University Partnership of the Confucius Institute: A Case Study in Canada

Yinan Wang, The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor: Li, Jun, The University of Western Ontario
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education
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Abstract

This study aims to explore the university partnership of the Confucius Institute between its partner from Canada and China. Drawing on organizational theory through the lens of higher education partnerships, the study uses a qualitative research method with a case study approach. Taking the Confucius Institute in a Canadian university as a case, the study probes into research questions regarding the nature and characteristics of the partnership built via the Confucius Institute as the platform, the key stakeholders involved in the partnership of the Confucius Institute, and in what ways have the key stakeholders shaped the partnership. Data were collected through the documents of the Confucius Institute and a semi-structured interview with the Canadian co-director. Key issues revealed from the data are the partnership mechanism of the Confucius Institute, dynamic interactions between the various key stakeholders in different stages of the partnership, in what perspectives the inside and outside stakeholders influence partnership building and the common objectives fulfillment of both partner universities. Discussions on the coping strategies to advance the partnership of the Confucius Institute are also provided in this study. Further, the author concludes with proper implications for the development of the Confucius model partnership based on the findings.

Keywords: Confucius Institute; language education institutes; partnership mechanism; higher education institutions’ partnership; transnational partnership
Summary for Lay Audience

This study aims to outline the university partnership of the Confucius Institute under the cooperation between the Canadian and Chinese partner universities. The research topic is navigated from two perspectives: the Confucius Institute itself as a language educational organization, and the Confucius Institute as a platform that enables its partnership between paired universities. Taking the Confucius Institute in a Canadian university as a case, the study explores the university partnership of the Confucius Institute from five perspectives: governance, equity, standards, teachers and community building. Data were collected through the documents of the Confucius Institute and a semi-structured interview with the Canadian co-director. Then, the research attempts to figure out who are the key stakeholders of the Confucius Institute involved in its partnership. Further, in what ways these stakeholders shape the partnership from the abovementioned perspectives. Discussions on the coping strategies to advance the partnership of the Confucius Institute are also provided in this study. Further, the author concludes with proper implications for the development of the Confucius model partnership based on the findings, intending to contribute to the university partnership, language learners around the world, and cultural understanding between various civilizations.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, most sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Jun LI, for his ongoing supports throughout the whole journey. Thank you for helping me to understand that academic life is a voyage of self-discovery more than just research work. You consistently allow me to explore my learning interest and potential by myself. Meanwhile, you are always one e-mail away to be reached out to guide me in the right direction. Your lovely encouragement, “why don’t you try to challenge yourself by exploring your real interest”, has motivated me to finish this research idea to the greatest extent.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Paul Tarc for serving on my thesis committee. Thanks for your time and all your valuable feedback on both the proposal and the thesis. I gratefully indebted your insights, which enable me to get inspiration from a different perspective. I also appreciate your instruction in the course Globalization and Education back in the first school year, which benefits me a lot until now.

Big thanks to all the authors in the references. Thank you for all the fantastic literature you have created, which allows me to accomplish my research based on your wisdom. I appreciate the charming ideas and words in your writings, which inspired me in many ways.

Special thanks to the participant of the interview, the professors and staff members in the Faculty of Education, and all the amazing fellows who I befriend at Western University. Thanks for your trust and support. I cannot fully enjoy this journey without any of you.

Cordial thanks to my dear friend, Dr. Jia LI, for being a big fan of my research and a great supporter at any stage of my life.

Last but by no means least, it is a great privilege for me to express the profound love and gratitude to my beloved parents and grandparents. Thanks for all your unfailing and unconditional love.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Alongside the rapid advancement of communication technologies, there is an increasing demand for communications among peoples and among countries. The establishment and development of language education institutes have become a major vehicle to meet this demand. Understandably, they have also been subjected to certain international skepticism and criticism in recent years, the most typical of which is the Confucius Institute.

1.1 Background of the Study

Founded in 2004, the Confucius Institute (CI) is a non-profit educational institution for the sake of supporting standard Chinese education among professional Chinese-speaking teachers and promoting Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. The Confucius Institute is sponsored in terms of its initial funding by the Confucius Institute Headquarters, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Education of China. Recently, the directive of the Headquarters’ retitling is circulating throughout the mass media output with a source in the education sector (Zhuang, 2020), but without any official announcement from the Headquarters nor the Ministry of Education of China so far. That is, the Confucius Institute Headquarters had changed its name to the Ministry of Education Centre for Language Education and Cooperation.

According to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes, in addition to supporting the increasing demands for standard Chinese learning all over the world, the Confucius Institute also aims to strengthen educational and cultural exchanges and cooperation with other countries, in order to increase friendly relationships with other nations and promote the development of multiculturalism. Hence, on the basis of offering standard Chinese language teaching courses, the Confucius Institute also provides support to local activities such as cross-cultural communication, Chinese education and cultural consultation and HSK (汉语水平考试) administration. HSK is the abbreviation for “Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi” in Chinese phonetics, which means Chinese Proficiency Tests.

Up to now, 541 Confucius Institutes and 1170 Confucius classrooms have been established worldwide, covering 39 countries and regions in Asia, 46 countries in Africa, 43 countries and regions in Europe, 27 countries in the Americas, and 7 countries in Oceania (Confucius Institutes Headquarters, n.d.).
Heretofore, there are 12 Confucius Institutes and no Confucius Classrooms in Canada, among which six of the Confucius Institutes have been founded in the University of Waterloo, Brock University, Carleton University, Saint Mary’s University, the University of Regina, and the University of Saskatchewan, in time sequence. The rest of the Confucius Institutes are based in public institutes, public colleges, one high school and one school district.
Table 1
Overview of the Confucius Institutes in Canada

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Confucius Institutes in Canada</th>
<th>Partnership Institutions in China</th>
<th>Locations of the Confucius Institutes</th>
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<tr>
<td>CI at British Columbia Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Southwest University</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>CI in Waterloo (University of Waterloo)</td>
<td>Shanghai international studies University</td>
<td>Waterloo</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>CI in Quebec (Dawson College)</td>
<td>Beijing Normal University</td>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI in New Brunswick (Department of Education in New Brunswick)</td>
<td>Shandong Provincial Education Department (Qufu Normal University)</td>
<td>Moncton</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI in Edmonton (Edmonton Public Schools)</td>
<td>Shandong Provincial Education Department (Shandong Foreign Trade Vocational College)</td>
<td>Edmonton</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI in Coquitlam (Coquitlam School District)</td>
<td>South China Normal University</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI at Brock University</td>
<td>Minjiang University</td>
<td>St. Catharines</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI at Carleton University</td>
<td>Central China Normal University</td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI at Saint Mary's University</td>
<td>Xiamen University</td>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI at University of Regina</td>
<td>Hunan University</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI at Seneca College</td>
<td>Northeast Normal University</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI at University of Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Beijing Institute of Technology</td>
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Table 1 provides an overview of the founding information for the Confucius Institutes in Canada and the details of their local partners. Typically, the cooperative agreements were signed by the host organizations and the Confucius Institute Headquarters, with a Chinese university always providing operational support. The Canadian and Chinese partner universities usually conduct the Confucius Institute in a joint effort later in practice. That is, the Chinese university offers a co-director, Chinese language teachers, and other resources like textbooks and consultation services. Meanwhile, the host university provides administrative support with another co-director, classrooms and facilities. The cooperation between both sides is also regarded as a win-win model. It can be observed that from 2005 to 2011, 12 Confucius Institutes were founded in Canada. All the local universities and schools inaugurating these Confucius Institutes have partnered with a Chinese university or college.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

The Confucius Institute faces various challenges in partnership development for various reasons. First, the Confucius Institute is not only a platform where both partner universities benefit but also a facilitator of the partnership for both partners. Besides, the Confucius Institute itself is commonly characterized by a language education brand that focuses on Chinese language learning and cultural understanding. Hence, unlike the traditional partnerships between higher education institutions primarily focusing on personnel exchanges and academic resource sharing, the Confucius Institute’s partnership model requires that both the Confucius Institute and its partners possess a high capability for managing cultural differences and expectations rather than being a unidirectional academic exporter.

Second, it can be observed in Table 1 that two partners are getting involved by the Confucius Institute, i.e., the paired universities in Canada and in China. Therefore, it can be understood that the Confucius Institute is not only a language educational organization but also a platform that enables these partnerships to happen between two higher education institutions. Like many traditional bilateral partnerships in educational cooperation, it is complex to identify the appropriate collaboration model for the Confucius Institute with relatively many more stakeholders involved. Further, since the partnership brings together partners from higher education institutions with diverse interests, functioning styles and cultural backgrounds, it is
also necessary for the Confucius Institute to perceive and satisfy even the most subtle needs of the potential stakeholders from both partner universities.

Third, although the Confucius Institute has increasingly been established all around the world, ensuring that the partnership model is well regarded internationally and determining the steps for advancing internationalization have not yet been adequately considered. Each single Confucius Institute is currently counting on the same one-on-one partnership model in its functioning, where a unified set of standards is applied to all the Confucius Institutes worldwide. There is no doubt that official regulations and agreements are still needed to ensure the functioning of each Confucius Institute, and to regulate behaviours and the tenets of each partnership on both sides. However, considering the institutional type, internationalization level, and partnership support of the foreign partners, the Confucius Institute is also supposed to keep the circumstances of its foreign partner institutions in mind, and in this way facilitate the partnership to achieve its desired outcomes.

Missteps in any of the three challenges abovementioned could trigger resistance or even create obstacles in the partnership with the Confucius Institute and furthermore result in operational and reputational problems. The most obvious negative side effect of the current partnerships of the Confucius Institutes is the dissenting voices among North American academics and media pundits. For instance, University professors in the United States and Canada have shown concerns about the establishment and operation of Confucius Institutes. Contradictions mainly focus on the interference with democracy and academic freedom. On the one hand, as public institutes under the administration of the Ministry of Education of China, the Confucius Institutes are treated as tools of the Chinese government to realize its “soft power” strategy, with the possibility of getting involved in some intelligence services (McDowell, 2010). Other critics assert that the purpose of the institutes is to strengthen China’s political influence and to propagandize the Chinese government’s ideology (AAUP, 2014). Most recently, the State Department has designated the Confucius Institute U.S. Center as a “foreign mission”, which means the U.S. Center along with all the Confucius Institutes in the U.S. are considered as “part of the Chinese Communist Party’s global influence and propaganda apparatus” (Pompeo, 2020) from the official’s perspective.

On the other hand, North American universities indicate that Confucius Institutes have threatened the integrity and academic freedom of local universities in the host countries with the influence of its Headquarters in Beijing. To be more specific, the Confucius Institute Headquarters may interfere with the academic affairs of the Confucius Institutes, such as through curriculum setting and classroom discussion topics (CAUT Bulletin, 2014), which
would negatively impact the practices of the Confucius Institutes in their operations in the host countries. As a result, many higher academic institutions in North America, such as the University of Chicago and Pennsylvania State University, have decided to suspend the operations of the Confucius Institutes within their universities as well as their cooperation with the Confucius Institute Headquarters. In Canada, universities are hesitant to continue their cooperation with the Confucius Institutes as well. Lately, a Confucius Institute in New Brunswick was shut down due to “community complaints related to foreign interference”, accompanied by the concern that the funding of the Confucius Institutes “comes with strings that can compromise academic freedom” (Tunney, 2020).

However, the functioning of the Confucius Institute has been demonstrated to be positive and successful in some ways in terms of Chinese language teaching. Empirical research shows that the Confucius Institute has not only met the demands of Chinese learning in host countries but has also promoted bidirectional cooperation and dialogue exchange between different civilizations (Li & Tian, 2016). Scholars also examine the contribution of the Confucius Institute when it comes to knowledge sharing (Li et al., 2009; Miao, 2010; Schmidt, 2013). Additionally, the Confucius Institute has also been positively evaluated in creating and improving the recognition of its educational brand (Usmanova et al., 2019).

It should be noted that the creation of the Confucius Institutes as a language education institute is not pioneering nor a unique effort on China’s part. Before China attempted to develop standard Chinese learning and cultural programming through its overseas Confucius Institutes, many language and cultural promotion institutes affiliated with their own governments were established worldwide, including the British Council of the United Kingdom, the Alliance Française of France, the Goethe Institut of Germany, and the Instituto Cervantes of Spain. All of these institutes receive funding from their governments and possess similar attributes and goals as those of the Confucius Institute. Unlike the latter, although these Institutes operate with certain criticisms, such as their colonial legacies (Mar-Molinero, 2006; Pennycook, 2007), they have been widely accepted by the host countries. According to this critique, then, there is a space for discussion about whether the partnership model of the Confucius Institute could be the possible influential factor that affects mission achievement for the Confucius Institute in practice.

