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THE HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT AND STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES (2004–2021)

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Abstract. The author of the article examines the history of the establishment and distinct stages in the development of Confucius institutes, including their objectives, principles, and funding mechanisms. The challenges faced by Confucius institutes in various countries are also indentified. The author delineates stages of the development of Confucius institutes: 2004–2011 (the formative stage of the cultural-educational institution), 2012–2019 (the advanced operational stage), and 2020–2021 (the transformational stage characterised by comprehensive reforms in the institutes' activities).

Keywords: China; Confucius Institute; “soft power”; Chinese language; culture; reform; stages; development challenges.

ИСТОРИЯ СОЗДАНИЯ И ЭТАПЫ РАЗВИТИЯ ИНСТИТУТОВ КОНФУЦИЯ (2004–2021)

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Аннотация. Рассматриваются история создания и особенности развития институтов Конфуция, цели, принципы и механизм финансирования этих учреждений, а также выявляются проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются институты Конфуция в различных странах. Выделены этапы развития институтов Конфуция: 2004–2011 гг. (этап становления и развития культурно-образовательного учреждения), 2012–2019 гг. (этап активного функционирования), 2020–2021 гг. (трансформационный этап, в основе которого лежит реализация всестороннего реформирования деятельности институтов).

Ключевые слова: Китай; институт Конфуция; “мягкая сила”; китайский язык; культура; реформирование; этапы; проблема развития.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, state programmes on cultural development proposed by the presidents of China Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping became benchmarks for promoting China's cultural and humanitarian interaction with foreign countries and strengthening national power in a new era. Confucius Institutes (CIs) were entrusted with the crucial role of

advancing China's external cultural policy. To achieve greater effectiveness in their activities, significant efforts were made by the Chinese side to adapt this cultural-educational organisation to changing conditions on the international stage.

The activities of Confucius institutes have attracted global expert attention. The foundation for writing this

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article includes scholarly works by S. V. Mikhnevich [1], N. V. Selezneva [2], Liu Xu [3], L. Chi-Cheung and H. Du Cros [4], N. V. Kosteeva [5]), J. Gil [6], R. Peterson, Y. Flora and I. Oxnevad [7].

The basic principles and features of the CIs system, the main directions of their activities, as well as the key tasks of the development of these institutions are examined by S. V. Mikhnevich [1]. N. V. Selezneva analyses the problems of CIs activity and, accordingly, reveals the efforts of the Chinese government to build up its “soft power” taking into account modern challenges and problems. The author pays special attention to the reorganisation of the management system of this organisation [2]. N. V. Kosteeva’s research work is also devoted to reforming the system of CIs. The author analyses the activities of this cultural and educational project through the prism of three universal concepts, such as “cultural diplomacy”, “knowledge diplomacy” and “internationalisation” [5]. L. Chi-Cheung and H. Du Cros examine multiple reactions on the activities of CIs and affirms the role of them in promoting a positive image of China in

the world arena [4]. J. Gil outlines the specifics of CIs development as a tool of China’s “soft power” strategy. He has made a significant contribution to the study of the functioning of CIs, outlined the peculiarities of their development in different countries, analysed the role of these institutions in expanding educational and cultural contacts and identified the problems and limitations faced by these organisations in Western countries [6].

Additionally, the author utilised materials from news agencies such as “Renmin”, “China News Network” and official information resources from Chinese ministries and departments.

This article aims to identify the main stages of development of CIs over the period from 2004 to 2021. In line with this aim, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- to examine the establishment and development of CIs worldwide;
- to determine the main stages of development of CIs and elucidate their content;
- to identify the specific features of CIs functioning in different countries.

Materials and methods

This study is grounded on the principles of historicism, comprehensiveness, and objectivity. General sci-

entific methods such as analysis, synthesis, induction, generalisation, and statistics were employed.

