

## Interactive Communication of the Core Values Between China and the ASEAN Members Through Confucius Institutes Under the “Belt & Road” Strategy

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**Supported by** Chongqing Social and Scientific Planned Grant (Chongqing Shi Guihua Xiangmu) “The Research of Legal Issues on the Development of Oversea Confucius Institutes” (2013PYFX21); General Grant of China Association for International Education “Research on Education and Management of MTC SOL International Students” (2014-15Y004).

Received 12 April 2017; accepted 5 June 2017  
Published online 26 June 2017

### Abstract

Core values reflect the spiritual pursuit of a nation or a country, serve as the value standards for judgment in a society, and are an important embodiment of the soft power of a country. National policies are one of the key determinants in language spread and cultural values communication, which are usually influenced by international political, economic and diplomatic factors. The spread and communication of languages and cultural values among different regions and countries are an interactive process, starting from differences, while based on things in common. The ongoing enhancement of China’s national strength is a guarantee for the interactive communication of core values between China and the ASEAN members. Confucius Institutes provide an impetus, opportunity and channel for such communication under the “Belt & Road” Strategy advocated by China.

**Key words:** “Belt & Road” strategy; Confucius institute; ASEAN; Interactive communication; Core values

Shen, H. (2017). Interactive Communication of the Core Values Between China and the ASEAN Members Through Confucius Institutes Under the “Belt & Road” Strategy. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 13(6), 38-43. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/9781> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9781>

### INTRODUCTION

The core values are about a country’s fundamental philosophy of values and spiritual orientation. Every country therefore attaches great importance to its core values, which help to enhance national cohesion and are an important embodiment of its soft power. As the name implies, the core values are the core of a culture, closely related to the spread and communication of language and culture. The spread and communication of languages and cultural values among different regions and countries are an interactive process, starting from differences, while based on things in common.

There is always a voice of “China threat” in the world, however, the culture and values of China is committed to be friendliness and peace. The peaceful rise of China will help to eliminate the prejudice against China. Based on this, the paper will discuss the interactive communication of the core values between China and the ASEAN<sup>1</sup> Members under the “Belt & Road” Strategy.

### 1. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CORE VALUES OF CHINA AND THE ASEAN MEMBERS ARE THE STARTING POINT OF INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

The interactive communication of core values of China and the ASEAN members is resulted from differences. Such differences give rise to communication and become the main contents thereof. It is the differences that require interaction and exchange and special attentions in political, economic, cultural and daily communications.

<sup>1</sup> ASEAN refers to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

There is difference between the core values of China and the ASEAN members, so is it among the ASEAN members. Those countries also have different attitudes towards China. In addition to the core values of China, the paper introduces the core values of ten ASEAN members categorized in three groups by the similarity of their core values and their attitudes towards China.

### 1.1 China's Core Values

The 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress proposed to promote prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony, uphold freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law and advocate patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship, so as to cultivate and observe core socialist values. "Prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony" are value goals at the national level; "freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law" reflect the value orientation of the society; and "patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship" serve as the value criteria of every Chinese citizen; all these comprise the socialist core values. The socialist core values, reflecting the nature and characteristics of the socialist core value system, are the core of the system, fully expressing the rich connotations and practice requirements of the system in a concise way.

### 1.2 The Core Values of Singapore and Indonesia

Singapore and Indonesia worship Western values, so their core values are classified as one group. Singapore is the first country in the world to state its core values in the form of a national white paper, and has successfully shaped and disseminated its "shared values". As to the contents and features of these values, the Singapore government released the *White Paper on Shared Values* in 1991, proposing the following five values as the basis: nation before community and society above self; family as the basic unit of society; community support and respect for the individual; consensus not conflict; and Racial and religious harmony.

China and Indonesia normalized their relations from the 1990s. For a period, Indonesia adopted pro-Western economic and diplomatic policies, including the market capitalism system. After the collapse of the Suharto's regime in 1998, Indonesia implemented policies on democratic reform, gradually abolishing the policies of exclusion or discrimination against Chinese and restoring the legal status of Confucianism. Nevertheless, Indonesia favors the Western political systems, social ideals and values.

### 1.3 The Core Values of the Philippines, Vietnam and Myanmar

These three countries can be classified as one group due to the following reasons. In the Philippines, Vietnam and Myanmar, some citizens prefer Western values, while others follow oriental values. Besides, all of these countries have territorial disputes with China.

Furthermore, these countries may experience a big change in terms of foreign political, economic and cultural policies after a regime shift between political powers with different values.