What is more, as the first most spoken native language in the world in terms of language population, and one of the official languages of the United Nations, the usage of Chinese has a long history and the Chinese language possesses a distinguished status worldwide. However, the teaching and learning of the Chinese language abroad are still in their infancy. Compared
with its counterparts, like the British Council of the United Kingdom (1934), the Alliance Française of France (1883), the Goethe Institut of Germany (1951), or the Instituto Cervantes of Spain (1991), the Confucius Institutes are still learning how to implement Chinese teaching effectively, and how to heighten the global understanding of their culture and language. Therefore, in order to better fulfill the two components of the mission in future developments, it is necessary to grasp a comprehensive picture of the Confucius Institute, especially its modality for partnerships. A healthy and sustainable partnership can benefit the continuity of the operations of the Confucius Institute and relatively help the Confucius Institute to function optimally to achieve its mission of Chinese language teaching and Chinese cultural understanding. Hopefully, the experience of the Confucius Institutes can also be further used as references or suggestions to benefit other language education institutes with similar dilemmas.

This research intends to understand the partnerships of the Confucius Institute in general, and in particular to determine such partnerships operated in the Canadian setting. Considering the situation of the Confucius Institutes in Canada, here I define the Canadian setting as the host organizations and Canada in general, because both the host organizations and the general public have interactions with the Confucius Institutes in their partnership development.

Taking one Confucius Institute in Canada as its example, the study specifically focuses on the Confucius Institute’s partnership between Chinese and Canadian universities. I am trying to understand the research topic from two perspectives: the Confucius Institute itself as a language educational organization, and the Confucius Institute as a platform that enables its partnership between two partner universities. On the one hand, I am going to analyze this Confucius Institutes in terms of its mission, function, funding models, teaching resources allocation, educational cultural exchanges, and its partnership model with the host university. On the other hand, to better understand the partnership, especially the appeal of and demand for various stakeholders, such as the criticisms from the host universities and the general public, I am trying to figure out what the real needs and concerns are concentrated specifically on, what are the critical points this Confucius Institute needs to develop for a long-term and smooth partnership in the host university, and how can this Confucius Institute achieve its mission by establishing and boosting partnership in the host country.

The guiding research question for this study is: What is the nature and the characteristics of the Confucius Institute and its partnership? In order to navigate the research question in a more specific way, I probe into three sub-questions for the topic:
1. What are the characteristics of one Confucius Institute and its partnership with a Canadian university?
2. Who are the key stakeholders of the Confucius Institute involved in a Canadian partnership?
3. What are the roles played by the key stakeholders involved in a Confucius Institute in Canada?

The first sub-question aims to demonstrate a comprehensive picture of the Confucius Institute and to determine its partnership modality. The overview of the Confucius Institute is important not only in understanding its features but also in providing the following two sub-questions with fundamental information. The Confucius Institute shares numerous similarities with its counterparts in terms of its mission and objectives. However, the underlying patterns that set it apart from others are vital to comprehending its uniqueness. Therefore, understanding the modality is the first step in making further analyses.

The second sub-question is designed to deconstruct the partnership of the Confucius Institute. To be more specific, who are the inside and outside stakeholders that may bring influence on the partnership, whether in a positive or in a negative way? There are many types of partnerships between different organizations, and the stakeholders who get involved in various partnerships can play dynamic roles in the creation and development of each partnership. Hence, focusing on the case of the Confucius Institute, it is vital to understand its partnership with higher education institutions from both Canada and China, to determine the positions and functions of the different stakeholders.

The third sub-question addresses the dynamic positionality of the Confucius Institute in its partnership. That is, what are the interactions between the Confucius Institute and the various parties involved in the partnerships? How would these interactions motivate or undermine the long-term partnership development of the Confucius Institute and the fulfillment of its mission? On paper, the Confucius Institute possesses two partners in the partnership of interest for this analysis. Whereas in practice, some stakeholders derived from these two partners and some others from the outside circumstances are all participating in the partnership. Therefore, the practices of various stakeholders and their interactions with the Confucius Institute play a vital role in the effectiveness of the partnership.

The three sub-questions focus on deepening the comprehension of the Confucius Institutes and providing a full-scale picture of their partnerships in Canadian universities. Together they contribute to boosting partnership building and to fostering Chinese language teaching and cultural understanding, which accord with the common vision of both partner
universities and also the primary mission of the Confucius Institute. Further, hopefully, they can be a reference for other language education institutes who aim to promote language and cultural exchange and to develop university partnerships as well.

1.3 Positionality and Reflexivity

Since qualitative studies involve researchers’ engagement and interpretation, it is inevitable that both processes and results of the research may be shaped by the researchers’ personal backgrounds (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, I am going to state my own research position in this qualitative case study to indicate in what ways my personal experiences have an influence on the research topic and how I observe the connections between them.

My perception of language education institutes comes from my undergraduate school life. I majored in Spanish Language and Literature with my bachelor’s degree. Back then, the professors who taught credit Spanish courses at the university recommended that we pay a visit to the Cervantes Institutes (Instituto de Cervantes in Spanish) if we would like to, saying that the institutes offered Spanish courses based on a different curriculum, and they organized various cultural activities as well, which could be a good opportunity to know more about the world of the Spanish language. In China, Spanish is recognized as a non-general language compared with English as the lingua franca. Hence, the existence of the Cervantes Institutes was cherished by Spanish language learners like me and my peers from the same program. This was the first time that I could connect with the language education institutes, and the memory of borrowing books from the Library of the Cervantes Institute was a significant moment of my undergraduate life.

From then on, I started to notice that these kinds of language education institutes are common around the world. Among them, the Confucius Institute is known as a language education brand from China. However, when I read the high proportion of negative comments on the Confucius Institutes ever since I started my academic life in Canada, the helpful image of the language education institutes derived from the Cervantes Institutes made me confused about what was going on with the Confucius Institutes. Because of that, I desired to figure out the reason behind this phenomenon, and more importantly, whether it is possible to make feasible improvements to the Confucius Institutes so that they are more beneficial to those people who are interested in Chinese language acquisition.

In brief, I believe that the attributes of the Confucius Institutes are those of a language education institute, just like its counterparts in their own countries. This belief determines that,
unlike the majority of the previous studies investigating the Confucius Institute from political or economic perspectives, I primarily seek for its contribution and improvement from an educational perspective. What is more, although I am able to understand the function and significance of a language education institute as a foreign language learner of Spanish, I may also have a personal bias when the institute is about the language education of my mother tongue, i.e., standard Chinese. Besides, I come from a Chinese cultural background and am pursuing my postgraduate degree in Canada. In consequence, my perception of language and cultural exchange issues may be influenced by both eastern and western cultures at the same time.

Being aware of my own identity and positionality, I am able to cooperate positively with my interviewee during the data collection. I positioned myself as a co-participant rather than a researcher in the conversation and the interaction with the interviewee, then I found that the interviewee was willing to be more open with me given my disclosure and self-engagement. The multilingual identity, multicultural experience and interactivity helped the interviewee to get a more particular understanding of me, and in this way, they built trust with me which allowed them to provide more information and discuss further topics beyond the interview outline.

Knowledge is never neutral because all knowledge is created by human beings who all have their own social positions, cultural and political backgrounds, personal experiences, and the value they support (Banks, 1996). Therefore, I intend to assist the readers in knowledge construction (Stake, 2005), and make findings and conclusions based on all the data I collected for the research topic. In return, I also expect that the research result can shape my cognition, helping me to develop new viewpoints related to the research topic.

1.4 Outline of the Research

This research consists of seven chapters in total. In the first chapter, I introduce the background and the purpose of the study, raise the guiding question and the three sub-questions to deconstruct the research. In Chapter 2, I make the justification for using organization theory through the lens of higher education partnerships, explain how I understand the research topic and the questions within the chosen theoretical framework. In Chapter 3, I provide the literature review of the Confucius Institute and its partnership modality in higher education institutions. On the one hand, I summarize the four related topic streams of the Confucius Institutes covered by the existing research. To fully understand both the Chinese and Western perspectives, the literature review includes both papers in English and Chinese. On the other hand, I draw
conclusions about the purpose and basic structures of the higher education institutions’ partnerships. In Chapter 4, following the guideline of the qualitative case study, I present the methodological details of this study and also explicate various methods I will be using in the study. Meanwhile, ethical concerns, trustworthiness, and limitations of the study are also declared at the same time. Chapter 5 presents the results of the data collection. I am going to display all the data I collected from the documents and the interview, with the intention of presenting how the original data can be understood in respect to certain themes in relation to the research questions. Next, in Chapter 6, I demonstrate the findings with emerging themes framed by the theoretical framework. Based on what I have found, I also present corresponding discussions under the guidance of the research questions. In the last chapter, I draw conclusions based on the findings in the previous chapter, suggest proper implications to promote the international partnership of the Confucius Institute and other similar language education institutes, and further provide potential research directions for future studies.

1.5 Significance

1.5.1 Contribution to University Partnerships

This study can help to enhance understanding of language education institutes’ partnerships in universities. Thanks to globalization and its new connections all over the world, higher education institutions have developed cooperative enterprises with their overseas partners more frequently than ever before. New partnership models, such as building transnational partnerships based on the functioning of language education institutes, are turning out to be a new trend. However, how the functioning of language education institutes can perfectly promote partnerships between higher education institutions has yet to be explored.

Besides, the language education institutes that are in their initial stage of a partnership foundation may face some of the same challenges that the Confucius Institutes are confronting today. Although the situations of different language education institutes can be very different as I emphasized before, the experience of the Confucius Institutes is still likely to provide certain suggestions to their counterparts in other countries on some perspectives at certain levels, helping them be better prepared for their partnership development, and in this way encounter less resistance in practice. Further, it can bring contributions to the partnership management of the home and host universities at the same time.

1.5.2 Contribution to Language Learners

Since globalization has diminished the sense of distance around the world, an increasing number of exchanges in terms of education and business call for a mutual
understanding between different cultures. As an essential carrier of culture, language is necessary for communications as well as more in-depth understanding of human behaviours. Accordingly, language education institutes play an important role in this communication process. Due to the fact that not every single person interested in foreign language acquisition is able to afford the expense of studying abroad, the language education institutes can satisfy the needs of foreign language learners with the teaching of professional native language teachers. Hence, in this study, a comprehensive understanding of the Confucius Institutes and subsequent improvement suggestions can improve its functioning and benefit the Chinese language learners.

1.5.3 Contribution to Cultural Understanding

Language is a carrier of that culture from which it derives. Hence, cultural understanding is one of the vital parts of the mission of any language education institute. Meanwhile, cultural understanding is also the key factor for a successful partnership between higher education institutions, especially for those who want to bring their partnership to the international stage, which is characterized by multiculturalism and diversity. Valuable academic exchange is the key stone of any university partnership, whereas cultural understanding can bring more flexibility, patience and less resistance to the practice.

The partnership model of the Confucius Institute doubles the importance of cultural understanding. That is, the language education institute itself and the partnership in which it is involved all call for cultural understanding of each other. Therefore, hopefully, this study can highlight cultural understanding as a key factor in a successful partnership and raise awareness of its importance for university partnership building in the future.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by organization theory through the lens of higher education partnerships. Organization theory focuses on the dynamics of organizations and the relationships with their complex social contexts. It addresses the interaction between the organization and its stakeholders, and also annotates the rationality of actively coping with the demands of various stakeholders to fulfill the organization’s mission and long-term development. Further, considering that the partnerships of the Confucius Institute are based on the cooperation between two partner universities from Canada and China respectively, I intend to frame the partnerships of the Confucius Institute within five distinct elements that are derived from higher education partnerships: governance, equity, standards, teachers, and community building. Specifically, I examine the characteristics of the partnership building and in what ways the inside and outside stakeholders of the Confucius Institute shape each partnership.

2.1 Partnerships from the Perspectives of Organization Theory

Partnerships possess different definitions regarding the different levels and attributes of the organization where the partnerships emerge and grow. The organizational partnership is recognized as a formalized cooperation system rooted in the cooperative working relationship and the mutually adopted agreement among institutions (Huillet & Van Dijk, 1990), with the common features including specific driven purposes, a range of stakeholders in design and practice, an implementation mechanism to achieve the common goal between different partners, and the fulfillment of mutual benefit (Huillet & Van Dijk, 1990; Hutchinson & Campbell, 1998; McQuaid, 2000).

