

Nov 04, 2016 by [Joshua Kurlantzick](#)

China's PD: Promoting Chinese Language Studies ^[1]

The cover story in Time's Asian edition highlights an important part of China's public diplomacy that is not yet well understood in the West -- promoting Chinese language studies.

After an initial rocky start trying to promote Chinese language studies in the late 1990s, the Chinese government, including its ministry of education, seems to have realized the need to divorce language studies from explicit government support. Hence the name of the Chinese language programs -- Confucius Institutes -- betrays no links to China's own political system or modern history; in actuality, Mao tried to disown Confucius' legacy. Hence, also, although the Chinese government has paid for at least the first year of a number of these language programs overseas, it does not highlight the government support, and generally allows local universities to take the lead.

The language studies promotion has been working well -- particularly in the less developed nations on China's borders, where Chinese language schools tend to be better-equipped than the local public schools. In Cambodia, for example, I found on a recent trip that one Chinese-language school has over 10,000 students, and the capital is proliferating with Chinese-language schools, some of which get at least initial funding from the Chinese government.