Results and discussion

To enhance mutual understanding and strengthen friendly relations between the Chinese people and other nations, as well as to promote scientific and cultural-humanitarian exchanges with foreign countries, the Chinese government established the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in 1987. In October 1989, the development of the Chinese proficiency test (HSK) commenced. In 2002, the Office of the International Council for Chinese language (hereinafter – Hanban), was established to provide resources and services for teaching the Chinese language and culture on a global scale. Following the examples of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, China began opening CIs worldwide in 2004, designating them as non-profit educational institutions to teach the Chinese language and promote its culture.

Confucius institutes are jointly established by Chinese and foreign partner institutions based on principles of mutual respect, friendly consultations, equality, and mutual benefit. The Chinese side emphasised that these institutes adhere to the laws and regulations of the countries in which they operate and respect local cultural and educational traditions [1, p. 88].

Regarding the chosen name “Confucius Institute” (CI) Hanban explained that “Confucius is a historically significant figure in Chinese culture. In the hearts of the Chinese people, he is considered the greatest teacher of all time. He was a philosopher who taught

people to treat others with respect and consideration, to coexist harmoniously with nature, and to strive for a better future based on their current environment” [6, p. 34]. Nevertheless, the activities of the Confucius Institute are not associated with Confucianism as a philosophical-religious doctrine but serve as a foundation for traditional Chinese culture.

The main areas of activity of the CI include the following:

- teaching Chinese language and familiarising students with Chinese culture and history;
- conducting scientific research in other related disciplines or fields using Chinese language as the primary medium;
- training and retraining teachers of Chinese language;
- preparing educational resources for teaching Chinese;
- organising cultural events;
- administering the HSK;
- arranging internships for those studying Chinese;
- providing consultancy services in education, culture, economics, tourism, etc.¹

Based on the analysis of CI activities, three stages of development of this cultural-educational organisation can be identified.

The period from 2004 to 2011 is the initial stage marked the development of CIs. On 15 June 2004, the

¹Global portal of the Confucius Institute [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://ci.cn/gywm/pp> (date of access: 27.04.2024) (in Chinese).

first-ever agreement to establish a CI was signed with Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies in Uzbekistan. On 24 November of the same year, the first CI was opened in Seoul (South Korea). It was a historic event for the international dissemination of Chinese language and culture. In total, in 2004, CIs were established in South Korea, Uzbekistan, Kenya, Cameroon, the USA and Sweden [3, p. 235].

In July 2005, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China published a document titled "Introduction to the "Chinese bridge" project". According to this document, the objectives of the CIs were defined as promoting diversity in the world, facilitating China's integration into the international educational community, actively advancing the teaching of the Chinese language abroad, and providing educational materials to various countries. The document indicated that CIs could collaborate with overseas universities to establish centres for Chinese language learning and conduct language proficiency testing². This laid a solid regulatory foundation for promoting Chinese language and culture globally, primarily through the platform of CIs.

In October 2006, the Centre for the development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language under the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China promulgated the constitution of the CI. This document outlined the purpose, principles, primary activities, rights and responsibilities of CIs, and specified the application procedure for establishing a CI. For instance, an applicant (an educational institution in a foreign country) must apply to the CI headquarters, where the application materials are reviewed. The review methods include document examination, personal hearings of reports, on-site inspections, and expert consultations. Once the CI headquarters approves the application, it signs an agreement with the applicant³. This provides a clear explanation for establishing CIs and conducting their cultural and educational activities.

According to the constitution of the CI, the CI headquarters is the highest governing body for CIs worldwide. The CI headquarters, established in Beijing on 9 April 2007, is designated by the Chinese side as a non-profit organisation with independent legal status, owning the name, logo, and brand of CI. A council was established within the CI headquarters. A member of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Chen Zhili, became the chairperson of the first session of the council. More-

over, to enhance operational efficiency, the headquarters began inviting Chinese and foreign specialists and experts to serve as senior consultants.

The CI headquarters undertook the following tasks:

- planning the establishment and determining evaluation standards for CIs;
- approving the creation of CIs;
- reviewing and approving annual project implementation plans, budgets, and final reports of CIs;
- supervising and managing the quality of CI operations;
- providing educational resources and services to CIs;
- selecting Chinese directors and teachers, and being responsible for training CI managers and teachers;
- organising annual CI conferences;
- developing a capital and asset management system for the Chinese side⁴.