In addition to the practical functionality of the partnership, the organizational partnership also addresses that partnerships are not only about organizations or methods, but also about attitude and culture (Coupar & Stevens, 1998). It is a question of building mutual trust, of acknowledging differences and finding common ground, and also a process of recognizing the socio-cultural environment and key drivers that influence the growth of the partnership, and in this way creating a more desirable outcome and improving the conflict resolution and evaluation mechanism for all the parties (Coupar & Stevens, 1998; Miller, 1999; Nelson & Zadek, 2000).
The partnership aims to share risks, resources, and skills to achieve mutual benefit by having common goals and generating cooperative strategies (Hutchinson & Campbell, 1998). Hence, an effective organizational partnership signifies the ability to facilitate information sharing and communication, a clear understanding of the advantages and weaknesses of various stakeholders, the high efficiency of resource sharing, and the avoidance of duty duplication in practice (Miller, 1999). Bringing the functionality and cultural consideration components together, every successful and productive partnership requires a clear common purpose, effective cooperative mechanism, positive engagement of stakeholders, and a supportive socio-cultural context, which can also be understood as a cultural understanding of different organizations that participated in the creation and development of the partnership.

2.2 Key Dimensions in Organizational Partnership

2.2.1 Common Vision and Objectives

The apparent common vision refers to the scope of partnership goals and activities on the common agenda of all the participating partners. An explicit strategic focus represents a shared commitment acknowledged by all the partner organizations, which indicates the common interests that have led to the joint effort in practice. Conversely, any conflict over objectives is likely to result in controversy in further partnership development. Besides, if a common vision and objectives are unclear in the partnership, the individual organizations would more likely move towards new cooperation (Coupar & Stevens, 1998).

In this study, the common vision and objectives of the partnership are to build the Confucius Institute with a joint effort from both partner universities, and in this way support the mission fulfillment of the Confucius Institute as a language education institute. Since the Confucius Institute is the organization that initiates each university partnership, the achievement of this common vision and objectives for both universities are actually on its shoulders. Then, the key stakeholders of the Confucius Institute, which are also implicated in its partnership, need to be brought to the table at the same time. Organization theory asserts that the ability to produce acceptable value and outcomes is the most significant feature of the organization (Jones, 2013). To exert this ability to the greatest extent and hereby reach the common objectives, the organization is viewed as an open system, in which two distinguishing core elements should be considered: the needs of inside and outside stakeholders (Daft, 2004). Both of them are crucial to maintaining the sustainable functionality of the organization, and they also play an important role in assisting the organization from various facets to fulfill its short-term and long-term missions.
No matter whether the organization is an enterprise or a non-profit, the sustainable running is driven by the needs and desires of its stakeholders, including the stakeholders inside and outside of the organization (Freeman, 2010). Thereinto, the inside stakeholders are individuals or groups who are directly or financially involved in the operational process of the organization. They have the most direct claim to organization resources, such as administrators and workforces, and also will be potentially rewarded for the achievement of the organization (Jones, 2013). By comparison, the outside stakeholders refer to the people who have interest in the organization but do not have a strong claim to it, such as customers, local communities and the general public (Hall, 1996; Jones, 2013).

In the next section, I am going to explicate how these two kinds of stakeholders shape the organizational partnership, with a specific focus on the partnership of higher education institutions.

2.2.2 Cooperative Mechanism

Scholars have created various analytic frameworks and standards to understand the cooperative mechanism of the partnership. Nelson and Zadek (2000) propose that the socio-cultural environment, agreement level on a common agenda, competency of partners, governance structure and ability to identify outcomes are five key themes to assist in a successful partnership. Moreover, Coupar and Stevens (1998) argue that the effective cooperative mechanism involves seven necessary factors, including a clear strategic focus on shared objectives and transparent operation, governance support with strategic leadership, mutual trust, the capacity of mutualism, reciprocity, organizational co-location, and accountability. Meanwhile, Hutchinson and Campbell (1998) believe that a coalition of interests and agreements, common aims, resource sharing, and mutual benefit are four basic principles to developing an effective partnership mechanism. In view of the overlap of different insights, it can be concluded that a clear governance structure, reciprocity, common agenda and commitment in co-location are shared core values viewed from various perspectives.

Specifically focusing on the partnership of higher education institutions, Maeroff, Callan and Usdan (2001) examine partnerships with five components: governance, equity, standards, teachers, and community building. This framework not only covers the essential elements that fit into a random organizational partnership in general with governance, equity and standards but also underlines the peculiarity of partnerships for higher education institutions like teachers and community building. This approach has been applied in recent
studies on international higher education (e.g., Li, 2017) to examine the dynamic positionality of China’s partnerships with the former Soviet Union and Africa over space and time.

Considering the partnerships of the Confucius Institute involved the cooperation of two universities and these five elements are particularly proposed to examine the partnerships of higher education institutions, this framework is a good fit to conduct the partnership analysis of the Confucius Institute. Moreover, the five elements can not only evaluate the university partnership from different perspectives but also echo the roles played by the inside and outside stakeholders of the Confucius Institute. They indicate from what angles can the inside and outside stakeholders of an organization shape its partnership. In other words, these five dimensions provide approaches for the key stakeholders to influence the establishment and advancement of the university partnership as well. Next, I am going to elaborate more on each of these five components.

**Governance**

Governance is also known as cooperative structures in the partnerships of higher education institutions. Good educational governance enables both partners to achieve their common objectives more easily. However, cooperating on the administrative level is never easy in practice because it also means a cultural clash (Maeroff et al., 2001) and the concession of power to some extent for both universities. This governance is not just a simple negotiation and cooperation between administrators from both parties as shown to the public. The interests and demands of all the participants are also key elements in shaping the governance mechanism. Hence, the structural change about how to properly share the operations is always on the top of the agenda to produce better outcomes.

In this study, likewise, governance is one of the key dimensions for the university partnerships of the Confucius Institute. As mentioned before, the establishment of the Confucius Institute involves the cooperation of Canadian and Chinese universities with two co-directors from both sides. It is a challenge for these two stakeholders to consider how to navigate the joint administration in the partnership of the Confucius Institute. Effective governance is crucial to advancing the university partnership and to supporting the functioning of the Confucius Institute.

**Equity**

It has become a trend that higher education is the most common way for students who come from different socio-economic classes and ethnic backgrounds to achieve better lives. According to the findings of Maeroff, Callan and Usdan (2001), university partnerships should serve to foster educational equity, which is mainly concentrated in two perspectives: school-
centered and student-centered planning. The school-centered plan refers to the efforts to create and follow a standards-based curriculum firstly, then carry over to the construction of the teaching team, and further pass on to the leadership capacity building team. The student-centered plan signifies the equal chances for education for a specific group of students, usually students in a group that is ethnically and culturally in the minority.

In the university partnerships of the Confucius Institute, equity is mainly reflected in the school-centered perspective. Whether the partner universities are able to reach agreements in terms of the curriculum, teaching team and joint leadership building of the Confucius Institute, and the ways they negotiate when diversity and dissent occur, are all key issues that define and influence the partnership.

**Standards**

Raising academic standards has always been a key factor in academic success. The connotation of “standards” usually covers two dimensions. First, unifying standards from elementary school until college so that curriculum and expectations can be aligned (Maeroff et al., 2001). Second, raising standards to a more demanding level in each particular stage to help students be better equipped for their further studies and be more qualified in work after graduating. In partnerships between higher education institutions, standards require joint efforts from both partners, including creating a general framework about what students are supposed to know, a curriculum to convey the framework, assessments to measure achievement, and rewards or penalties to evaluate both parties.

It is difficult to create standards for the Confucius Institute that are recognized by both universities. First, the two partners may hold different standards on Chinese language teaching and cultural understanding because they come from different cultural backgrounds and have respective traditions and experiences in their previous partnerships. Second, for the very same reason, it is not easy for both universities to fully comprehend and accept the standards of each other even after negotiations and concessions. Hence, standards could be a huge challenge for advancing the university partnerships of the Confucius Institute.

**Teachers**

Teachers play a pivotal role in any type of higher education partnership. They shoulder both teaching and research tasks at the same time, which are not only linked to the academic outcomes of the students but also to the reputation of the institutions where they work. Additionally, some teachers are situated in the interlevel between administrators and students. This in-between positionality makes them naturally become mediators in their work. Hence, how to inspire teachers to devote themselves to teaching and research has been a crucial issue
in the partnerships of higher education institutions. Moreover, reinforcing the professional development of teachers, which is generally known as teacher education, has also gathered attention in the investigation of university partnerships.

In this study, teachers provide a significant dimension by which to evaluate the partnerships of the Confucius Institute. Their professionalism and overall quality determine the mission achievement of the Confucius Institute, which is exactly an indicator for measuring the effectiveness of each university partnership. Nevertheless, being selected is a start rather than the end for these language teachers. Hence, this analytic dimension also provides the partner universities with a reflection about how they can work together to create relevant training programs for their teachers, which can ensure continuous support to motivate better performance.

**Community Building**

Higher education institutions and their related personnel share common concerns about improving academic outcomes with their neighborhoods in the same community. An interdependent relationship with the surroundings can not only improve local education and revitalize the community but also bring potential students to the higher education institutions themselves (Maeroff et al., 2001). Driven by this mutual benefit, higher education institutions are expected to put more effort into their community building and effectively maintain the relationship in the long run.

In the case of the Confucius Institute, the community building of its partnership can be observed on three levels. On the micro-level, the Confucius Institute is physically located in a university. As a language education institute that is experiencing a university partnership, it is inevitable that the Confucius Institute will interact with the university community. Since there are many scholars who are interested or specialized in the Chinese language and studies in universities, this resourceful community plays a critical role in the mission fulfillment of the Confucius Institute. On the meso-level, the local public community in Canada is a key factor in enhancing the partnerships of the Confucius Institute. As mentioned in the first chapter, any critique from the local public is a form of resistance in the advancement of a partnership. Hence, only when the Confucius Institute has been well acknowledged by the local public community can its partnership last in the long run. On the macro-level, since the Confucius Institutes have been established worldwide, the international community is potentially keeping an eye on the trends of every single Confucius Institute as well. Hence, this community building has been extended to a broader scope, which may bring more challenges to the partnerships of the Confucius Institute at the same time.
2.2.3 Key Stakeholders

As explicated before, both the inside and outside stakeholders are critical to the mission fulfillment of the organization and in this way further shape the organizational partnerships. Under the analytic framework proposed by Maeroff, Callan and Usdan, it can be seen that the inside stakeholders play an essential role in terms of governance, equity, standards and teachers, whereas the outside stakeholders are involved more in community building. These two kinds of stakeholders will be discussed respectively.

**Inside Stakeholders**

Inside stakeholders are characterized by their mutualism with the organization in its partnerships. The inside stakeholders are directly affected by the organization’s success, whereas their expectations and suggestions are vital to influencing the decision making and the improvements within the organization at the same time. Hence, in regard to inside stakeholders, organization theory focuses on behaviours, which include organizational management, organizational structure, organizational design and interactions between people within the organization (Miner, 2005). It can be seen that the features of management, mutualism, structure design and all the related behaviours echo governance, equity, standards and teachers in the aforementioned university partnership theory.

In this study, since the mission of the Confucius Institute is the same as the common objectives of the partner universities, it is appropriate to examine the partnerships with the inside stakeholders of the Confucius Institute through these four lenses. To be specific, the Confucius Institute can fulfill its mission by motivating the Canadian and Chinese co-directors to coordinate with each other with a proper governance structure, reasonable standards and awareness of equity in the operation. Additionally, it is necessary to stimulate the Chinese language teachers to be qualified in the language and cultural teaching. In this way, as the inside stakeholders of the Confucius Institute, the co-directors and the Chinese language teachers can also be satisfied by the success of the organization and further benefit the Confucius Institute in its long-term development.

**Outside Stakeholders**

The satisfaction of the outside stakeholders is equally important to evaluating the effectiveness of the organization, and this is tightly coupled with community building, which is an essential element in the partnerships of higher education institutions. Organizations are never simple technical systems in performing certain functions to achieve their own goals. They are also political and social systems embodying norms and values of importance to their participants (Selznick, 1957; Scott & Davis, 2015). The organization is connected to its outside
world in a tangible way. For example, the local neighborhoods bring potential customers who are interested in the services provided by the organization (Hannagan, 2001), and the voices of local communities can always greatly influence the organization (Hannagan, 2001; Scott & Davis, 2015).

