

## Research Article

# Expanding Person-to-Person Diplomacy with Overseas Chinese

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**Abstract.**

In the current global context, with prominent multilateralism and multipolarity trends, China is seeing a rise in comprehensive strength and influence on the international stage. China has always upheld mutual respect, mutual benefits, and win-win situations for its diplomatic strategies and has launched the Belt and Road Initiative to actively unite neighboring countries and regions for common development and advancement. Person-to-person diplomacy is an important part of foreign affairs work, of which overseas Chinese are a force to be reckoned with. Overseas Chinese are also descendants of the Chinese nation, so it is easier to communicate with them concerning culture, language, characters, and ideas. Therefore, with Chinese in Indonesia as the research subjects, this paper provides a case study of the Confucius Institute jointly built by Xihua University and Universitas Sebelas Maret (Sebelas Maret University, UNS) to specifically explore how to expand person-to-person diplomacy, unite overseas Chinese, promote China-foreign exchanges and cooperation, and enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples with overseas Chinese as the bridge.

**Keywords:** people-to-people diplomacy, confucius institute, overseas ChineseCorresponding Author: Zhang  
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## 1. Introduction

It has been a long history that Chinese people emigrate to Indonesia. Prior to western colonists' invasion of Southeast Asia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Indonesia had nearly 10,000 overseas Chinese. During the Dutch colonial rule of Indonesia, Dutch colonists hired hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers in order to plunder local resources in Indonesia. In 1949 when Indonesia was recognized as independent of the Netherlands, there were around 2 million overseas Chinese people in Indonesia. It is estimated that Indonesia has nearly 10 million overseas Chinese now, accounting for 5% of its total population, among whom 90% have been naturalized. A majority of overseas Chinese in Indonesia originally came from Fujian Province, accounting for approximately 50%, followed by those from Guangdong Province, accounting for about 35%, and the remaining 15% consists of those from Hainan, Guangxi, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, and Hubei.

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The overseas Chinese economy plays a special role in the national economy of Indonesia and has become an important indicator that measures the country's national economy. Overseas Chinese in Indonesia mainly engage in cigarette manufacturing, cement, paper pulp, agricultural product processing, finance, and real estate, covering the primary, secondary and tertiary industries of Indonesia. However, among overseas Chinese in Indonesia, 56% live in underclass zones, 20% are professionals, 20% are middle-class families, and only 4% are consortium bosses.

Unlike overseas Chinese in other countries, those in Indonesia have suffered from Chinese exclusion incidents many times, such as the 1740 Batavia massacre, the 9.30 Incident in 1965, and Black May in 1998, during which overseas Chinese were arbitrarily killed and suffered severe property losses. Later, the China-Indonesia relationship broke the ice. After 2010, bilateral relations saw a gradual pickup. In 2013, the two countries jointly issued the Future Direction of China-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership; in 2015, both sides issued a joint statement to strengthen the comprehensive strategic partnership. In April 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the Asian-African Conference and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bandung Conference in Indonesia. Since then, there have been frequent exchanges between leaders of the two countries. At present, the two countries have established a bilateral dialogue mechanism at the deputy prime minister level, the Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation, the Joint Commission on Economic and Trade Cooperation, the defense and security consultation, as well as cooperative mechanisms at the vice-ministerial level concerning aviation, agriculture, technology, and national defense industry.

## 2. Overview of Chinese Education in Indonesia

Indonesia is the country with the largest number of overseas Chinese in the world, which enables an early start of Chinese education in this country. From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Chinese education in Indonesia can be divided into five stages, including start, rapid development, heyday, decline, and gradual recovery.

(I) Start (the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century): Chinese education in Indonesia was firstly provided in Java. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as overseas Chinese businessmen settled and got married in Java, the problem of education for overseas Chinese children emerged in the early overseas Chinese community. As a result, a number of overseas Chinese people founded community-run schools charging no tuition to offer literacy classes to overseas Chinese children. Therefrom, Chinese schools were created.