Regarding funding for CIs activities, according to the constitution of CIs, each new institution received a certain amount of initial funding from the Chinese side. Annually, funds are jointly raised by both foreign and Chinese parties, with their contributions in a ratio of approximately 1:1 typically⁵. On 4 July 2008, the document titled "Interim measures for the administration of special funds for the international development of the Chinese language", issued by the Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China and the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China specified that the initial funding for each CI amounted to 150 000 US dollars (with 30 000 US dollars allocated for each Confucius Classroom). The operational expenses showed slight variations but were generally maintained between 150 000 and 200 000 US dollars per annum for each CI (and 50 000 US dollars annually for each Confucius classroom)⁶. Funding for CIs was sourced from both China and foreign countries, as well as from the institutions themselves. The CIs offered a variety of fee-based courses in language and cultural studies. The revenue generated provided crucial financial support for the institutes' day-to-day operations⁷.

The global financial crisis of 2008 presented China with an opportunity to achieve its economic development goals at a faster pace and to be perceived in a new light by countries that had previously been critical of its economic model. Following 2008, the global network of CIs expanded rapidly. Many countries demonstrated an interest in enhancing cooperation with China, includ-

²Introduction to the "Chinese bridge" project [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/xw_zt/moe_357/3579/moe1017/tnull_10586.html (date of access: 27.04.2024) (in Chinese).

³Constitution of the Confucius Institute [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/zsdwxxgk/200610/t20061001_62461.html (date of access: 02.04.2024) (in Chinese).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Notice on the issuance of the "Interim measures for the management of special funds for the international promotion of Chinese Language" by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://202.204.169.201/html/contentpage.aspx?NewsID=177&systemName> (date of access: 02.04.2024) (in Chinese).

⁷Interim measures for the management of Chinese funds for Confucius institutes [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/zsdwxxgk/200608/t20060801_62246.html (date of access: 02.04.2024) (in Chinese).

ing in cultural and educational domains. Notably, the number of new institutes reached a record high in 2009, with 249 establishments. By 2011, there were 858 CIs worldwide [6, p. 48]. Thus, from 2004 to 2011, an average of 122 new CIs were added annually. Under these conditions, activities on the CI platform consistently expanded.

Analysing the role of CIs since their inception in 2004, L. Che-Chung and H. DuCros argued in their scholarly article that it was still too early to discuss the global impact of CIs, as the institution was in its early stages of development and building mutual trust [4, p. 82].

It appears that from 2004 to 2011, foreign countries viewed CIs as venues for learning the Chinese language, opportunities to closely observe China's development trends, and platforms for cooperation with China in education, culture, and economics. CIs evolved into a brand for international Chinese language education and a means for fostering friendly exchanges between China and other countries. Consequently, at this initial stage, CIs successfully developed cultural and educational activities that were welcomed by most countries.

The period from 2012 to 2019 marked an advanced phase in the development of CIs, characterised by the adoption of the Development plan for Confucius institutes from 2012 to 2020. This document clearly outlined development goals, primary tasks, key projects, and other aspects of CI advancement. This event had a positive significance for deepening China's interaction with foreign countries in culture and education and for highlighting the role and potential of CIs as platforms for promoting Chinese culture globally⁸.

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of CIs, a decision was made at the Global Confucius Institute conference in December 2013 to hold the first world Confucius Institute day on 27 September 2014. On this day, approximately 1200 CIs and Confucius classrooms across 123 countries and regions organised over 3000 events. These activities included open Chinese language classes, exhibitions of Chinese textbooks, lectures on Chinese culture, and student performances⁹. In honour of the 10th anniversary celebration, Chinese president Xi Jinping, in a letter addressed to all teachers and students, highlighted that the Chinese government and people support the development of CIs. He called upon all nations to collaborate in promoting the progress of human civilisation, fostering closer ties among peoples, and creating a better future for humanity¹⁰.