As mentioned before, organizations usually interact with their wider circle on different levels. Typically, the wider circle refers to local communities on a micro level and the socio environment where the organization operates (Daft, 2004) on a meso level. Specifically, in this study, because the partnership of the Confucius Institute is conducted in Canada with the support of higher education institutions from Canada and China, I consider the universities and relevant research institutions, the local general public, and the international community as the outside stakeholders of the Confucius Institute on the micro-, meso-, and macro levels respectively. I aim to explore the interaction of the Confucius Institute with these three kinds of outside stakeholders to determine how the Confucius Institute can cope with the community building of its partnerships given the influence of these outside stakeholders.

Organizations ought to make positive and timely strategic choices to cope with the outer world and to satisfy the needs of the outside stakeholders (Hannagan, 2001; Miles & Snow, 2003). In this process, community building allows the organization to produce the expected outcome to better fulfill the common vision of both partners in their cooperation.
In this study, as elaborated in the first chapter, I aim to explore a specific partnership of the Confucius Institute conducted by two partner universities. Addressing organization theory, I recognize the Confucius Institute as a non-profit educational organization that enables the partnership between the two partner universities. The mission of the Confucius Institute as an organization is rooted in the common vision and objectives of its partnership brought about by both partner universities. Therefore, any understanding of this partnership through the already mentioned five components in the field of higher education can be embedded in the interaction between the Confucius Institute and its inside and outside stakeholders.

In short, the essence of understanding the partnership of the Confucius Institute is to figure out who are the inside and outside stakeholders of this organization, and how these key stakeholders play their roles in terms of governance, equity, standards, teachers, and community building in their interaction with the Confucius Institute.

Meanwhile, it is necessary for the organization to consider, evaluate and meet the needs of both inside and outside stakeholders because the satisfaction of their needs has a remarkable influence on the mission fulfillment of the organization. In the partnership analyses of this
study, the mission achievement of the Confucius Institute precisely means the success of the partnership between higher education institutions.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

The literature review of this study focuses on two parts: the Confucius Institute and partnerships in higher education institutes. On the one hand, for the sake of gaining a comprehensive picture of the Confucius Institutes, I conducted a literature review of the Confucius Institutes in both the English and Chinese databases. I was intent on understanding from what perspectives scholars have framed and interpreted the establishment and development of the Confucius Institutes. Since scholars also mention the Confucius Institute in its Chinese version, I used the term “孔子学院”, which represents the Chinese version of the “Confucius Institute” to conduct the literature review as well.

On the other hand, I also pursued a literature review of the partnerships in higher education institutions. I aimed to draw conclusions about the diverse types of partnerships between higher education institutions, and between higher education institutions and other organizations, with the objective of understanding the different purposes and structures of the universities’ partnerships, and to figure out the function of different partners in various partnership modalities.

3.1 The Confucius Institute

The results of the literature review about the Confucius Institute can be classified into four directions. Researchers have made academic analyses of the institutes, including teaching quality evaluation and the possible improvement of course design and textbook modifications; the ideological concerns inherent to the Confucius Institutes; the case studies of the Confucius Institutes in different countries, with the purpose of exploring the specific practical problems in different settings; the investigation of Chinese language education from interdisciplinary perspectives, that is, the additional effects other than language and culture brought about by the Confucius Institutes in the world.

First, existing studies have drawn attention to the investigation and evaluation of the Confucius Institute in terms of the academic perspective, as for example, a policy analysis of the Confucius Institutes (Zhao & Huang, 2010) and the contribution of the Confucius Institutes to knowledge sharing (Li et al., 2009; Miao, 2010; Schmidt, 2013). Researchers have framed the Confucius Institute as an educational organization and focused on its function as a provider of standard Chinese language teaching and learning. However, despite the fact that the Confucius Institute has promoted the learning of standard Chinese all over the world and
successfully created and improved the recognition degree of its education brand (Usmanova et al., 2019), some scholars point out its defects in actual practice at the same time. Practical problems focus on the shortage of Chinese teachers, the non-standardized teaching of the Chinese language in different countries, and the imbalance between language teaching and Chinese cultural celebrations (Hartig, 2015; Wheeler, 2014; Zhao & Huang, 2010). The varying quality of the standard Chinese language teaching among different countries and the insufficient attention to the improvement of teaching activities are the most belabored topics in the practices of the Confucius Institutes. Besides, the gap between the rules announced in policymaking and actual practices, and the various factors that may affect the performance of each Confucius Institute in actual operations (Liu, 2018) are revealed in these studies at the same time.

Second, in addition to assessing the Confucius Institutes on the academic level, researchers have also evaluated the Confucius Institutes based on their ideological influences in the host countries. Various researchers have examined the Confucius Institutes through the notion of soft power and cultural diplomacy, drawing the conclusion that although the Confucius Institutes are dedicated to promoting the traditional culture and values of China and gaining certain support and recognition, the Confucius Institutes are too aggressive in realizing the objective of improving China’s international image (Lee, 2010). What is more, receiving funding from the Confucius Institute Headquarters is a symbol of economic power relations (Zhou & Luk, 2016), which may lead to interference from authorities in terms of academic freedom. As a result, it is difficult for the Confucius Institute to gain wide acceptance and credibility (Flew & Hartig, 2014), and they also failed to implement China’s cultural diplomacy and soft power projection (Lahtinen, 2015; Pan, 2013; Lo & Pan, 2016). Eventually, the establishment and the development of the Confucius Institute turns out to be a threat from China in the eyes of the host countries and the international consensus discourses. Taking the politically influential factors into account, researchers argue that the Confucius Institute undertakes the responsibility of soft power propaganda and ideological infiltration directed by the Chinese government. As a cultural diplomatic medium, the Confucius Institute represents ambitious Chinese engagement in the international community rather than a language education institute that simply desires to promote Chinese language and culture.

Third, with the increasing number of Confucius Institutes on six continents, research has also focused on the dynamic interaction between the Confucius Institute and the host countries, with the purpose of figuring out the specific operation and problems caused in different countries. By examining the cooperative operating models, various experiences and
factual challenges for the Confucius Institutes in their first decade of development, researchers argue that the Confucius Institute can be understood not only as an “international educational cooperation project” but also as “the largest internationalization project”, which benefits both Chinese language teaching and the diversification of human civilization (Li & Tian, 2016).

Scholars have also focused on the Confucius Institutes in specific countries. Current research covers the power relationships in the Confucius Institutes in Peru, underlining that the essential concern comes from the “on-campus model” of the Confucius Institute contrasting with those western “state-sponsored language and cultural centers” (Park, 2013). In addition, scholars point out the operational contradiction of the Confucius Institutes in Europe (Starr, 2009) and more specifically, in Finland (Lahtinen, 2015) and Germany (Hartig, 2010). They describe a large number of the Confucius Institutes at different levels of the education system in Europe, stating that soft power diffusion is driven by the Chinese government, and further expressing pessimistic estimations of the Confucius Institute acting as a powerful promoter of Chinese culture.

In addition, researchers indicate the ideological diffusion of the Confucius Institutes at the University of Nairobi (Wheeler, 2014) and generally in South Africa (Hartig, 2014; Procopio, 2015). Here, bringing the specific national context into the study, scholars analyze the needs for receiving foreign aid in some African countries. Besides, they argue that the practical problem in the functioning and the selectiveness in presenting the image of China are two critical issues that should be noted in the future development of the Confucius Institute.

Furthermore, scholars looking at the cultural diplomacy function of the Confucius Institutes in Australia and Asia (Hartig, 2012; Ang et al., 2015), have drawn conclusions that the Confucius Institute is a collaborative tool of the Chinese government to promote the international image of China. Some other researchers propose that the role of the Confucius Institute as an “unofficial cultural diplomat” (Pan, 2013) indicates its acceleration of its partnerships with universities and other educational organizations. Further, empirical research has examined whether the Confucius Institute and its cultural impact play an essential role compared with other forms of diplomatic relations, especially in the Sino-Africa relationship (Liu, 2008). Moreover, scholars also examine the positive effect of the Confucius Institute as a cultural diplomat on China’s “One Belt One Road” construction (Chen et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020). That is, the active cultural exchanges aided by the Confucius Institute facilitate cross-border mergers and acquisitions in the “One Belt One Road” countries.

The case studies in North America portray the Confucius Institute as a threat in terms of cultural, economic, political and academic freedom (Hubbert, 2014; Wang & Adamson,
On the one hand, the Confucius Institute’s complex relationship with the Chinese government inspires fear about China’s ambition to create a new Lingua Franca other than English. On the other hand, they also point out several concerns that may apply to the university setting, which separate the Confucius Institutes from other language education institutes, as for example, funding channels, rulemaking and independence. Correspondingly, suggestions are made by scholars in three ways: receiving funding from various channels, having a specific Constitution to avoid possible political interference from the home country, and have no physical existence on campus.

In spite of the distinct concerns from different countries, the threat of the Confucius Institutes to the host countries from different perspectives, the coherence of the Confucius Institutes and the local stakeholders, and the interference with higher education’s academic freedom are three common problems faced by the Confucius Institutes in all these countries.

Fourth, scholars intend to comprehend the Confucius Institutes through an interdisciplinary viewpoint. They treat the Confucius Institute as a node among all subject areas, trying to explore its significance from different viewpoints, and in this way assign different concept connotations to the Confucius Institute. For example, some researchers analyze the Confucius Institutes in respect of their influence on world politics (Gil, 2009) and dynamic geopolitical power (Kluver, 2014; Zanardi, 2016), believing that as a kind of cultural capital accumulation, the development of the Confucius Institutes can potentially benefit China’s international relationship building in the long term. Besides, by treating the Confucius Institutes as a representative image of the competition between different powers (Huang et al., 2019), scholars also examine the Confucius Institutes through the lens of international relations. In addition, rather than considering the function of the Confucius Institutes as simple language learning institutes, scholars examine the additional value of the Confucius Institute and its potential connection to other fields at the same time. For instance, some researchers explore the leadership model (Chiou & Chang, 2009) of the Confucius Institute as an individual non-profit organization. They also frame the Confucius Institute as cultural accommodation (Lee, 2010), and evaluate the economic benefit it brings to both China and the host countries (Akhtaruzzaman et al., 2017; Lien, 2012; Lien et al., 2013). Moreover, due to frequent appearances in mass media, scholars also discuss how the Confucius Institute performs its function in demonstrating its communication value (Lueck et al., 2014) to media fields.
3.2 Partnership of Higher Education Institutions

Universities usually experience various kinds of partnerships during their functionality and development. Considering the availability of intelligent resources, prestige, geographical dispersion and the power positionality of the universities and their partners (Maringe & De Wit, 2016), higher education institutions’ partnerships can be summarized in multiple forms. Typically, in higher education, partnerships can be observed in three types, starting with universities’ partnerships with secondary schools and communities. In this type of partnership, universities usually play a relatively central role (Bullough Jr & Kauchak, 1997; Harkavy, 1999) in the effort to support and sustain better schools and communities. Although active engagement and interaction are required for both sides, universities are in a giver position in terms of teacher education and intelligent resource allocation (Leiderman et al., 2002). The main purpose of this partnership is to unlock the resources and values retained within any single organization (Barnes & Phillips, 2000; Marginson, 2002), and maximize the effective use and exchange of human resources, information and finance to fulfill their social mission to benefit the schools and communities (Maurrasse, 2002).

Second, partnerships with business corporations are also one of the essential modalities of partnerships for higher education institutions. Under this circumstance, universities provide courses and degrees customized for business or hold co-operative education programs with the enterprise (Meister, 2003; Ryan, 2009) to support the company’s needs. In this way, the enterprise is able to strengthen its human capital and credibility through the partnership (Marginson, 2002; Ryan, 2009), and in return bring economic and influential support back to the higher education institution, which is also widely known as the “win-win” model.

Among all the modalities of partnership, the third type, universities’ partnerships with their offshore partners, is the most discussed by scholars in the education field. This kind of partnership is also known as a transnational higher education partnership, cross border higher education partnership or global higher education partnership based on the distinct descriptions of various scholars. No matter what the name, the core characteristics of this partnership are recognized as narrowing the knowledge gap and differentials among different regions, navigating cross-cultural contexts and partnership dynamics, as well as achieving stakeholder engagement on a higher level (Elliott, 2017; Mwangi, 2017; Maringe & De Wit, 2016).