(II) Rapid development (the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to 1942): In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Indonesia was under Dutch colonial rule. Dutch colonists hired overseas Chinese to govern the overseas Chinese community, so there were fewer restrictions on the development of Chinese education. Therefore, a number of Chinese schools with modern nature were established one after another. From the 1920s to the period before the Second World War (WWII), Chinese education in Indonesia experienced rapid development. In 1941, Indonesia had around 500 Chinese schools with more than 65,000 students.

(III) Heyday (1945–1957): After WWII, Indonesia saw the unprecedented development of Chinese education. In 1948, Indonesia had 621 Chinese schools with 141,600 students. That figure jumped to 1,669 with 425,000 students in 1957. Back then, Indonesia had about 3 million overseas Chinese. Almost every right-age student had received Chinese education.

(IV) Decline (1958–1998): Since the newly-founded Republic of Indonesia was eager to remove the mark left by colonial rule, Indonesia had introduced stricter policies for foreign settlers from the 1950s. From 1958, Indonesia banned the establishment of new foreign schools and prohibited Indonesian students from attending Chinese schools. As of 1966, Indonesia had only 629 Chinese schools with more than 270,000 students. In 1967, the new Suharto government broke off the normal diplomatic relations with China and banned Chinese schools, halting the development of Chinese schools.

(V) Gradual recovery (2000–present): In 1998, the Indonesian government announced the lifting of the ban on Chinese education, providing a good opportunity for the recovery of Chinese education. Such recovery has been associated with the rise of China's national strength. Thanks to the reform and opening-up strategy, China has continuously enhanced its strength, gradually outperformed Japan in Southeast Asia, and become the largest trade partner of Indonesia, providing an engine to push local economic development. Learning Chinese is apparently able to promote local tourism development and attract investment from China to Indonesia. The rapid recovery of Chinese education in Indonesia is mirrored by the establishment of many private training schools, of the department of Chinese language and literature or the Chinese education major in universities and colleges, and of the Chinese-Indonesian-English school, which demonstrates the mainstream development of Chinese education in Indonesia. The trilingual school has more than 50,000 students, consisting of 85% of students of Chinese origin and 15% of other origins.

### 3. Overview of the Confucius Institute Jointly Built by Xihua University and Universitas Sebelas Maret

The Confucius Institute jointly built by Xihua University and Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) is officially known as the Confucius Institute UNS. Both sides signed an inter-university cooperation agreement in March 2018. In May 2018, they applied for the establishment of a Confucius Institute to the Center for Language Education and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education (formerly known as Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters) and received the approval. On March 11, 2019, the Confucius Institute UNS was inaugurated in Surakarta, Indonesia. The inauguration ceremony was attended by important guests, including the vice minister of Higher Education of Indonesia, the governor of Jawa Tengah, the deputy consul-general of China in Surabaya, Indonesia, the cultural representative of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Indonesia, Chinese and Indonesian presidents of other six Confucius Institutes in Indonesia, UNS's leaders, and Xihua University's leaders.

This Confucius Institute is the seventh Confucius Institute in Indonesia established seven years after the last Confucius Institute. It is also the first Confucius Institute in Jawa Tengah, which is of great significance to both China and Indonesia. Therefore, this Confucius Institute, based in Surakarta, aims to have an influence on the whole Jawa Tengah and Jawa Timur, satisfy local needs for Chinese learning, spread Chinese language and culture, and tell China's stories. Meanwhile, the Confucius Institute has also worked actively hand in hand with local Chinese organizations and combined social and economic development needs of Sichuan Province, China and Jawa Tengah, Indonesia to promote in-depth cooperation between the two schools and school-enterprise cooperation, serve local economic development, expand people-to-people exchanges, enhance understanding and friendship between the two peoples, facilitate China-Indonesia humanistic exchanges and construction of the "Belt and Road", and contribute to all-round exchanges between China and Indonesia.

