classroom learning with daily life experiences and provide a more sustainable institutional foundation for cultural exchange. Therefore, the case of Senegal highlights interpersonal interaction as a unique dimension of cultural diplomacy. Its significance lies not only in the existence of the contact itself, but also in the opportunities created by this contact for communication, mutual learning, and a deeper understanding of the societies of both countries.

Bilateral Awareness: Understanding China–Senegal Relations

Although the students generally hold a positive view of China, their understanding of the relationship between China and Senegal is not entirely consistent. 34.1% of the students believe that the bilateral relationship is “very good”, while 26.8% think it is “just good”. 39.0% are unclear about the current status of bilateral relations, and no one considers the relationship to be “bad” (see Table 11). This phenomenon indicates a difference between familiarity with China itself and understanding of bilateral relations. Language learning, cultural activities, and interpersonal communication can help learners understand Chinese society, but to comprehend Sino Senegal relations, they also need to master knowledge in politics, economics, education, and institutional cooperation. The proportion of students who are not familiar with the current situation of China Senegal relations is relatively high, indicating that there is still room for cultural and educational expansion. Overall, the students have positive or stable expectations for the future, 43.9% expect the relationship to improve, while 41.46% expect the relationship to remain largely unchanged. 14.6% indicates uncertainty and no one expects the relationship to deteriorate (see Table 12). These responses indicate that the interviewed learners have confidence in the continuity or improvement of bilateral relationships. However, these responses did

not reflect their detailed understanding of the existing cooperation situation, nor did they provide a basis for their expectations.

The institute can directly link language and cultural education with bilateral cognition by organizing seminars, invited lectures, educational exchange seminars, and activities to explore cooperation between China and Senegal in trade, development, and people to people exchanges. Such measures will help learners place their personal experiences in a broader institutional context and understand how cultural exchange is linked to broader bilateral relationships. The survey also examined whether learners believed that the institute had an impact on corporate investment and public attitudes. 90.2% gave a positive answer, while 9.7% gave a negative answer (see Table 13). This result indicates that the majority of respondents believe that the importance of the college goes beyond language teaching. The interview records provide in-depth insights into this viewpoint. Some learners link their Chinese language proficiency to the improvement of communication between Chinese enterprises and Senegalese communities, while others see potential employment and language support opportunities. These viewpoints link language education with practical communication and career participation.

This association is reasonable because language proficiency can facilitate communication, and educational networks can provide career opportunities for learners. However, the survey did not measure changes in investment decisions, employment outcomes, trade, or public opinion. Therefore, 90.2% of this data reflects the broader impact perceived by the surveyed learners, rather than the confirmed economic or social impact. From this, it can be seen that bilateral cognition is an independent dimension of cultural diplomacy, rather than an inevitable result of positive cognition or interpersonal contact.

Institutional Constraints and Pathways to the Sustainable Development of the Confucius Institute in Senegal

The research results in the previous section indicate that the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar has played a positive role in shaping learner's impressions of China, while also revealing shortcomings in cultural understanding and awareness of bilateral relations. This discovery provides a basis for evaluating the institutional development of the Confucius Institute. The contribution of this Confucius Institute to cultural diplomacy is mainly reflected in four interrelated dimensions, educational accessibility, teaching quality, curriculum relevance, and interaction with the broader Senegalese society. To strengthen these aspects, simply increasing institutional visibility or organizing more cultural activities is not enough. This requires an educational platform that can respond to local needs, cultivate Senegalese local capabilities, maintain reciprocal cultural exchanges, and evaluate its contributions through clearly differentiated learning outcomes.

Institutional Presence and Structural Constraints: Expanding Access Beyond the University

The Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) in Dakar provides an institutional foundation for Chinese language education and cultural exchange in Senegal. The college is located within a major university and closely integrates language teaching with higher education, academic cooperation, and professional development. Therefore, its institutional value is not only reflected in the establishment of Chinese language courses, but also in providing an organized platform for sustained interaction between participants from both China and Senegal. However, the existence of institutions and accessibility to education are two different things. Confucius Institutes based on universities mainly serve learners who can participate in their courses and activities, while broader participation depends on geographical coverage, course supply, economic affordability, and compatibility with learner's schedules. Given that there is only one Confucius Institute in the country, to expand its contribution to Senegalese society, it is

necessary to establish an educational network that goes beyond the scope of its university.