In June 2016, during a seminar at the annual conference of the International association for Chinese management research, an analysis of the development of CIs was conducted. It was noted that within ten years, CIs had surpassed the achievements of agencies from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain in promoting their languages over decades or even centuries. However, alongside the development of CIs, numerous challenges emerged. These included obstacles and conflicts between Chinese and foreign staff in the context of intercultural communication, as well as misunderstandings and suspicions regarding CI activities¹¹.

During this period, there was a further expansion in the geographical reach of CIs. Among Asian countries, Thailand, Japan, and South Korea took leading positions in terms of the number of CIs and students enrolled. In Europe, CIs were relatively densely distributed, with the highest numbers operating in Germany, the United Kingdom, and France. Among CIS countries, Russia led in the number of institutes, with Belarus occupying an honourable second place. CIs were established in the US, Canada, and Mexico. In Africa, learning the Chinese language and culture became a fashionable trend as these skills positively impacted China's cooperation with countries in the region. In Oceania, the CI at the University of Western Australia established the Confucius Institute fund to promote language learning and charitable activities. The opening of more CIs in various countries and regions was undoubtedly influenced by factors such as the size of their territories, geographical remoteness from China, and their significance as trade and economic partners of China.

In April 2017, a report titled "Confucius institutes and soft power in American higher education" was published on network-attached storage (NAS) platforms in the US. The report indicated that CIs represent a Chinese project aimed at fostering a positive attitude among Americans towards China's communist government. These institutions were located within American universities, with their numbers exceeding one hundred. NAS recommended that all American universities and schools hosting CIs or Confucius classrooms should close these centres and terminate all contracts with Hanban to protect the integrity of American education and intellectual freedom¹². The influence of CIs on education sparked significant debate in the US. Some American experts argued that these institutes threatened free discussion

⁸Confucius Institute development plan (2012–2020) [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201302/t20130228_148061.html (date of access: 02.04.2024) (in Chinese).

⁹Confucius Institute day [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%AD%94%E5%AD%90%E5%AD%A6%E9%99%A2%E6%97%A5/15847337> (date of access: 02.04.2024) (in Chinese).

¹⁰Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter on the 10th anniversary of the establishment of Confucius institutes worldwide and the first global Confucius Institute day [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0928/c64094-25748929.html> (date of access: 27.04.2024) (in Chinese).

¹¹International association for Chinese management research 2016 annual conference seminar: research on the development of Confucius institutes [Electronic resource]. URL: https://hk.aconf.org/conf_72297.html (date of access: 27.04.2024) (in Chinese).

¹²Outsourced to China: Confucius institutes and soft power in American higher education. New York : Natl. Association of Scholars, 2017. P. 11–12.

and could impact academic freedom in universities. However, some did not share this viewpoint.

Western countries' concerns regarding the activities of CIs were not so much about China's right to disseminate its language and culture but rather stemmed from the fact that China is a communist nation that has pursued a markedly different path of modernisation compared to Western countries. Consequently, China holds divergent views on significant global issues [6, p. 65].

Members of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, the premier minister, and the president of the country regularly participated in CI ceremonial events, which caused a certain degree of discontent among Western countries. On one hand, Hanban was directly subordinate to the State Council of the People's Republic of China. On the other hand, CIs received widespread support through Chinese diplomatic missions abroad. The active involvement of the Chinese government drew the attention of state structures in certain Western countries to CI activities, prompting efforts to either close down CIs or reclassify them as independent legal entities. In their view, these educational organisations' activities extended beyond the scope of inter-university collaboration [2, p. 271–272]. In 2017–2018, a rapid wave of CI closures swept across the US, growing each year. A crisis of trust in CIs also began to manifest in Europe. The closure of these cultural and educational institutions in Western countries led to a global decline in the number of CIs for the first time in 2019.