Since its establishment and operation, the Confucius Institute UNS, based on its international Chinese education, has actively carried out Chinese education activities centered on Jawa Tengah and opened more than 50 Chinese education classes at various levels, including social classes, classes for college and university teachers, classes for primary and secondary school students, classes for college and university students, HSK tutoring classes, and free preschool experience classes, receiving a total of nearly 1,000 students. Through high-quality teaching activities, the local influence

of Chinese education has soon been effectively improved. In addition, the Confucius Institute UNS has actively adapted itself to, grasped, and led the new trend of international Chinese language education, provided differentiated Chinese teaching services with local characteristics, conducted a systematic survey of Chinese education in Indonesia's characteristic trilingual school system, and reached cooperation with Indonesian Trilingual School Association. In 2020, in the face of the new situation of online Chinese teaching in Indonesia during the pandemic, it first held an online micro-lecture competition for Indonesian Chinese language teachers, convened the "International Symposium on Chinese Education in Indonesia in the Post-epidemic Period", and officially published the proceedings of international conferences, promoting the scientific research of Chinese education in Indonesia and enhancing the Chinese education levels of partner schools and other schools in Indonesia. Third, the Confucius Institute UNS has organized rich, novel Chinese cultural activities, run new media, and promoted Confucius Institute activities and spread Chinese culture on WeChat official account, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and other domestic and foreign social media. It has created a favorable environment and atmosphere for Chinese language learners to learn Chinese and also attracted more internet users to learn about Chinese culture and study Chinese.

#### **4. Support and Cooperation from Local Overseas Chinese During the Construction and Development of the Confucius Institute**

Guided by the philosophy of "focusing on the main business and aggregating advantages for integrative development and multivariate co-construction", the Confucius Institute UNS drives its development by regarding overseas Chinese in Indonesia as an important force for development that must be won over. At the same time, the Confucius Institute provides conveniences for overseas Chinese to learn Chinese culture and makes it possible for them to participate in the dissemination of Chinese culture and to facilitate cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. The work of the Confucius Institute can increase the international influence of Chinese culture and enhance the national pride and cohesion of overseas Chinese. So in the early days of the establishment and development of the Institute, close ties were maintained with the local overseas Chinese, who offered great support as cooperative partners.

#### **4.1. Actively Integrating into the Local Society and Promoting the Confucius Institute and Chinese Culture with the Help of Local Overseas Chinese**

Surabaya and Surakarta in Jawa Tengah have always been Chinese gathering areas, where the attitude of locals towards Chinese is more moderate than that in other regions. What's more, as an independent island, Jawa Tengah has rarely seen Chinese exclusion incidents of Indonesians in history. On this island, Chinese people live in harmony with local people, and part of Chinese culture is still alive and Chinese language education remains. Stephanie Phanata, a teacher and director of the Confucius Institute UNS, as well as several Chinese language teachers from the Chinese Department (junior college degree), UNS — all aged between 20 and 30 — have studied for undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in China and thus have a very good understanding of China and Chinese culture. Among them, a senior teacher, over 60, is enthusiastic about Chinese language education. These teachers are engaged in local Chinese language teaching. At the initial preparation stage of the Confucius Institute UNS, they actively made contact and built a bridge of communication and cooperation between the UNS and the Chinese cooperative school, facilitating the establishment of the Institute.

Since its establishment, the Confucius Institute has vigorously participated in local cultural activities of overseas Chinese. The local Chinese Culture Center (CCC) organizations also gave support to the work of the Confucius Institute, inviting the newly appointed director to introduce the new Confucius Institute at the Lantern Festival gala organized by the CCC and also holding an award ceremony. Teachers and students of the Confucius Institute and the Chinese Department, UNS are also invited to participate in celebration activities of Chinese traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival and Dragon Boat Festival, disseminating Chinese culture.

#### **4.2. Helping Teachers of the Confucius Institute Adapt to Local Culture and Improve Teaching Adaptability**

Due to historical reasons, a high proportion of Indonesian Chinese language teachers are overseas Chinese, who are familiar with the local cultural background and know the Chinese language learning characteristics of local students well. During the teaching process of volunteer teachers sent by the Chinese side, the local overseas-Chinese teachers are very willing to help the volunteers. Based on their understanding of the local culture, they assist the volunteers in understanding the characteristics of students

and improving their teaching methods, significantly enhancing the practical teaching abilities of the volunteer teachers.