For the Confucius Institute in Dakar, collaborating with more universities, secondary schools, vocational colleges, and related public institutions is a practical way to expand educational coverage. Expanding courses, joint teaching projects, and online teaching can extend Chinese language education to learners beyond the university community. Partnerships should be built around clear educational needs, well-defined responsibilities, and stable arrangements for teaching and resource supply. The sustainability of institutions also depends on the ability of local partners to support project implementation. Classroom resources, qualified teachers, appropriate learning materials, administrative coordination, and continuous financial support are all essential elements in building a stable educational environment. These requirements should serve as the basis for institutional planning and partnership agreements. The urgent task is to strengthen the coverage and operational capabilities of the existing platforms while maintaining consistent educational standards.

Curriculum Diversification and Societal Engagement: Connecting Language Learning with Learners' Needs

The survey revealed that students at Confucius institute have diverse expectations. The survey results also provide a direct basis for the diversification of courses and a closer connection between education supply and student demand. Firstly, cultural education should integrate traditional heritage with contemporary social experiences. Chinese philosophy, literature, festivals, architecture, and artistic traditions provide important foundations for cultural learning. However, courses that mainly focus on historical heritage cannot fully present the full picture of contemporary China. Students also need opportunities to explore social changes, popular culture, education, technology, work, and daily life. When cultural activities can explain the historical background of a certain custom, examine its

contemporary manifestations, and encourage discussions on its significance, its educational value will be enhanced. For example, Spring Festival activities can not only introduce traditional customs, but also discuss topics such as changes in family customs, urban migration, and intergenerational differences. Similar methods can connect Chinese cuisine, clothing, architecture, and artistic expressions with broader social and historical contexts. This type of activity deepens cultural learning by transcending the simple display of cultural symbols and shifting towards interpretation and discussion.

Secondly, localization should simultaneously affect teaching methods and curriculum development. Simply translating existing Chinese textbooks into French cannot solve the language and cultural challenges faced by Senegalese learners. Effective teaching also needs to pay attention to the relationship between Chinese and the language already mastered by learners, the interpretation of unfamiliar cultural concepts, and the educational background in which Chinese language teaching is conducted. The multilingual environment in Senegal makes this particularly important. French occupies a central position in formal education, while Wolof and other ethnic languages play an important role in daily communication. Teaching resources should reflect these language realities and the needs of different learner groups. Thirdly, professional Chinese language education should complement general language courses. The learning motivations of the students include curiosity, cultural interests, employment needs, and further education plans. These diverse goals support the development of differentiated learning paths, including Business Chinese, Tourism Chinese, Logistics Chinese, Agricultural Chinese, and other fields related to Senegal's education and career background. Curriculum design should seek the opinions of learners, employers, and educational partners to determine specific language requirements and practical career applications, rather than providing a generic language curriculum for everyone. Finally, in

cooperation with universities, vocational colleges, enterprises, and public institutions, language learning should be combined with practical experience. Visiting workplaces, attending professional seminars, conducting career oriented language activities, and organizing internships all help learners understand the practical application of Chinese language skills in real institutions and professional environments.

Media Visibility and Public Engagement: Engaging with Senegal's Plural Information Environment

The information environment in which the Confucius institute operates is shaped by news media, digital platforms, interpersonal communication, as well as the extensive presence of Chinese companies in Senegal and the influence of Chinese products and institutions. Therefore, the public's perception of China comes from various channels, including cultural education, economic experience, political debate, and media coverage. Communication strategy must be integrated with this broader environment, while clarifying its educational and cultural functions. The institute's media coverage is more concentrated on official Chinese media accounts or channels such as WeChat, while Senegalese students who have never been to China hardly use these media platforms. A coherent and easy to understand public communication strategy can promote the educational activities of the institution beyond the students on campus. Digital resources can include language learning materials, interpretation of cultural customs, discussions on contemporary Chinese society, interviews with students and teachers, as well as relevant information on courses, scholarships, and exchange opportunities. Short videos, online language courses, and interactive discussions can provide a wider audience with access to these resources. Therefore, the college should make more use of popular media platforms commonly used by Senegalese youth, such as Instagram, X/Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.