The core values of the Philippines are peace and nonviolence, differences and harmony. Put it simply (Lu, 2010), peace, tolerance and harmony. Christianity has a far-reaching impact on the Philippines. As an independent democracy, Philippines have a strong sense of national identity and nationalism, and desire for justice, freedom and democracy. In the Philippines, nationalism and globalism coexist. The social, political and economic realities play a decisive role in the formation of core values of the country. Acceptance and acknowledgment of differences, as a core value, stem from the reality of extreme disparity between the rich and the poor.

Vietnam has similar national conditions as China as both countries took the socialist road in the context of underdeveloped productivity. Although Vietnam has not proposed such a specific core values as China did, it has developed its values, such as independence, freedom and happiness in its revolution and construction periods. Some of the characteristics of socialism mentioned by Vietnam, including prosperity, also reflect the core values of the country. Vietnamese academics believe that the values of Vietnam shall first highlight the traditional values of the nation and then the universal values of mankind, and finally, efforts shall be made to create new values with a view to realizing industrialization, modernization and internationalization (Lu & Lei, 2015).

In Myanmar, with the resumption of the multiparty democracy system in democratic transformation, political forces that were suppressed for many years are becoming active, underlying national, social and religious conflicts. Myanmar has many nationalities, which give birth to a variety of nationalism, but Burmese have not formed a unified national identity. In this transition period, nationalism becomes the dominant ideology, and Great Burmeseism and Buddhist extremism are on the rise. Politicians' vote-before-everything mentality fails to lead the people away from the narrow nationalism (Khin, 2016).

### 1.4 The Core Values of Malaysia and Brunei

Malaysia and Brunei advocate moderatism and always resort to peaceful approaches to settle disputes on domestic ethnic relations and international relations. Islam is their official religion. Consequently, they can be classified as one group.

The Malaysian government regards the values of moderatism as its national culture and strives to maintain peace in the country and avoid racial conflicts. The values of moderatism are the main weapon Malaysian use to successfully solve issues involving multiple nationalities and religions.

After independence in 1984, Brunei faced the question of how to unify national thoughts and maintain the status of rulers under the new historical conditions. When determining the official ideology, the Brunei government emphasized three elements: first, Malay cultural tradition and values; second, the orthodox Islam; third, the monarchy. Since independence, the Brunei government has been committed to maintaining and raising the position of Islam as the basis for the government to develop policies and as the conduct standards for the entire society, and endeavored to promote other pagans to convert to Islam, with a view to building Brunei a unified Muslim society (Huang, 2007). Brunei always holds moderate attitude to and advocates settlement of the South China Sea Dispute through diplomatic channels.

### **1.5 The Core Values of Thailand, Cambodia and Laos**

Thailand, Cambodia and Laos are deeply influenced by Buddhism. People here are kind and gentle, respecting for and loving nature.

The values of Thai people are closely related to socio-economic aspects of Thailand, and depend on the philosophy of Buddhism through family and school education. According to literatures, Thai people are deemed humble, warm-hearted and benevolent. In the era of globalization, Thai culture more or less contains the elements of Eastern and Western lifestyles. The country is experiencing urbanization and has both the hi-tech economy and the traditional economy, which, together with other binary elements, are shaping the way of thinking and behavioral pattern of the Thai people. Cultures in the rest of the world bring many things to Thailand and its culture. From the perspective of the values of Thailand, Thai culture should be treated as part of other cultures (Promsit, 2008).

Cambodia's core values are distinctive, which can be summed up as anti-materialism and moderatism. Under the impact of traditional Buddhism in early times, anti-materialism is prevailing in the country. Besides, a small number of refugees with Western values live in Cambodia. Due to the local low level of living, frustrated foreigners can live a life they cannot afford in their own countries. They live in Cambodia simply because it may be the only country that does not require any qualification for conducting a professional job.

Laos is one of the least developed countries in the world according to the UN. In this country, however, one may see harmonious coexistence of poverty and happiness, Buddhism and socialism and local tradition and foreign cultures. Lao people are mainly Buddhists, living on agriculture and still keeping their main traditional culture as they are less affected by the external world. Their traditional ethics and values are mainly reflected in the following aspects: (a) thoughts

of compassion, reincarnation and fraternity; (b) respect for the old and caring for the young; good relationship between the husband and wife; and valuing family; (c) unity and courtesy; pursuit of harmony, equality and justice; and (d) respect for life; love to nature; pursuit of harmony between nature and man. In fact, such thoughts as respect for life and love for nature have existed in Laos and Cambodia long ago. Lao people respect nature and worship mountains and rivers. They not only respect nature, but also know how to follow the laws of nature to live (Cheng, 2009).