However, unlike the two types of partnerships previously mentioned, universities’ positions are highly dynamic rather than relatively fixed in transnational partnerships. The position of universities in this type of partnership can always be influenced by complex contextual factors, in which distinguishing the transformative political contexts, the different
time periods (Li, 2017), and the changing international situations (Montgomery, 2016), especially characterized by global financial influences, (Feast & Bretag, 2005) can be difficult. Although universities in some western developed countries, such as Australia, had started their transnational higher education partnerships at an early stage and developed mature partnership systems, they constantly face challenges in coping with practical problems in a globalization context (Carroll & Woodhouse, 2006; McLean, 2006). Whereas universities in eastern developing countries such as China have experienced a positional transformation “from a recipient into a provider” (Li, 2017) in terms of the partnership. The process of partnership creation, the changing of partner position, the dynamic relationship between different stakeholders, are all affected by the policy implications and socio-economic transformations of the host countries as well as the global environment. Because of that, universities’ partnerships can never be simply considered as cooperative issues between organizations.

Moreover, these transnational partnerships among higher education institutions are also complicated in terms of structure. Typically, transnational partnerships exist between universities on the academic level, which involves collaborative teaching provision, joint research activity, knowledge transfer, and overseas branch campuses (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Leask, 2004; Woodfield et al., 2009). That is, the partnership not only refers to the communication between students, professors and scholars but also includes the exchange of programmes, projects and services (Haritos Tsamitis, 2009; Knight, 2004). Since various commitments and personnel are getting involved in practice, it is hard to maintain a successful transnational partnership with one single higher education institution and its offshored partner. In actual operations, the partnership often consists of several organizations in a complex web, because these organizations may be in charge of different responsibilities (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). For instance, the recruitment of students, the support of teaching resources, and the providing of campus and technical equipment can be the accumulated efforts accomplished by several organizations. In this way, it is easy to cause confusion among students and staff members in practice.

In addition to the partnership between universities possessing similar attributes and on a similar academic level, two other common types of transnational partnerships among higher education institutions are often addressed by scholars as well. They are transnational partnerships between private colleges and public universities, and the pair up of private educational companies and public colleges (Drew et al., 2008a). To be specific, private education institutions are usually weak in awarding an academic degree, so they are inclined to fill the gap via partnerships with their overseas public partners. These two types of
partnerships are not only dependent on the choices of individual higher education institutions but also hinge on the prevalence of partner types in different countries. For instance, those partnerships with educational companies are more likely to be developed in Europe, whereas creating a partnership with private higher education institutions is easier in the Middle East (Drew et al., 2008a).

In short, higher education institutions’ partnerships are complicated in terms of the structures and types, and the positionality of partners is dynamic in the changing circumstances nationally and internationally.

3.3 Summary

Based on the literature review aforementioned, the studies about the Confucius Institute mostly focus on its performance evaluation and the ideological concerns that it brings to the host country. It should be noted that the lack of exploration of university partnerships may lead to an incomprehensive understanding of the Confucius Institute. Although several pieces of research refer to the relationship between the Confucius Institute and the American universities (Hughes, 2014; McCord, 2019) or American secondary schools (Zhou, 2012), they are more about pointing out the existing problems and the importance of the cooperation rather than developing a deeper understanding of the partnership mechanism. Moreover, the insufficient case studies of the Confucius Institute in North America, especially in Canada, have led to the result that it is still unclear about the university partnerships of the Confucius Institutes that are conducted in these specific settings.

In order to contribute to the existing research with a case in Canada, reaching a better understating of the partnership modality of the Confucius Institute, I am going to elaborate on the methodological approaches of this case study in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Methodological Approach

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the university partnerships of the Confucius Institutes in Canada. Under the guidance of the case study, documental analysis and interviews are two primary research methods used to address the research topic. In this chapter, I will justify using a qualitative case study methodology to explain the research questions and introduce the details of the research design, including the standards for research participants, the process of data collection, the ethical considerations, the trustworthiness of the research, and limitations of this study.

4.1 Qualitative Case Study Methodology

4.1.1 A Case Study Approach

To achieve an understanding of the university partnerships of the Confucius Institutes, I adopted the case study as the main approach throughout the research for two reasons.

First, the case study can better assist in answering the research questions and developing a deep and comprehensive understanding of the research topic. A case study refers to an investigation of a phenomenon in a real-life context in which there is not any clear boundary between the phenomenon and the context (Yin, 2014). A case study can guide the research when the proposition is seeking a descriptive inference other than a causal relationship with an exploratory strategy (Gerring, 2004). For this study, the research questions focused more on comprehending the Confucius Institute and its partnerships with Canadian and Chinese universities in a descriptive and exploratory way respectively. Considering the uniqueness and the complexities of the research topic from multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009), it was suitable to adopt a case study to fulfill these two purposes at the same time.

Second, the case study satisfies the needs of data collection from multiple sources since it contains a number of methods of data collection and different analyses that need to be implemented in a variety of contexts (Bromley, 1986). This study primarily aimed to explore the university partnerships of the Confucius Institute, as understanding the Confucius Institute was the first step to achieving comprehension of its partnerships. Thus, I needed to collect the data from both documents and interviews to achieve a thorough exploration of both portions.

Documents are the bases of documental analyses in a case study. They are an accessible and reliable source of data collection. On the one hand, documents are able to provide
comprehensive background information on specific issues, and they also allow for the accumulation of insights into people with distinct positionalities, which reflect the substantive changing of assessment topics (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014). On the other hand, documents exist in various formats which allows researchers to choose the proper ones to meet their research needs. For example, documents can be accessed not only through public records such as official ongoing serials, mission statements and annual reports, but also physical evidence like handbooks and agendas (O’Leary, 2010). Besides, documents are stable for repeated views (Merriam, 1998), which means they can cover a long span of time and numerous topics and settings (Yin, 2014). It is beneficial for investigators to evaluate the authenticity of documents, avoid possible biases in the documents, and further make relatively proper judgements by themselves given their considerable documental resources. Moreover, documents are available through multiple channels, such as hardcopy monographs and various online databases, which can save time for investigators in respect to access.

In addition to documents, the interview was also a vital method for the data collection of this study. The interview is a question-based research method with a specific purpose, allowing the interviewer and the interviewee to share their opinions and insights on a topic (Cohen et al., 2018). Despite the various purposes and categories of the interview, this research method can facilitate the study with one part seeking for certain information on a research topic and the other part able and willing to supply the information.

Generally, I intended to keep some of the technical elements of an interview in mind, such as reflexivity, naturalism, the absence of standardization, openness and flexibility (Farber, 2001; Lamnek, 1993; Pannas, 1996). These elements enabled me to take into consideration that all the interviewees had their own positionalities and understanding of knowledge. Because of that, as a researcher and an interviewer, I needed to be aware of their language and speech, and also helped them to engage in a free and open discussion, trying to stimulate them and encourage them to share more opinions and experiences instead of cutting the conversation off. During the whole interview process, importantly, I must work with my interviewees rather than working above them. That is, researchers should not play a dominant role in the interview. It was their responsibility to create and to maintain an equal and safe environment for the interviewee.

To sum up, the first data source allowed me to understand the mission and functioning of the Confucius Institutes. The second data source enabled me to access the lived experience of the interviewee in their interaction with the Confucius Institutes. Taken together, I was able
to understand the Confucius Institutes from various perspectives and its partnership in different stages. In a word, the case study could help me to gain all the data that is needed for this study.

4.1.2 The Case

The case I chose for this study is a Confucius Institute located in a Canadian university, with the pseudonym the CAU-CNU CI in this study. This CAU-CNU CI was built under a cooperation agreement between a Chinese university and a Canadian university and had been approved by the Confucius Institute Headquarters. Both partner universities possessed a rich experience of higher education partnerships. In particular, they both had established hundreds of international partnerships with higher education institutions in various countries and regions, the range covering joint educational programs, student exchanges, and research cooperation, which qualified them for an international partnership in operating the Confucius Institute together. Although the Confucius Institute was a first attempt for the Canadian university, the Chinese partner university had established several partnerships with other higher education institutions elsewhere around the world in operating the Confucius Institute jointly.

The CAU-CNU CI was physically located on the campus of the Canadian university with its individual office. The Canadian university also provided the Institute with classrooms to implement Chinese language teaching. In the first year, this Confucius Institute received 100 thousand USD dollars from the Confucius Institute Headquarters to support its establishment. In the following four years, it kept receiving the start-up funds from the Headquarter, with a range from 100 to 200 thousand USD dollars based on a specific annual budget. After the initial period, the Headquarters and the Canadian university were responsible for providing the fund to carry on the functioning of the CAU-CNU CI together on the 1:1 ratio.

The board of this Confucius Institute consisted of members from both the Canadian university and the Chinese partner university. On the decision-making level, there were two presidents in total, one of each coming from the respective universities. On the operational level, there was one Canadian co-director\(^1\) from the Canadian university, and one Chinese co-director sent by the Chinese partner university. However, the Canadian co-director played a fundamental role in practice given the temporary absence of the Chinese co-director. Besides, all the Chinese language teachers were selected and sent from China. Typically, they had graduated from an “English Language and Literature” program with a bachelor’s degree, and

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\(^1\) The interviewee chose the “Canadian director” instead of “Canadian co-director” as their partnership identity. However, this study will be adopting “co-director” as the title of both directors to accord with the partnership mechanism proposed by the Confucius Institute Headquarters.
then pursued a master’s degree in “Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language”, with a qualifying certificate to conduct Chinese language learning.

This Confucius Institute offered non-credit Chinese language courses to the public by term. Typically, lectures were held twice a week in fall and winter terms, with 15-45 hours per term in total based on different courses’ levels and types. The curriculum was designed in primary, intermediate and advanced levels to satisfy the various needs of language learners. Textbooks were compiled by the Confucius Institute Headquarters, and homework was flexible to suit the students’ specific situation. Students usually did a quiz at the end of each term instead of passing a formal exam to finish the whole course. The total number of students for one academic year was around two hundred. The number varies slightly in different years.

The CAU-CNU CI provided various services in addition to non-credit Chinese language courses to the local community, and was distinguished by its Chinese proficiency tests, consultations for doing business with China, and services in interpretation and translation. Additionally, it organized academic conferences, academic exchange trips to China for students, and cultural celebrations like arts performances and Chinese movie nights for the local public.

4.2 Participants

To acquire knowledge of the Confucius Institute and how the partner universities cooperate to navigate its functioning, the participants of this study should be those in the leadership positions of the Confucius Institute. It was vital that these participants have experienced with co-administration with their counterparts in the partner university because this study intended to understand a Confucius Institute operating in Canada and its university partnership, which included the partnership modality, the key stakeholders involved in the partnership, and the ways that the various stakeholders shaped the partnership. Therefore, the participants needed to meet the following criteria to be suitable interviewees for this research:

(1) Person who is in a leadership position in the Confucius Institute at the Canadian university;
(2) Person who has abundant practical experience in the operation of the Confucius Institute at the Canadian university;
(3) Person who is willing to share their experience of engaging in the operations of the Confucius Institute and dealing with the academic and administrative issues of the institute;
(4) Person who would like to offer suggestions for the future development of the Confucius Institute.

I started to contact all the available staff of the Confucius Institutes who met the criteria mentioned above after my research proposal was approved by Western University’s Research Ethics Boards. In the end, the Canadian co-director of the CAU-CNU CI agreed to participate in the research. I briefly explained the purpose of the study in an email and then delivered the Letter of Information and the Consent Form after the Canadian co-director showed interest in participating in the research. Later in the interview, they signed the printed copy of the Consent Form, fully read and then kept the Letter of Information. Finally, the participant selected “the Canadian director of the Confucius Institute” as their identity. In addition, I reached an agreement with the participant that I would use “they” as the pronoun instead of pointing out any specific gender to protect their privacy. In the following part, I am going to introduce the basic information of the participant.