#### **4.3. Paying Great Attention to and Supporting the Teaching and Cultural Activities of the Confucius Institute**

The Confucius Institute organizes a variety of lively activities to convey China's outstanding cultures and show China's new modern image to the new generations of overseas Chinese. A lot of local overseas Chinese have sent their children to study in the Confucius Institute and participate in traditional cultural activities organized by the Institute. Through integration with the local culture, Indonesia-born Chinese and their next generation will be influenced by Chinese culture as they grow, so that they can have a better understanding of modern China and are more likely to be sinophile and China-friendly when they grow up.

### **5. Achievements Made by the Confucius Institute in Expanding People-to-people Exchanges and Educational Cooperation Through Overseas Chinese**

#### **5.1. Actively Participating in Local Chinese Cultural Activities**

Since its establishment, the Confucius Institute has vigorously participated in local cultural activities of overseas Chinese. In the first month in office, the Chinese director of the Confucius Institute participated in the first Indonesian National Trilingual Schools Sports Culture Week organized by Indonesian national CCC organizations and served as a judge. In the absence of teachers at first, the Institute still actively supported the cultural publicity activities of the local CCC by providing financial support and arranging performances delivered by Institute student groups, becoming an indispensable force for local cultural activities within a short time.

#### **5.2. Focusing on Visiting the Chinese Language Education Leader**

Through recommendations of local Chinese teachers, the Chinese director of the Confucius Institute, upon taking office, focused on visiting the ethnic-Chinese Chinese language education leader, Mr. Chen Youming, president of the Indonesian Trilingual School Association. They discussed the plan to carry out a series of investigation and research projects on Chinese language education in trilingual schools in Indonesia

and the cooperative intention of co-hosting the Conference on Chinese Education of Indonesian National Trilingual Schools in 2020. The director received Ms. Feng Xinhui from Jakarta Chinese Education Coordination Agency and introduced the basic information of the Confucius Institute to her in detail. Later, due to the impact of the pandemic, the director contacted Mr. Cai Changjie, executive chairman of Jakarta Chinese Education Coordination Agency via the internet, and closely worked with Mr. Cai in the investigation and research on Chinese language education in Indonesia.

### **5.3. Making Concerted Efforts to Conduct Country Studies on Chinese Language Teaching**

Based on Chinese language education, the Confucius Institute actively adapts to, grasps, and leads the new trend of local Chinese language international education and provides Chinese language teaching services with local characteristics. The Confucius Institute conducted a systematic survey of Chinese language education in Indonesia's characteristic trilingual school system by contacting and investigating the Sekolah Nasional 3 Bahasa Budi Utama, the Sekolah Nasional 3 Bahasa Bina Widya, and the Indonesian Trilingual School Association, as well as Puhua Trilingual Foundation and Sekolah Nasional 3 Bahasa Putera Harapan and cooperating with the Association. In 2020, in the face of the new situation of online Chinese teaching in Indonesia during the pandemic, it held an online micro-lecture competition for Indonesian Chinese language teachers in October; convened the "International Symposium on Chinese Education in Indonesia in the Post-epidemic Period" in November, which was attended by more than 100 Chinese language experts and educators from Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and China; collected more than 20 conference papers and officially published the proceedings of international conferences. These activities have been reported by mainstream media such as people.cn and Ecns.cn.

### **5.4. Actively Cooperating with Trilingual Schools to Strengthen the Cultivation of Local Teachers and Enhance the Influence of Chinese Language Education**

Since its establishment, the Confucius Institute has conducted Chinese language teaching and training in local trilingual schools with the help of the Indonesian Trilingual School Association; signed teaching point cooperation agreements with trilingual schools such as Sekolah Nasional 3 Bahasa Bina Widya and Sekolah Nasional 3 Bahasa Putera Harapan; sent volunteer teachers from the Confucius Institute to help trilingual



schools with teaching, and organized multiple training sessions for local teachers, improving local teachers' understanding of China and Chinese language education levels and enhancing the local influence of the Confucius Institute.