In general, the core values of ASEAN members are different and underwent development or adjustment in different historical periods, which led to change of their relations with China. Additionally, the extent to which Chinese culture is retained in these countries is different. When representatives of different classes were elected national leaders, they would bring impacts on the core values of their country and the country's attitude towards China may also change.

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## **2. THE COMMONALITIES BETWEEN THE CORE VALUES OF CHINA AND THE ASEAN MEMBERS ARE THE BASIS FOR INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION**

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The commonalities between the core values of China and the ASEAN members are the basis for interactive communication. ASEAN is a concept geographically and culturally. It not only means a regional economic development mode, but also has a unique historical and cultural connotation that has not been seen in modernization in the past, which is especially featured by distinct ideologies. The modernization in this region therefore has strong local characteristics. From westernization to nationalization, values in these countries will gradually return to the values of nations.

The Asian area can be divided into three large cultural circles: Chinese character - Buddhism culture circle, including China, South Korea, Japan and some countries in Southeast Asia; Indian culture circle, including countries in South Asia and some countries in Southeast Asia; and West Asian Islamic cultural circle. Besides, there is also Central Asian culture. Even in the same cultural circle, there are complicated differences. Based on the consensus reached among Asian countries through cultural exchange in the past and following the trend of pursuit by people in different countries of social development and happiness, we may shape shared values to guide the development of Asian civilization. These shared values will become the basis for the interactive communication of core values among China and ASEAN countries. A harmonious culture based on common ethics may play a bigger role in this regard.

Indisputably, “Asian values” along with the concept of Asia have already existed. When developing their values by reference to the Oriental values, the Western world created the values and image of Asia in their eyes. With the rise of their cultures, European countries considered their values superior to that of Asian countries due to the decline of those countries in modern times. The world witnesses the rapid development of the former colonial and semi-colonial countries in this region with their own values and lifestyles after their independence and liberation, especially the rise of China, a country that has ancient civilization and one-fifth population of the world. Of course, India, also a country with ancient civilization, has accelerated its pace of revival.

It is very difficult to find or extract certain Asian values that are fully agreed by Asian countries under the current conditions, but it is possible to shape shared values that could guide the development of Asia. It is not a visionary idea. The formation of such values roots in tradition and there are similar processes in the past. First, historically, Asian people have the history of cultural exchange. Second, almost all Asian countries have a history of being invaded and colonized. The same or similar hardships people suffered become the foundation on which they could better understand each other and share values. Finally, the emergence of Asian economies and their efforts to catch up with the developed countries today also provide a common or similar economic and cultural experience to these countries. With the fast development of Asia, people in this region realize their power and strength. The rise of Asia gives self-confidence to Asian people. No longer satisfied with acceptance of the values created and given by others, Asian countries are increasingly tending to shape their own values. Not only does China stress on independent development and successfully find a road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, but also leaders of other countries including Lee Kuan Yew expressly put forth the proposition of Asian values. Asian people themselves could provide the Asian program to contribute to the “human efforts to explore a better system”, as Chinese President Xi Jinping says.

What kind of Asian values may be shaped? The author believes that the Asian values based on similar historical experience and common development among those countries and designed to be used as a guide for future development may contain the following aspects:

First, give priority to social order. The history of mankind proves that bad order is better than no order, and even a bad government is better than anarchy. Without order, a society will fall into the state of universal war. The development of China and the experience in Singapore tell us that without social order, there is no personal freedom, let alone stability and

prosperity of life. People can only pursue more freedom and democratic participation and better livelihood in a society with order.

Second, give priority to the collective interests. In a larger historical process, one should consider his ultimate interests from a broader perspective, rather than being confined to then personal interests. In order to advance an economy to get rid of its dependence on others, the collective well-being shall be placed in a more important position. The values officially put forward in Singapore emphasize the value orientation of priority of the community over individuals. So it is in China where collectivism is stressed. The rise of Asia is certainly related to this value orientation.

Third, give priority to social harmony. Chinese people have always advocated “harmony” and “concord”. In the values advocated by Singapore, the notion of harmony is also emphasized. Of course, there are conflicts of interests, controversies and disputes in Asia, but people in this area seem prefer the notion of harmony to resolve conflicts.

Fourth, give priority to peaceful settlement, which is an international value of concord. Consistent with the value of harmony emphasized, Asian society is more relying on the power of harmony in coordination of international relations. The People’s Republic China put forth the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which were adopted at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in April 1955. It can be said that the spirits of Bandung Conference are an explicit declaration of Asian values.

Fifth, focus on national spiritual traditions and oriental characteristics. For example, in Singapore, “Asian values” mainly refer to “Confucian values”, while in Malaysia, “Asian values” mean “Malay values with a strong Islamic imprint”. In spite of this, the “Asian values” advocated by Singapore and Malaysia are essentially the same or similar: first, such values represent the spiritual traditions of Asian peoples that are different from that of the West, and thus the “national character” is the most important prerequisite and connotation of “Asian values”; and second, “Asian values” are a value choice different from or opposite to the Western values.