The participant had been the Canadian co-director of the CAU-CNU CI for many years. In addition to serving as one of the co-directors, they taught credit courses at the host university at the same time. This dual identity enabled them to understand the Confucius Institute from various perspectives. On the one hand, the participant had rich experience in the management and the operation of the CAU-CNU CI, which allowed them to understand the Confucius Institute as an insider. On the other hand, the identity of the co-director as a Canadian enabled them to take one step backward in seeing the practical issues from the perspective of the Canadian partner university. In this way, they were able to offer me information about the contradictions and the challenges from a different viewpoint. It was critical for me to develop these insights from two perspectives and observed the Confucius Institute from all angles. With the results of the interview, I could draw conclusions about the university partnership of the Confucius Institute, and determined how the key stakeholders influenced this partnership. At the same time, I could get suggestions from the Canadian co-director for the future development of the Confucius Institutes as well.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Interviews

In this study, I considered the interview as one of the viable methods for collecting data for two reasons. First, the interview allows for a deep exploration of the topic. To figure out the real problems and the proper solutions for the partnership with the Confucius Institute, I needed not only to know the lived experiences of the interviewees in their management but
also to see the viewpoints of the interviewee based on their experiences. In other words, their experiences could help me understand the problems inherent in the daily operations of the Confucius Institute at the host university, and their viewpoints allowed me to understand how the participants elucidated the information within a specific setting. In this way, I was able to perceive how interviewee weighed different problems and what were their essential concerns in the partnership. Hence, in order to acquire the information on a specific research topic and to gather information on what people value and weigh (Tuckman & Harper, 2012), interviews are a valuable approach for this study.

Second, in addition to gathering the verbal information on a specific situation, the interactional, interpersonal and communicative aspects of the interview (Cohen et al., 2018) enable the interviewer to collect potential information beyond the designed questions. In an interview, the interviewee provides answers not only through spoken words but also in non-verbal language, as for example, facial and body expressions. It is vital for researchers to notice the unfinished or unspoken contents of the respondents’ behaviours given these visual clues and motivate them to reveal more ideas and thoughts on the research topic. Moreover, compared with other data collection methods, the mutual participatory aspect of the interview highlights the dynamics of the situation. That is, the interviewer ought to play a role as an active listener rather than just a note keeper. It is the interviewer’s responsibility to give appropriate reactions or feedback to the interviewees, to keep the conversation moving forward, and to encourage the respondents to share and discuss their insights with the interviewer beyond the designed questions. In this way, researchers can collect data as comprehensively and deeply as possible.

Next, considering the research topic and questions, I have adopted a semi-structured interview as the research tool. Scholars suggest that interviews can be categorized by the research purpose, the exploratory extent, and the focusing point (Kerlinger, 1986; Kvale, 1996). In this study, the purpose of the interview was to understand the university partnership with the Confucius Institute. I deconstructed it as a problem-centred, in-depth, and cognitive-based orientation, which could all be fulfilled by the semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is conducted for a topic with open-ended questions. Despite the interview questions being designed beforehand, researchers still have the freedom to tailor or to modify the questions in the process of the interview. In this study, I designed interview questions for the individual interviewee based on the literature review and documental analysis I completed in the first stage. However, since I was neither the insider of the Confucius Institute nor of the partner universities, I was aware that there must be some information beyond my knowledge.
That is, to figure out what is actually going on with the partnership, I relied on the objective evidence and the subjective views provided by my interviewees (Witzel, 2012), which were an indispensable supplement to my knowledge. In addition, a semi-structured interview enabled me to tailor the interview questions based on the interviewees’ responses, and further came up with new questions according to their answers. In this way, I was able to navigate the interview such that it became an in-depth conversation, generating more data to better clarify the research topic.

Putting all these technical elements into practice, I designed eight interview questions according to the semi-structured interview guideline, aimed at understanding the practice of the Confucius Institute at the Canadian university and its university partnerships. The interview was held at the office of the Canadian co-director in accordance with their preferences. I briefly explained the object and the design of the research upon arrival. Then the interviewee voluntarily signed the “Letter of Consent”, which had been approved by Western University’s Research Ethics Boards. Later on, I presented the print version of the interview questions to the interviewee and explained to them that they could choose not to answer specific questions if they did not feel comfortable doing so. The whole interview took three hours in total and was conducted in an in-depth semi-structured way. In addition to the eight designed questions, the interviewee was welcomed to offer any experiences and no direct relevance perceptions regarding their understanding of language education and the language education institutes, including but not limited to the Confucius Institute. Since the interviewee preferred not to be recorded during the interview, I made the notes by myself using a laptop, and in this way created the entire interview transcript. After the interview, I repeated all the information provided by the interviewee on the basis of the notes that I had taken to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the interview transcript. The interview ended after the interviewee confirmed all the interview contents with me.

4.3.2 Collection of Documents

In this study, I collected related documents available about the Confucius Institutes. Here I classified the documents into two types: official documents and nonofficial documents.

Official documents stand for the reports released by the Confucius Institutions and their administration organization. Here, the administration organization refers to the Confucius Institute Headquarters, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Education of China. I further subdivided the official documents according to the two stages of the Confucius Institutes: the establishment stage and the operation stage. The policymaking documents in the initial stage
enabled me to understand the Confucius Institutes in general, including their mission, funding, teaching resources allocation, educational and cultural exchanges, and partnership modality. This general understanding was not only to answer the first sub-question but also a precondition to understanding the following two questions.

In the second stage, the official social media accounts of the Confucius Institutes, such as those on Facebook pages and Instagram, continuously release the latest trends of the Confucius Institutes as to their functioning within the host universities. I decided to select these two channels because they are more likely to be available to public scrutiny exposed with the official social media accounts of the Confucius Institutes in China. Therefore, these trends might affect the framing and conceptions of the Confucius Institutes in the host country.

To sum up, these official documents were not only accessible but enabled me to understand the gap between the policymaking and the performances of the Confucius Institutes, which could also benefit the second sub-question: the key stakeholders that affect the practices of the Confucius Institutes at the host universities.

Nonofficial documents refer to those documents that are related to opinion pieces about the existence and functioning of the Confucius Institutes at the host universities from the perspective of the host countries. Given all the critiques directed at the Confucius Institutes from the host organizations in North America, it is vital to understand the exact concerns of the local communities and general public that may influence the partnership development of these different Confucius Institutes.

Considering the research topic is about Canadian Chinese university partnerships with respect to the Confucius Institutes, my data collection strategy here was to gather the opinion pieces about the Confucius Institutes regarding their performances at the Canadian host universities, which were intuitive reflections of the partnership outcomes. I chose this kind of mass media output because the mass media is a platform that most people can access. Hence, the opinion pieces from the mass media are relatively easier to collect. In this way, I was able to learn about the factors that may influence the functioning of the Confucius Institutes at the host universities in Canada and also how they shaped the partnerships, which could contribute to both the second and third sub-questions.

In the following part, I am going to present the approaches to collecting these two kinds of documents respectively. In terms of the official documents, since their establishment, the Confucius Institutes and their administration organization have generated various types of official documents related to their mission and plans to reach them. To be more concrete, I collected and studied the official documents according to four categories.
First, I collected the documents related to the policies, regulations, operation and funding. In the initial stage of establishment, the Confucius Institutes drafted a systematic document associated with their development goals, either in ideological or in practice perspectives, which were vital to understanding the original intentions of these language education institutes.

Second, the Confucius Institutes published annual reports to document their actual operations all around the world with detailed and accurate data, including numbers of students, information about language tests, offerings of scholarships, newly opened institutes, usage of funding, etc. Since the annual report generally focused on all the Confucius Institutes around the world rather than any single country or region, I aimed to summarize the updates of the teaching resource allocation which could be applied to all the countries and regions from the reports. That is, they may not specifically serve Canada but apply to all countries and regions, including Canada.

Third, I focused on the Chinese language courses and extra-curricular activities of the Confucius Institutes that operated at Canadian host universities, which could be found in the official social media accounts of the Confucius Institutes. This information helped me to understand the performances of the Confucius Institutes and to observe their mission fulfillment regarding Chinese language teaching and cultural promotion.

Fourth, as the Confucius Institute Headquarters has regularly held the Global Confucius Institute Conference since its establishment, there were also conference proceedings for the Confucius Institute. The conference publications were a supplement to any investigation and evaluation of the Confucius Institute, and provided various insights into its operations.

In terms of the nonofficial documents, I focused on mass media outputs to obtain a sizable sampling for analysis. Due to the fact that it was impossible to assess every single piece of public opinion, the sample focused on mass media outputs from newspapers and magazines that were published in Canada within the last 20 years. The topics covered the performance of the Confucius Institutes at Canadian host universities, evaluations of the Confucius Institutes from different perspectives, and general discussions about the Confucius Institutes that operate in Canada. I chose newspapers and magazines because they are two traditional integration platforms for gathering and expressing opinion pieces on a specific topic and are also more likely supported by the investigative work of journalists compared with the random opinion pieces on the internet.

For the sake of collecting the opinion pieces as comprehensively as possible, I chose the newspaper database “Press Reader” as my approach for collecting data. To be specific, in
the retrieval stage, I used “Confucius Institutes”, “Canada” and “University” to be the three mandatory key words. Next, I limited the publication by country with the option of “Canada”, which narrowed down the number of publications to 433 in total. Then in the result presenting stage, I eliminated any duplicate articles to avoid counting articles published simultaneously by different news agencies. Since these publications were published and circulated in Canada, they were more likely to report the opinion pieces of the events in this country. Furthermore, since these publications were available to the majority of the Canadian people, there was a great possibility that these opinion pieces could further shape the understanding of the average Canadian person in terms of the performance of the Confucius Institutes at Canadian universities and in Canada. Given that these opinion pieces could in some way represented the voices of the Canadian public, with the transcripts of the newspapers and magazines, I aimed to categorize these viewpoints of the Confucius Institutes with respect to their performance in Canadian universities.

To sum up, the official documents could provide me with detailed information of the Confucius Institutes regarding their statements of purpose, partnership modalities, and functioning at the host universities. Meanwhile, the unofficial documents were essential in evaluating their performances in the host country. Based on these documents, I was able to draw a panorama of the Confucius Institute and its partnership and then proceeded forward to further studies on this research topic.

4.4 Data Analysis and Coding Strategies

The data analysis of this study was based on all the data collected from the official documents, the unofficial documents and the interview transcript. Upon completion of the data collection, I started to make sense of the data (Merriam, 1998) and proceeded with my interpretation based on what I had acquired. The analysis process was continual, and no computer software assisted me throughout the study given my limited data. Because the textual data of the documents and interview transcript were too rich to be presented directly in the results, I highlighted those data that were most likely to relate to the research topics and aggregated these featured data into a small number of themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Two analytical methods were mainly addressed in the data analysis.

On the one hand, I adopted documental analysis to ensure an in-depth review of the documents. By analyzing the documents given their descriptions, I was able to better understand the content of their resources, and in this way capture the intention and the deeper meaning behind the words, sentences and language structures. According to Sarantakos (2013),
there are four main approaches usually employed in documental analysis, including descriptive analysis, categorical analysis, exploratory analysis and comparative analysis. In this research, descriptive analysis and categorical analysis were the two main methods for supporting my documental analysis of the Confucius Institute.

On the other hand, I used content analysis to identify the presence of various themes within the data from documents and the interview transcript. Content analysis refers to an investigation that makes inferences by systematically and objectively determining special characteristics of content (Holsti, 1969). More specifically, it underlines the focuses and communication trends of an individual, group or institution, and lays emphasis on revealing certain patterns within communicated content (Berelson, 1952). Typically, conceptual analysis and relational analysis are two main categories of content analysis. In this study, I adopted relational analysis to look for relationships between identified themes from various data sources. By identifying the themes and defining the relationship types of these themes, I was able to do further code and to see beyond the meanings of the data.

In data processing, the strategy for both documents and the interview transcript were coding them for emerging themes. First, I looked through the documents and the interview transcript to get the general idea of them. Next, I constantly reviewed these two types of data to search and arrange the potential topics and patterns, then sorted out possible themes in the upper level to cover them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this data organizing process, I captured the topics and patterns through the commonalities in the text from the documents and the interview transcript respectively. To be concrete, I created tables to visualize the data from the documents. In terms of the official documents, I deconstructed the data of the establishment stage to explain the features of the modality of the Confucius Institutes. In addition, I categorized the data of the operational stage into three groups: Chinese teaching and learning, cultural celebrations, and academic-cultural exchanges. In terms of the unofficial documents, I classified the mass media outputs into positive, negative and neutral, then sub-classified the negative into academic and ideological.