Communication should also reflect Senegal's language and media environment. French materials can be used to support formal communication and

educational promotion, while Wolof and other ethnic languages can help reach specific audiences. Collaboration with Senegalese radio, television, and digital media can expand not only the coverage of educational content, but also create opportunities for local perspectives to participate in shaping a discussion atmosphere. Local media should be regarded as communication partners, rather than just channels for institutional promotion. The effectiveness of this strategy depends on the credibility, relevance, and accessibility of its content. Regular communication, transparent information about educational opportunities, and substantial audience participation are more effective in laying a solid foundation for public engagement than simply increasing visibility. The goal should be to promote a rational understanding of China while respecting the diversity of viewpoints in Senegalese society.

Conclusion: Reflections on the Cultural Diplomacy role of the Confucius Institute in Senegal

This study explores the role of the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University in China's cultural diplomacy in Senegal. By combining cultural diplomacy with shaping national image and soft power, this study explores how institutionalized language education, cultural activities, and interpersonal interaction promote cultural exchange between participants from China and Senegal. The research results indicate that the role of the Confucius Institute cannot be understood solely from its potential impact on Senegalese people's impression of China. It also provides opportunities for Chinese teachers and volunteers to understand Senegalese society and gain exposure to local cultural perspectives. Therefore, in this context, cultural diplomacy should be understood more as a potential reciprocal process, where participants not only convey their own cultural experiences but also gain recognition of others. In addition, the findings of this study not only clarify the opportunities and limitations of Confucius Institutes conducting cultural diplomacy in Senegal, but also provide

broader insights into how cultural diplomacy can play a role through national image building, reciprocal cultural learning, and interpersonal interaction.

From Image Projection to Audience-Mediated National Image Formation

The cultural diplomacy of Confucius Institutes provides institutional opportunities for people from different societies to engage with language, cultural practices, and perspectives. However, these interactions do not determine how participants interpret the relevant society. Senegalese students come to Confucius Institutes with different motivations, prior knowledge, and expectations, while Chinese teachers and volunteers also interpret Senegal through their own experiences and interactions. Therefore, the cultural diplomacy of Confucius Institutes should not be simply understood as the process of countries to conveying their national image to foreign audiences. It is also a process that may confirm or re-examine existing cognition. The positive views held by the interviewed learners confirm that Confucius Institutes may help enhance China's attractiveness, thereby promoting the improvement of the country's image and strengthening its soft power.

From One-Way Cultural Presentation to Reciprocal Cultural Learning

For Senegalese students, the academy provides them with opportunities to master Chinese language skills, explore Chinese culture, and establish connections with the Chinese people. For Chinese directors, teachers, and volunteers, daily interactions with students and participation in university and community activities provide them with opportunities to understand the Senegalese language, social customs, educational vision, and cultural perspectives. Therefore, the institute is not only expected to become a platform for introducing China to Senegal, but also a place for Chinese personnel to understand Senegal. These processes do not need to be carried out with equal intensity or produce

identical results, but they confirm that the connotation of cultural diplomacy has transcended the one-way cultural display mode. In addition, this reciprocity may also extend beyond the college itself. Chinese teachers and volunteers will share their experiences in Senegal with their colleagues, students, friends, and professional networks in China. Their narration can help the audience understand the social landscape of Senegal, which is rarely mentioned in general expressions about Africa, and thus contribute to shaping Senegal's image in China. Whether this can be transformed into cultural soft power depends on the content of the information and its audience.

Beyond Interpersonal Contact: The Conditional Relationship Between Engagement and Cultural Understanding

All the students reported having Chinese friends. The survey results indicate that social contact within this sample group is very extensive, but a significant proportion of learners believe that their cultural understanding is not sufficient. This suggests that relying solely on contact, whether with the institution or with friends, cannot guarantee a deeper understanding. The importance of interaction depends on its quality, sustainability, and openness to different perspectives. Similarly, although the interaction between Chinese teachers and Senegalese students can provide valuable local insights, these experiences should not be seen as representative of the entire Senegalese society. Therefore, language education, interpersonal relationships, and organized cultural activities are complementary means of promoting mutual learning. Their value lies not only in enhancing familiarity, but also in creating opportunities to examine cultural assumptions and understand experiences in social contexts.