In short, the rise of Asia must be accompanied by the rise of new Asian values. Though we did not have the same expression of values in the past, we are able to shape Asian values for the future development of this region. The core values of the ASEAN are an important part of new Asian values. As the pace of globalization quickens, the international community is aware that all nations shall respect each other and learn from each other if they want to live in peace. It is based on this consensus that people are increasingly recognized that there is no so-called advanced culture or backward culture in the world, and that all cultures are equal.

### **3. THE ONGOING ENHANCEMENT OF CHINA’S NATIONAL STRENGTH IS A GUARANTEE FOR THE INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION OF CORE VALUES BETWEEN CHINA AND THE ASEAN MEMBERS**

China is an ancient civilization and has one fifth of the world’s population. The rise of China and enhancement of its national strength provide a guarantee for the interactive communication of core values among China and ASEAN members. With the rapid growth of China’s economy and increasingly importance of its role in the international community, a platform for dialogues between China and the West is taking shape. This platform is placing more and more emphasis on equality and respect for each other. In foreign exchange, we do not resist some of the core values of the West, but to make these values work effectively. They must be integrated with the Chinese tradition. Although the thoughts of China or Confucianism derive from a specific cultural area, the values embodied in such thoughts, such as benevolence, justice, courtesy, wisdom and sincerity, are gradually recognized by the rest of the world. Therefore, it is a time to have dialogues on values.

In the process of exchange, inequality is inevitable due to the advantaged position of western countries politically or economically, but as long as there is a chance to engage in a dialogue, it will produce certain impacts. In particular, Chinese culture does not worship might, but has a higher pursuit. Since ancient times, there is a notion of “world” in the mind of Chinese people. In case of any conflict of interests between China and the world as a whole, most of Chinese people will agree that the interests of all of the mankind shall be prior to or the basis of that of China.

Western universal values advocate individual freedom, focusing on equality, democracy and civil rights. The core of such values is humanism, which has been underlined since the Renaissance. In Chinese core values, “freedom, equality, democracy and friendliness” are also advocated. It is not just a coincidence. The western core values have been recognized and accepted by Chinese people. The Communist Party of China realized it long ago.

As China put forward the “Belt & Road” Strategy, it is the best time to transmit Chinese culture and values. This strategy aims at promoting not only economic exchange and cooperation with the countries covered, but also interaction among cultures and values. Taking the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) initiated by China as an example, the implementation of the said strategy requires financial support and the establishment of the AIIB needs cooperation of people with different cultural

backgrounds and values. The implementation of programs of the AIIB under the “Belt & Road” Strategy will surely lead to exchange of values of China and ASEAN members.

### **4. CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES: AN IMPORTANT CHANNEL FOR EXCHANGE OF THE CORE VALUES OF CHINA AND THE ASEAN MEMBERS**

The exchange of core values is realized by the spread of language and cultural communication. The story in the 1900s in which the spread of Chinese language was suppressed in the ASEAN countries implies that the ideological conflict shall be avoided in the spread of language and values. National policies are one of the key determinants in languages spread and exchange of culture and values, which are usually influenced by international political, economic and diplomatic factors. China therefore should include the international language and culture exchange and values transmission in national diplomatic work, promote the conclusion of international exchange agreements on language and culture, set up a demand-driven Chinese cultural communication service system in the ASEAN area, with a view to advancing the spread of Chinese language and culture in the world and hence enhancing the soft power (Wu & He, 2016).

To facilitate interactive communication of the core values of China and ASEAN members, all these countries shall learn from each other in cultural exchange. Confucius Institutes and overseas Chinese cultural centers shall be made full use of to boost international spread of Chinese traditional culture. The cultural exchange and cooperation among countries along the “Belt & Road” shall be strengthened. Efforts shall be made to explore new modes for communication of Chinese culture in the world, and create a transmission structure with different levels and covering wide aspects by means of mass communication, group communication and interpersonal communication (Xinhua News Agency, 2017, January 25).

When spreading the core values of China abroad, Chinese people may not emphasize their national identity, but the active role they play in promoting national amalgamation (Anonymous, 2016). Nationalism shall be played down, while national fusion shall be propelled to encourage people in this area to do great things together. In addition to the China’s mainland, traditional Chinese culture does exist in Southeast Asian countries from Cambodia to Laos, which will surely enhance China’s confidence in culture. Of course, the ASEAN members may continue to experience the core values of China today.

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