As for the interview transcript, I deconstructed the interview data and outlined five points to cover the transcript’s content: the function of the Confucius Institute, the necessity to customize Chinese language teaching, the importance and qualifications of the Chinese language teachers, the connotation of the educational cultural exchanges, and any administrative dilemmas. These five points were the most frequently expressed in the interview, which demonstrated the focus and the concern of the Canadian co-director in their managerial experiences with the Confucius Institute.
Afterwards, I noticed the overlap between the document data and the interview data. That is, these two kinds of data were connected by some of the same topics and they supported each other in some ways. Because of that, taking research questions as an outline, I integrated various topics from different data sources in the coding process, and then I identified emerging themes across those topics to be presented in the findings. Finally, five themes were determined based on all the data collected from different sources. I will elucidate them with more details later in Chapter 5.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

From the very beginning of the study, I have strictly followed the ethical requirements of Western University. I submitted the online research ethical application to Western University's Research Ethics Board after the approval of my thesis proposal. In addition, I did not start to collect the data until the application was approved in December.

In my preparation for data collections, since the interview was one of the most essential methods in this qualitative case study, I thoroughly explained the purpose and the process of the research when I first contacted the potential participants. Then I sent out the Letter of Information by email to the contacts who showed their interest in participating. During the interview, I emphasized the confidentiality of the study and also addressed that there were neither risks nor direct compensation in this study. Moreover, I discussed with the interviewee to what extent they wanted to reveal their identity and I assured the interviewee that they had the right not to answer individual questions and they can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences before the study is published. In addition, I took notes rather than recording the conversation upon the consent of the interviewee.

After the interview, I transcribed and organized all the interview data by myself under confidential circumstances. Then I sent the transcription via e-mail to the interviewee for validation. After gaining feedback from the interviewee, I started to process the findings with the data.

4.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is vital to ensuring the validity of the research findings from different standpoints (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To strengthen the accuracy of the findings and the consistency of the approach (Gibbs, 2008), I adopted three methods for ensuring the validity and reliability of this study.

First, I intentionally kept my positionality in mind during the process of data collection and analyses in the study. I consciously made myself be transparent in data collection, and in
this way avoided biases and stereotypes on any culture and society as far as possible, treated
the documental data and the opinions of the interviewee in a neutral way.

Second, to improve the trustworthiness of the data, I engaged in conversational
interactions with the interviewee during the interview to make sure all the information they
provided had been noted accurately. Later in the data analysis, I kept in contact through E-mail
with the interviewee to make sure that all the data were constructed and interpreted accurately.

Third, I triangulated various data sources to build a coherent justification for themes
and to enhance the rationality of the theme coding. The data from the two types of the
documents and the interview contributed to the research topic from different perspectives,
supporting each other in the theme coding, and they turned out to be a supplement to the
validity of this study.

Fourth, I enhanced the overall validity of the study with peer debriefing and external
reviewing. On the one hand, I used peer debriefing in the theme coding process to enhance the
rationality of the findings. I elucidated the data sources and the coding process to two peers
and invited them to reflect on my interpretation of the findings. On the other hand, I asked an
external auditor who is from a different disciplinary background to review my entire research
design, findings and conclusions. Both peers and the external auditor provided me with
relatively objective views and assessments of the research and enabled me to see if the study
findings resonated with people other than myself. As a result, the trustworthiness of this study
has improved with their participation.

4.7 Limitations

Despite the originality and contributions mentioned in the introduction, I also want to
indicate the deficiencies of this research. First, given the limited number of Confucius Institutes
in Canada, and their scarce presence at Canadian universities, the case I chose may not be that
representative, and the situation of this specific case may not be generalizable to any other
Confucius Institute in any other setting or country.

Second, the opinion pieces of the general public that I collected from the mass media
outputs at data might not accurately represent the voices of the Canadian public but reflected
the opinions of the authors of those pieces. Although these outputs were reported based on
interviews and investigations of the public views, they still inevitably contained subjective
judgement of the journalists in their information processing and copywriting. Hence, the
opinion pieces can only, in some way, represented the voices of the Canadian public.
Third, I planned and tried, but eventually did not succeed, to interview more co-directors of the different Confucius Institutes. Being in a leadership position could be a dilemma. I was fully aware of the possible concerns for any director in speaking of the organizations they were involved with, and their hesitation in being open enough to share both positive and negative experiences rather than selective images. Besides, talking about self-reflections in daily work as individuals, versus potentially acting as representative voices of their institutions could be a struggle because of the overlapping in disparate roles. The complexities of multiple identities in a single human being might impose a lot of pressure and worries for the interviewee. This probably was also the reason that led to the low response rate in the process of my data collection. As a result, although I appreciated the valuable lived experiences of my interviewee, this limited sample affected the applicability of the findings in this case study.

Fourth, the absence of Chinese language teachers and learners in this study should also be addressed. Although the directors were a good fit in offering insights in both administrative and academic perspectives, a greater diversity of participants could have benefited the trustworthiness of the data. Since Chinese language teachers are the people who actually carry out the teaching activities in practice, they represent the voice of the inside stakeholders in each partnership of the Confucius Institute as well. Hence, their insights could be a strong supplement to my understanding of the cooperation between the Canadian and Chinese universities on the academic level. In addition, as one of the outside stakeholders, the Chinese language learners also play an essential role in the partnership due to their interest in the Confucius Institute, which can motivate the fulfillment of the organization’s mission (Hall, 1996; Jones, 2013). Although the current study includes their needs from the voice of a third party, their direct claims would be a great support in understanding the partnership.

4.8 Summary

In Chapter 4, I have introduced my reasoning for why I opted for the qualitative case study as the methodology of this research and in detail presented the specific methods for data collection. I also explained the purposes in collecting official and unofficial documental data and described the interview and its participant. Next, I elaborated on the data analysis processes, ethical considerations, positionality, and discussed my possible personal bias as a researcher. Finally, I explained the trustworthiness and the limitations of the research. In the next chapter, I am going to present the results of the data from the documents and the interview.
Chapter 5
Findings

In Chapter 5, I am going to present the findings of this study with the data I collected. On the one hand, I am going to present three tables with categories to demonstrate the results and make corresponding illustrations based on the tables respectively. On the other hand, in the interview, eight designed questions were answered by the interviewee. Moreover, one additional topic-related question was added at the end based on the discussion between the researcher and the interviewee of question number four. All the answers of the interviewee have been turned into a transcript to be presented in the data presenting. I use “Canadian co-director” to refer the interviewee without exposing the detailed identity. A neutral pronoun “they” will be used throughout the description of interview data to conceal the specific gender of the interviewee. Furthermore, all the information that may identify the interviewee has been removed to protect the privacy and personal information of the participant.

5.1 The Initiation of the Partnership

5.1.1 The Mission Agreed for the Confucius Institute

Organizations can never exist alone as an isolated entity. They need various types of support from their key stakeholders, such as staff, owners, and customers, to make the organization prosper (Hannagan, 2001). Hence, a clear statement of mission will help develop an understanding of the reason that the potential stakeholders should support the organization. In this study, the mission statement of the Confucius Institute, which also demonstrates the common vision and objectives of both partner universities, is the keystone of the partnership development. Hence, the first step of exploring the partnership is to know the mission of the Confucius Institute.

According to the official declaration of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, the Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational institution that aims to promote the Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. That is, the mission of the Confucius Institute focuses on two parts: Chinese language teaching and cultural understanding. With the aspiration of contributing the multicultural development, the Confucius Institute devote to share the Chinese language and culture with other countries, and in this way bring more diversity to the world.

To fulfill the purposes abovementioned, the function of the Confucius Institute includes Chinese language teaching, Chinese language teacher cultivating, Chinese proficiency tests organizing, information consulting of Chinese education, culture, economy and society, and
cultural exchanges between China and the host countries. These tasks focus on Chinese language teaching and evaluation, cultural exchanges as well as consulting services of information about China, which echoing the mission of the institute.

**5.1.2 Planned Partnership**

In addition to the mission statement, the partnership modality can be observed in the pioneering stage of the Confucius Institute as well. With the understanding of the partnership establishment and the funding mechanism, it is obvious to distinguish the positionality of the Canadian and Chinese universities as inside stakeholders. The positionality of the Confucius Institute Headquarters could be understood according to different stages because the nature of its relationship with the Confucius Institute changes over time. The Headquarters was an inside stakeholder of the CAU-CNU CI during its establishment because it was responsible for approving the partnership agreement of paired universities. However, later in the functioning of the Confucius Institute, although the Headquarters still plays a role in the approval of the language teachers’ selections and the annual budgets of the Confucius Institute, it never intervenes directly in the daily operation nor the usage of funds. Hence, the Headquarters does not explicitly operate as a stakeholder after the initial establishment of the Confucius Institute.

In the design phase, the Confucius Institute Headquarters typically approves the running of the institute in a cooperative way. To be specific, a Confucius Institute may be established in various ways, “with the flexibility to respond to the specific circumstances and requirements found in different countries”, as states in the By-Law of the Confucius Institute. However, the potential partners are supposed to make an application to the Confucius Institute Headquarters, in which demonstrate 1) the local demands of learning Chinese language and culture; 2) the available personnel, space, facilities, and equipment to support the educational activities; 3) the statement of the institute’s operation plan and detailed funds management. After the assessment of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, a new Confucius Institute is ready to establish at the host location. In line with the By-Law, the potential partners can be any legally registered organization or corporation, as long as they are “located with resources to conduct teaching, educational and cultural exchanges, and public service” (Confucius Institute Headquarters, n.d.), which can ensure the fulfillment of the mission.

From the establishment process of the partnership in general, there are usually two partners involved in the partnership. In the case of the CAU-CNU CI, several procedures were applied in terms of the creation of the partnership. First, the Canadian university had shown the need to have a Confucius Institute on campus to support the Chinese language and culture
teaching for the university and the local community. Then the university submitted the application to the Confucius Institute Headquarters for the qualification assessment. Next, the Headquarters paired up the Canadian applicant with a Chinese university, which was known as the Chinese partner, to negotiate the practical details of the Confucius Institute, such as the dispatching of the Chinese co-director and the selection of the Chinese language teachers. As a rule, there were two directors in one single Confucius Institute. As explained by the Canadian co-director of the CAU-CNU CI:

One of them is possibly a professor at the host Canadian university who teaches credit courses or a staff member working in the school’s international office; meanwhile, another one is sent from China, usually from the partner university.

Funds channel further attests to the identities of the partner universities as inside stakeholders, and the changing positionality of the Confucius Institute Headquarters. In general, the funds’ channel can be divided into two stages. In the beginning, the Confucius Institute Headquarters provides aid to the newly established institute in the form of set funds. The start-up funds typically continue three to five years, depending on the individual cases. In the case of the CAU-CNU CI, the initial funding lasted a few years. Later in operation, the CAU-CNU CI can still get support from the Headquarters, whereas the Headquarters no longer provides the full amount of funding anymore. That is, the host university and the Confucius Institute Headquarters are supposed to share the financial responsibility typically on the ratio of 1:1 in the subsequent years. The continuous running of the CAU-CNU CI depends on the financial support of both the Confucius Institute Headquarters and the Canadian partners. It can be noticed that the funding is provided by both the Confucius Institute Headquarters and the host university on the whole. In the meantime, the Confucius Institute Headquarters has never directly involved itself in the fund utilization but only in charge of the financial allocation.

To conclude, the CAU-CNU CI in this study can be understood as a platform where enables the partnership between the Canadian and Chinese paired universities. The Board of the CAU-CNU CI is under the joint venture between the Canadian and Chinese partners. Partner universities are in the cooperative relationship to provide intellectual, financial and configuration supports. Hence, the Chinese language teachers, Canadian and Chinese co-directors, and other related personnel from both partner universities who also provide supports to the partnership are turning out to be the inside stakeholders in the partnership of the CAU-CNU CI. Meanwhile, serving as the authority that approves the partnership but never intervenes in the daily operation nor the direct funding management in practice, the Confucius
Institute Headquarters has experienced a transformation of its positionality from an inside stakeholder to a point where it does not clearly act as a stakeholder of the CAU-CNU CI.

5.1.3 Implementation by Inside Stakeholders

After recognizing the inside and outside stakeholders, I am going to justify the interactions between the Confucius Institute and its inside stakeholders in this section.

Typically, the inside stakeholders influence the Confucius Institute by resource allocation, which includes selecting and assigning Chinese language teachers, preparing teaching materials, holding Chinese proficiency tests, and organizing academic cultural exchanges. The resource allocation mechanism also demonstrates the inside stakeholders involved. As discussed in the previous section, the Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational institution. Hence, the Confucius Institute, like many other organizations that are aiming to fulfill its mission to the greatest extent, is designed to create valued services that the target people need and desire (Jones, 2013). Although the primary mission of the Confucius Institute is carrying out Chinese language teaching, it also shoulders the responsibility of cultural understanding and exchange. In the following section, I am going to elaborate on these four resources provided by the partner universities to support the Confucius Institute in the host countries.