In contrast to the developments in the West, cooperation between China and Asian and African countries in education, culture, science, and economics continued to expand. Specifically, a course titled "Chinese language + vocational education" was developed to meet enterprises' staffing needs and help students advance successfully in their careers, particularly within the framework of the Belt and road initiative. It is important to note that CIs in Asia and Africa consider regional development characteristics in their activities.

The period of 2020–2021 marked a transformational phase in the history of CI development. The Covid-19 pandemic served as a significant stress test for CI operations. This was evident as the shift to online education during the pandemic exacerbated issues related to educational quality due to the lack of effective online teaching methodologies. Additionally, CI students' motivation was low. According to professor Sun Yixue of Tongji University, the Covid-19 pandemic presented CIs with a new mission and pushed them towards a new stage of development. CIs were tasked with redefining

their positioning, establishing educational goals, and improving teaching methodologies for sustainable development¹³.

In June 2020, the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) was established in Beijing, comprising 27 Chinese universities and companies. The foundation aims to promote cultural and humanitarian exchanges, strengthen mutual understanding and learning between different civilisations, and jointly build a community of a shared future for mankind. The initial fund amounted to 36.3 million yuan, contributed by 24 entities, including Beijing Language and Culture University. The Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China serves as the registration and management authority for the foundation, while the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China acts as the competent business unit. The CIEF has been granted an exclusive licence to use the CI trademark and has commenced managing CIs under a brand authorisation model. Applications for establishing CIs now require approval from this foundation (figure).

According to the general provisions of the foundation charter, approved at the 1st meeting of the CIEF Council during its inaugural session on 16 June 2020, the CIEF is tasked with the following positions:

- exploring and proposing prospective directions for the development of CIs and Sinology worldwide;
- establishing standards and criteria for the CI brand, with the authority to set up CIs and Confucius classrooms;
- evaluating the quality of educational organisation within CIs and Confucius classrooms;
- undertaking other activities related to international Chinese language education that align with the foundation's objectives.

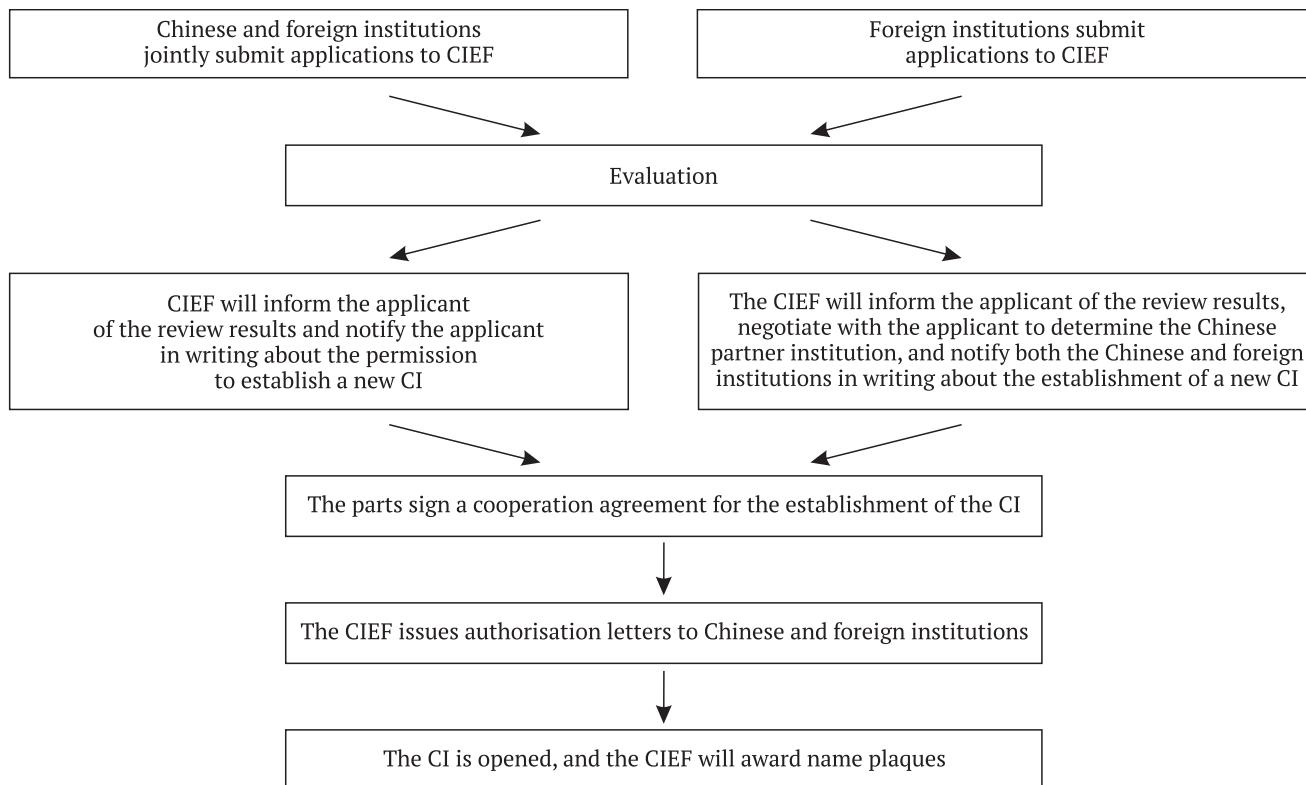
To date, a new CI charter has not yet been adopted [2, p. 274].