Distinguishing National Image Perceptions from Diplomatic Awareness

Although respondents generally expressed a positive change in their views on China, 39.0% of them are still unclear about the current status of

China Senegal relations. This indicates that familiarity with culture does not necessarily mean a detailed understanding of diplomatic dynamics, economic cooperation, or bilateral institutions. At the same time, Chinese personnel's understanding of Senegal's potential through this research institute should not automatically equate to a comprehensive understanding of Senegal's foreign policy, political system, or economic situation. Although cultural cognition and diplomatic awareness intersect, they do not necessarily derive from each other. Therefore, the contribution of the research institute should be considered in a broader context, which that media, universities, public institutions, businesses, and interpersonal networks are also shaping mutual understanding between the two countries.

In summary, this study suggests that the Confucius Institute at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar should be seen as an institution that creates cultural exchange opportunities for Senegalese and Chinese participants, rather than a mechanism that automatically shapes a positive national image or promotes deeper bilateral understanding. Its cultural diplomacy role depends on whether it can effectively combine language education, interpersonal relationships, reciprocal cultural learning, and opportunities to understand broader Sino Senegal relations. Therefore, the core challenge is not only to expand the cultural influence of the Confucius Institute in Senegal, but also to enhance the depth, reciprocity, and educational value of the cultural exchanges it promotes. In addition, this study is based on a questionnaire survey of 41 learners at the only Confucius Institute in Senegal, supplemented by interviews and literature research. The research findings cannot be generalized to all Confucius Institutes in Africa, Senegalese learners, or the broader population in China and Senegal. This survey records the experiences and opinions described by participants, rather than changes measured over time.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there is no conflicts of interest to this work.

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Appendix: Data on the Evaluation of the Cultural Exchange activities at the Confucius Institute, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal

Table 1 : Reasons for choosing to study at the Confucius institute

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Encourage by family or friends	7	17.07%
Interest in Chinese language and culture	8	19.51%
Curiosity in Chinese language and culture	13	31.70%
Employment purposes	8	19.51%
For Study in China	5	12.19
Others, please specify	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 2: Opinion about the Confucius institute

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Both Language and Culture	22	53.65%

institute		
Just a language institute	5	12.19%
Just a culture institute	14	34.14%
Others, please specify	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 3 : Opinion about China and Chinese people before going to study at the Confucius institute

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Chinese people are hardworking, enthusiastic, and industrious, and China's economy has developed rapidly	12	29.26%
All Chinese people know kung fu.	10	24.39%
Chinese people are monks	5	12.19%
Negative perception	0	0%
Know nothing about China	14	34.14%

Others, please specify	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 4 : Opinion about China and Chinese people after going to study at the Confucius institute

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Improved perception	29	70.7%
Improved just a little	9	21.95%
Still bad/negative	0	0%
No opinion	3	7.31%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 5: Views on the Curriculum Design and Teaching Methods of the Confucius Institute

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Satisfied	36	87.80%
Not too satisfied	5	12.19%
Not satisfied	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 6 : Views on Whether the Confucius Institute Helps People Understand China and Chinese Culture

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Enough	25	60.97%
So so	16	39.02%
Not enough	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 7: Expectations of the Confucius Institute for the future

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Business class	4	9.75%
Internships/Exchange programs	11	26.82%
More cultural activities and Dedicated cultural courses	14	34.14%
More scholarship programs	5	12.19%
Doesn't need more	7	17.07%
Others, please specify	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 8: Perceived Support from Family and Friends for Studying at the Confucius Institute

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Supported	35	85.36%
No support	6	14.63%

Number of valid responses	41	
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Table 9 : Experiences of Making Chinese Friends

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Have friend(s)	41	100%
Do not have friend(s)	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 10 : Willingness to Recommend the Confucius Institute to Others

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Willing	41	100%
Not willing	0	0%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 11 : Perceptions of the Current Relationship Between Senegal and China

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Very good	14	34.14%
Good	11	26.82%
Bad	0	0%
Have no idea	16	39.02%

Number of valid responses	41	
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Table 12 : Perceptions of the Future Relationship Between Senegal and China

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Will get better	18	43.90%
Will remain the same	17	41.46%
Will deteriorate	0	0%
Not sure	6	14.63%
Number of valid responses	41	

Table 13: Perceptions of the Confucius Institute's Influence on Corporate Investment and Public Attitudes in Senegal

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Have influence	37	90.24%
Have no influence	4	9.75%
Number of valid responses	41	