### **5.5. Building High-end Humanistic Exchange Platforms to Increase Influence in Mainstream Society**

In December 2019, the "Java-Bashu Culture Research Center", located at Xihua University was jointly established by Xihua University and UNS for both sides to jointly conduct cultural, educational and academic and scientific work. In March 2021, the Java-Bashu Culture Research Center held the "First International Symposium on Bashu-Java Cultural Exchanges". Eight experts and professors of both sides exchanged local cultures and characteristics through the symposium, which had a good social impact and was covered by local media in Indonesia. During the Spring Festival of 2021, online activities of "Chinese Bridge – Spring Outing to Bashu" were carried out. Relying on the "Bashu-Java Culture Research Center", some activities were carried out through methods like real-time teaching, video course, online forum and online interaction combining contents such as poetry, song, folk custom, and art with the theme of "wandering around the land of Bashu in the beautiful spring", which attracted more than 100 students and teachers in Indonesia, and become effective means of promoting local cultural exchanges and people-to-people exchanges.

Efforts have been made to search for coherence points in intangible cultural heritage, promote industrial cooperation between Bashu culture and Indonesian culture, and actively promote the cultural and industrial cooperation of Javanese batik and China's Shu embroidery. Experts from Shu Embroidery Industrial Park and Indonesian Chinese costume designers were invited to participate in the international costume online symposium of "Cultural Inheritance of Javanese batik and China's Shu embroidery" held by the Confucius Institute, and a total of more than 200 Chinese and Indonesian teachers and students participated in the activity through online symposium and field visits.

To explore the potential of economic and trade development, the Confucius Institute UNS held a forum under the theme of "Millennials and Modern Digital Finance Management". At the forum, Indonesian Chinese entrepreneurs in the economic and financial industry were invited as keynote speakers to discuss topics focusing on current hot issues of digital finance development, which had a positive impact on the young generation of China and Indonesia.

## 5.6. Cooperating with local Chinese media to promote the new image of China in the new era

The Confucius Institute UNS cooperates with local Chinese media to actively publicize the Confucius Institute and exchange activities of Chinese culture. *Harian Nusantara*, *International Daily News* and *Harian InHua* of Indonesia, and *Sin Chew Daily* of Malaysia covered or forwarded the cultural news of the Confucius Institute UNS many times. Among the news, topics such as Chinese Bashu culture and the new economy drew wide attention.

## 6. Difficulties and Challenges in People-to-people Diplomacy with Overseas Chinese in Indonesia

During nearly one-year construction and three-year operation of the Confucius Institute, the existing difficulties in carrying out people-to-people diplomacy among overseas Chinese in Indonesia are mainly reflected in the following two aspects:

1. Due to the complexity of overseas Chinese composition, in-depth understanding and flexible response are required during exchanges and cooperation.

For historical reasons, overseas Chinese in Indonesia are composed of descendants of early migrants from coastal areas of China's mainland such as Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi, and also Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other areas, mainly from Taiwan. Before establishing the first Confucius Institute together with the university of the Chinese mainland in 2007, universities in Indonesia had close cooperation and exchanges with Taiwan in terms of Chinese education. At that time, Chinese was called the "Chinese language" (written in traditional Chinese characters) by Taiwan. Since 2007, a total of seven Confucius Institutes have been established under the cooperation between Chinese and Indonesian universities. From then on, Chinese education (written in simplified Chinese characters) has been gradually spread from top to bottom in Indonesia through colleges and universities and accepted and popularized more widely throughout the Indonesian society with good impact. Although the exchanges between Indonesia and Taiwan are gradually weakening, some overseas Chinese in Indonesia are descendants of immigrants from Taiwan or have exchanges with Taiwan. So the composition of the overseas Chinese in Indonesia is complex, among whom some people with sensitive identities or unknown backgrounds attempt to find out further information about the Confucius Institute such as the local operation and personnel.