The CIEF has become a significant support mechanism for promoting the development of CIs globally. According to annual reports for 2020 and 2021, the CIEF expended 18 mln yuan and 37 mln yuan respectively to support the functioning and development of CIs. The revenue sources of the CIEF include funds donated by initiators, voluntary donations from individuals, legal entities, or other organisations¹⁴, investment income, other legal revenues, etc.

Additionally, significant funding sources for CI activities include Chinese and international partner universities, as well as revenue generated from CI activities themselves.

¹³After the epidemic, the development of Confucius institutes should press four fast-forward buttons [Electronic resource]. URL: https://ishare.ifeng.com/c/s/v0041mXOkUW9zTj1yuCQ0U41RTTpEdNHeG3D6w-_OteiZfh0Agd-QdZhSMmYNI-spvG7CCTM78ZvSNefC7Zi00F00Tg?spss=np&aman=700b00R22bhde4ufb5rfbb1fd46d38Ac8q28cV20a&gud=7f260z079k492F700f000b004&from=timeline&from=timeline (Date of access: 18.04.2024) (date of access: 18.04.2024) (in Chinese).

¹⁴Annual report on the work of the Chinese International Education Foundation for 2020 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.cief.org.cn/xxgk_ndbg (date of access: 02.04.2024) (in Chinese); Annual report on the work of the Chinese International Education Foundation for 2021 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.cief.org.cn/xxgk_ndbg_2021 (date of access: 02.04.2024) (in Chinese).



The process of the new CI establishment

As a result of the reforms, the CIEF no longer directly participates in specific managerial affairs of CIs. Operational activities are managed by partner universities, thereby expanding institutional capacities for direct inter-university cooperation between China and foreign countries [5, p. 116–117].

According to the head of Shenyang Normal University Hao Deyong, the method of cooperative management and the operational mode have changed. However, the guiding ideology, fundamental rules, and principles for establishing CIs remain unchanged. It has changed the specific functions of CI management entities. The CI educational system has undergone fundamental changes, including reforms aimed at enhancing educational standards, developing specialised courses, and creating a high-quality professional team¹⁵. In October 2021, the news agency “Huanqiu Shibao” highlighted that the structural reforms were aimed at “dispelling the Western misconception that Confucius institutes serve as China’s ideological marketing machine”¹⁶.

On 5 July 2020, the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) was established under the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, replacing the CI headquarters. This centre is tasked

with coordinating and promoting international Chinese language education, actively implementing language cooperation with foreign countries, and expanding intercultural exchange. The primary responsibilities of the centre include participating in the overall strategy for international Chinese language education, promoting international language education projects, and facilitating global cultural and humanitarian interaction. Following the reorganisation, CLEC operates under the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and offers various forms of cooperation to international partners.

As a result of these reforms, the management structure of CIs was restructured. This reorganisation alleviated the issue of extensive involvement by the Chinese government in CI activities and represents a significant intention to diversify CI funding sources [2, p. 270–274]. However, the reform did not immediately improve the situation regarding CI closures. In the US, the number of closed institutions continued to rise in 2020–2021, with 27 closures in 2020 and 34 in 2021 [8, p. 33]. Judging by changes in the number of CIs worldwide, the negative growth trend persisted in 2020. According to the chairman of the CIEF Yang Wei, the door for CIs as a window

¹⁵Confucius Institute undergoes “restructuring”: non-governmental foundations manage brands and introduce external partner support [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/cul/2021/07-24/9527533.shtml> (date of access: 27.04.2024) (in Chinese).

¹⁶Song K. Beijing renamed Confucius institutes in response to growing international criticism [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.epochtimes.ru/china/pekin-izmenil-nazvanie-institutov-konfutsiya-v-otvet-na-rastushhuyu-mezhdunarodnuyu-kritiku-125216/> (date of access: 30.04.2024) (in Russ.).

and bridge for linguistic and cultural exchange between China and foreign countries will not be closed, nor will the door for teaching the Chinese language¹⁷.

As of July 2021, marking the first anniversary of the establishment of CIEF, over 500 CIs and Confucius classrooms worldwide had received brand authorisation letters issued by the foundation. Consequently, all these cultural and educational organisations completed their transition to CIEF management. Moreover, since the foundation's inception, more than 60 Chinese and foreign educational institutions have expressed their intention to establish new CIs abroad. Yang Wei stated that the CI brand is managed by a non-governmental foundation, which allows for mobilising enthusiasm from all sectors of society both domestically and internationally, promoting the global dissemination of the Chinese language, and achieving sustainable and high-quality development of CIs¹⁸.

In 2020–2021, despite Covid-19 significantly impacting international Chinese language education, CIs achieved new successes with support from both Chinese and international partners. As of 31 December 2021, there were 489 CIs and 817 Confucius classrooms worldwide, located in 158 countries and regions. These included 135 institutes and 112 classrooms in

Asia, 63 institutes and 46 classrooms in Africa, 180 institutes and 332 classrooms in Europe, 92 institutes and 249 classrooms in North America and South America, and 19 institutes and 78 classrooms in Oceania. In 2021, the total number of registered learners in CIs and Confucius classrooms worldwide exceeded 1.05 mln people¹⁹.

In 2021, a global portal for the CI was launched, the journal “Confucius Institute” was republished in 11 languages, and a commemorative medal system for CI directors was established. In December of the same year, during the international week of Chinese language learning, several key resources were introduced, including the Reference system for Chinese culture and society in international Chinese language education, the Action plan for international online Chinese language education (2021–2025), the Report on the development of educational resources for international Chinese language education, and various other educational materials²⁰. All these initiatives laid the theoretical and practical groundwork for more rapid and successful development of CIs in the third decade of the 21st century. On 25 July 2022, at the 12th meeting of the 1st council, the Development plan of the China International Educational Foundation (2022–2025) was adopted. This also means that CIs have entered a new stage of development since 2022.

Conclusions

The naming of CIs after the ancient Chinese philosopher and educator Confucius signifies that the core principle guiding this cultural and educational organisation is harmony. This concept encompasses mutual respect, recognition of diversity, learning from one another, friendly consultations, equality, and mutual benefit. CIs are non-profit institutions established through collaboration between Chinese universities and foreign partner educa-

tional institutions. Based on a comprehensive analysis of CI activities, their development can be divided into three stages: 2004–2011 (the period of establishment and development), 2012–2019 (the advanced stage) and 2020–2021 (the transformational stage). The reform of the CI was completed in 2021. This marked the beginning of a new phase for the sustainable development of CIs and international Chinese language education in a new era.

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