1. Currently, Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country,

with Muslims accounting for 87% of the population, which ranks first in the world. Besides, 6.1% of the population believes in Protestantism, 3.6% believes in Catholicism, and the rest believes in Hinduism, Buddhism, and fetishism. The Constitution of Indonesia stipulates freedom of religious beliefs. "Pancasila" is the guideline for the founding of Indonesia. Among its five principles, the first one is "Belief in the Almighty God", so the Indonesian government allows its people to have different religious beliefs. Almost everyone in Indonesia has his own religious belief, especially Islam, which has widely and profoundly influenced the politics, economy, culture, education, and custom of Indonesia. Therefore, overseas Chinese in Indonesia are also accustomed to asking the beliefs of Chinese people in the exchanges. China respects people's freedom of religious beliefs, but not everyone in China has a religious belief. Therefore, when communicating with overseas Chinese, the Chinese presidents, teachers, and volunteers of Confucius Institutes working in Indonesia should fully respect local religious beliefs but should not talk too much about the religious belief to avoid misunderstanding and conflict.

## 7. Strengthening Specific Paths for People-to-people Diplomacy with Overseas Chinese in Indonesia

In the current context that the global pattern is changing, with prominent multilateralism and multipolarity trends, China, as a big responsible nation, is seeing an increasing rise in the comprehensive strength and international influence on the international stage. China has always upheld "mutual respect, mutual benefits, and win-win situations" for its diplomatic strategies and has launched the Belt and Road Initiative to actively unite neighboring countries and regions. We should actively unite with Indonesia in diplomacy as it is an important strategic country on the Maritime Silk Road. Therefore, in combination with the above analysis of the situation of overseas Chinese in Indonesia, and the example of the work and achievements in the unity of overseas Chinese with the Confucius Institute, this paper proposes the following specific paths for strengthening people-to-people diplomacy with overseas Chinese in Indonesia.

1. Based on the language, strengthen the foundation of Chinese teaching, cooperate closely with schools such as trilingual schools with a large amount of local overseas Chinese, further affect the young generation of overseas Chinese in Indonesia in order

to make them be sinophile and China-friendly in the future, and establish a long-term cooperation mechanism based on mutual benefits to achieve the sustainable development of people-to-people diplomacy;

2. With culture as the media, introduce cultural sources, analyze cultural differences and similarities between China and Indonesia, as well as Sichuan Province and Jawa Tengah, to motivate the sense of identity and intimacy of more overseas Chinese. For example, topics such as the comparative analysis and research of Sichuan Bashu culture and Indonesia Java culture, the art study of Javanese batik in Indonesia and Shu embroidery, the origin exploration of the puppetry in Indonesia and Chinese shadow puppetry can be conducted to seek common ground while reserving differences in social and cultural development and process, attract the interest and identification of overseas Chinese in Indonesia, especially the young generation, and promote the development of people-to-people diplomacy;

3. Establish a new mode of people-to-people communication in the post-epidemic era, a mixed-mode of online communication and field communication; Although the epidemic has temporarily blocked people's field visits, we can actively organize a series of exchanges in fields like language, culture, and scientific research and gather online through new media, building a bridge of understanding and trust between China and Indonesia;

4. Based on Chinese education, actively promote the development mode of "Chinese +"; combine with the advantages of Chinese and Indonesia, and the fields of Indonesia that need to be developed urgently, such as economy and trade, e-commerce, agricultural machinery to promote practical exchanges and cooperation between the two countries in more areas. This measure not only meets the local needs for Chinese learning, as well as education, science, and technology, building a bridge between the two countries in fields of education, cultural exchanges, and cooperation, promoting the people-to-people exchanges and ties between the two countries, realizing the connectivity in technology, cognition, information, and commerce.

## 8. Conclusions

During the development of the Confucius Institute, the two universities should make active cooperation and exchanges and highly value the importance of overseas Chinese in Indonesia. We should actively unite, establish mechanisms, build bridges and explore cooperation, so as to form a characteristic development path to expand the development of people-to-people diplomacy with overseas Chinese as the bridge in

the new situation, and make positive contributions to improving mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

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