In terms of the Chinese language teachers, head teachers, government-sponsored teachers, and volunteer teachers are three streams that cover all the teaching positions of the Confucius Institute. Head teachers are in the leadership position of the teaching team. They are “full-time employees who take full responsibility for organizing and managing Chinese language teaching of Confucius Institutes under the leadership of the Institute Directors” (Confucius Institute Headquarters, n.d.). They are in charge of formulating teaching plans and course outlines, selecting teaching materials and guiding all the government-sponsored and volunteer teachers. Head teacher candidates can be either native Chinese speakers or not, as long as they hold the certificate of the Standard Chinese Proficiency Test with a minimum level 2-A (or equivalent) or passed the highest level HSK test. At least a master’s degree is required for the candidate, and they must have two years of Chinese language teaching experience in the Confucius Institute or five years of related experience elsewhere. In addition, the host organizations that would like to apply for such a position need to run for at least two years with a minimum of 200 registered students in their Confucius Institute.

The government-sponsored teachers are sent by the Confucius Institute Headquarters from China to satisfy the teacher demand of the host countries. This is also the mainstream
teachers’ type in the teaching team of the CAU-CNU CI. Qualified candidates have at least a bachelor’s degree and the certificate of the Standard Chinese Proficiency Test with a minimum level 2-A (or equivalent). Besides, two years or above of the Chinese language teaching experience is also needed for the teachers.

Volunteer teachers are usually select from two pools. They can be undergraduate and graduate students from China who major in International Chinese Language Education, or foreign citizens and international Chinese students who temporary resident oversea in the host country. However, it is noted by the Confucius Institute Headquarters that priority goes to those volunteer teachers who are recommended by the Chinese partner university under the same qualification.

Teaching materials include standardized, localized and digital resources. Standardized resource refers to the International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education. It is a guiding material that has been widely used in various Chinese language teaching institutions, including the Confucius Institutes around the world. It aims to serve the Chinese language learning with different levels and purposes, which characterizes in the combination of Chinese language teaching and HSK examinations. Before introducing the localized resource, a project named “Chinese Language Teaching Resources Development” needs to be addressed here. It is a cooperation project between the Confucius Institute and the host organization, for the sake of developing the teaching materials that fit the local needs. Technically, the overseas Confucius Institutes, together with the host organizations, apply for the funds from the Confucius Institute Headquarters to compile their own Chinese language and culture teaching materials. According to the Overseas Local Chinese Language Teaching Resource Development Catalogue (Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2019), as of the year 2019, 75 localized teaching materials are compiled by all the Confucius Institutes in Canada, in which includes the contribution of the CAU-CNU CI as well. Digital materials include the digital library of the Confucius Institute and the online Chinese Language Teaching Materials Development platform, which is also known as “CLT Materials Development”. It is a co-construction and sharing online platform where all the users can create their own Chinese language teaching materials and also make evaluations on those materials compiled by others.

Chinese proficiency tests are official language evaluations to prove the non-native speakers’ language ability in daily, academic and professional lives. For this reason, there are four types of tests to serve different examining purposes. Among these, HSK is a writing test to evaluate the general Chinese language abilities of adult learners with six levels. HSKK is the oral test corresponding to its writing version HSK, with beginner, intermediate and
advanced levels. YCT assesses the Chinese language abilities in daily and academic settings of the young non-native learners, which consists of four levels in writing tests and two levels in oral tests. BCT refers to Business Chinese Test, a test to evaluate candidates’ Chinese language ability in business negotiation and working environment. BCT includes the general speaking test and levels A and B in the writing tests. HSKE is specially designed for the language teaching and evaluation of the Confucius Institute to support the pretesting, course evaluation and course completion in its language teaching. As mentioned in Chapter 4, holding HSK is one of the essential functions of the CAU-CNU CI in its Chinese language teaching mission.

To boost academic-cultural exchanges, the Confucius Institute engage in both the Chinese Bridge Competition and Scholarship exchange summer camp. The Chinese Bridge Competition is a yearly academic-cultural exchange carried out by the Confucius Institute Headquarters in cooperation with local governments. The competition consists of Chinese language proficiency, knowledge about China, Chinese cultural talents and comprehensive learning abilities. Three sub-events are oriented towards local college students, local high school students and international students in China. Students who win the preliminary rounds that hold in their countries are qualified to visit China for the semi-finals and finals. Additionally, winners will also get scholarships to advance their studies in China as rewards. Scholarship exchange summer camp is an experiencing cultural event for foreign high school students to enhance their cross-cultural understanding of China. In the case of this study, the CAU-CNU CI plays an assistant role as a consultant and undertaker of the exchange programs. It provides the applicants with program information, in charge of the registration, and act as liaisons between the Headquarters and the local applicants. Moreover, the CAU-CNU CI also features in high-quality academic-cultural communications between Canada and China, which has been emphasized by the Canadian co-director several times:

We treat the Confucius Institute as bridge where people from Canada and China can achieve cultural exchange and mutual communication. Both parties can use this platform to collaborate on research projects based on common interest, or to share their experiences in multi-cultural studies.

5.2 Mechanism of Partnership in Practice

Generally speaking, the partnership of the Confucius Institute is accomplished through a win-win mode. Chinese partner university offers co-director, language teachers and initial funds, and the host university provides classrooms, facilities, and administrative support with
another co-director. Under the combination of software and hardware facilities from both sides, the Confucius Institute can be treated as a platform where conducts the partnership between both partner universities. The common vision of both universities is equal to the mission of the Confucius Institute: the Chinese language teaching and Chinese culture promotion. All the inside stakeholders from both partner universities are critical to support the mission fulfillment (Bart et al., 2001) of the Confucius Institute, which can also be viewed as the success of its partnership.

In the initial stage of the partnership, inside stakeholders occupy a dominant status in the development of the Confucius Institute. Understandably, the primary consideration in the initial phase is how the host and Chinese partner universities can acknowledge the mission of the Confucius Institute, then further assist its growth with software and hardware resources.

In practice, however, the partnership of the Confucius Institute faces more challenges. The principal manifestation of these challenges is how different inside stakeholders can meet the expectation of the organization (Miner, 2005) and cooperate with each other? Moreover, the outside stakeholders bring more challenges to the partnership when the Confucius Institute launches in the Canadian setting. That is, the successful partnership of the Confucius Institute not only requires the joint support of intelligent, human, financial, and equipment resources from various inside stakeholders but also needs supports from the local higher education community, the local public, and the international community in general.

5.2.1 Policy Implementation Gaps between Inside Stakeholders

Because the Canadian and Chinese universities provide the Confucius Institute with software and hardware facilities to support its functioning together, they are both inside stakeholders in the partnership of the Confucius Institute. The organization is supposed to motivate its inside stakeholders to coordinate with each other, and then make good use of available resources to achieve the mission (Jones, 2013). Hence, it is crucial to managing the coordination of different inside stakeholders (Miner, 2005), and in this way to satisfy their expectations and needs. In turn, the inside stakeholders can further benefit the organization in its long-term development.
Table 2
Implementation of the Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>Cultural Celebrations</th>
<th>Academic-Cultural Exchanges</th>
<th>Not Related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data adapted from the official homepages of the Confucius Institutes in Canadian universities on Instagram and Facebook.

Table 2 demonstrates the four categories with three specific topics and the correspondent number, which concluded from the posts of official accounts of the Confucius Institutes at Canadian universities on Instagram and Facebook. I looked through the existing posts on the official social media pages and divided them into four categories: Chinese teaching and learning, cultural celebrations, academic-cultural exchanges, not related.

“Chinese Teaching and Learning” refer to the posts that are related to the information of Chinese classes on different levels, language teaching activities, online popularization of Chinese language and culture, and HSK tests. “Cultural Celebrations” cover the contents of Chinese cultural events, such as the Spring Festival Galas, the Moon-cake Festival tea parties, and movie nights. “Academic-Cultural Exchanges” include Chinese Bridge competition, scholarship visiting, annual conferences between Canada and China, and summer or winter study tours to China.

As shown in the rightmost column, the “not related” category covers the contents which are not related to the performance of the Confucius Institutes, like notifications of the office hours changing and updates of the profile pictures. The statistic of this category will not be later used for analysis purposes since it is not directly related to the performance of the Confucius Institutes.

Therefore, in the middle of the four categories, three of them can summarize social media accounts data. They are Chinese teaching and learning, cultural celebrations, and academic-cultural exchanges. Among these three topics, there is an apparent imbalance between cultural celebrations and the other two. In the total 284 posts of the three topics, 199 posts are about the cultural celebrations, which means the total posts of Chinese teaching and academic-cultural exchanges are occupy less than one third in the whole.
Based on the results, it becomes evident that the Confucius Institutes are inclined to pay more attention to the dissemination of the themed Chinese cultural celebrations rather than to the language teaching and academic-cultural exchanges in practice.

However, from the standpoint of the Canadian university, they have a different expectation of Chinese language teaching and a distinct understanding of the cultural celebrations as well as academic-cultural exchanges.

Table 3
Differences in Chinese Teaching between the Confucius Institute and Canadian university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Confucius Institute</th>
<th>Canadian University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Participant</strong></td>
<td>Individuals in the local community who want to learn the Chinese language.</td>
<td>Students who are enrolled in the university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Goal</strong></td>
<td>Mostly interest and business-driven study to satisfy personal needs.</td>
<td>Get the credit to pursue a university degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Non-credit courses. Time flexible, 15-45 hours in total based on different courses' levels and types.</td>
<td>Credit courses. Twice a week, 36 hours in total to complete the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructor</strong></td>
<td>Teachers assigned by the Confucius Institute Headquarters from China.</td>
<td>Professors who are Canadian citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Material</strong></td>
<td>Textbook compiled by the Confucius Institute Headquarters.</td>
<td>Materials from different sources prepared by professors of the Chinese courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignment and Exam</strong></td>
<td>Homework is flexible to suit the specific situation of the students. Students do a quiz instead of passing a formal exam.</td>
<td>Finish assignments like Chinese essay writing, take tests and pass a final exam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source.* Interview data.
Table 3 shows the differences between Chinese language teaching provided by the CAU-CNU CI and by the Chinese Language or Chinese Studies Department in its host university, based on the interview data with the Canadian co-director. Basically, it can be observed that the Confucius Institute has its own curriculum. It provides non-credit courses to people in the community who want to learn Chinese. According to the Canadian co-director, they are mostly learning Chinese for the following reasons:

1) Professors or staff members in the university who need to make contacts with the Chinese international students;
2) University students who plan to go to China for academic exchange, internship program or work, or who are engaged in China study programs;
3) Canadian citizens who are doing business with China or are planning to tour China;
4) Canadian citizens who have a family member(s) married to a Chinese person. They want to study basic Chinese to make daily communication with their relatives by marriage;
5) People who want to spread the Gospel to the newcomers from China;
6) The employees of the insurance company who wants to sell insurance to the new Chinese immigrants;
7) Police officers who want to communicate more efficiently with the new Chinese immigrants in their work;
8) Some university students who failed to enroll in the Chinese credit course at the university consider the Confucius Institute as a second choice to learn Chinese for no credit;
9) Some are seniors who would like to challenge themselves by learning a different language.

The point here is that, although people learn Chinese for different purposes, “learning with the Confucius Institute is more like an interest-driven study to satisfy personal needs”, according to the Canadian co-director. That is, teachers are supposed to provide the students with the Chinese learning that they really need, instead of always repeating what the textbooks say. For this reason, in the opinion of the Canadian co-director:

I hope that the Chinese language teaching at the Confucius Institute can be more flexible. I mean, not only restrict to the basic level language teaching but also focus more on the real demand in the community. I would suggest that the teachers of the Confucius Institute should visit the classrooms of the Chinese credit courses at the
university for some diverse experiences. Maybe it can help them to modify their own teaching more efficiently.

To better elaborate on the Chinese language teaching strategy, the Canadian co-director also offered detailed suggestions based on their teaching experience, saying that:

Language teaching is more than just literacy work. As a professor of Chinese studies, I hope that the students can build a connection to the Chinese language and culture. As long as they fully understand the cultural background where the charming features of that language generate, the motivation can often bring their language study to a higher level.

For this reason, they suggested that the best language teachers should always be assigned to the beginner because it is essential to nurture the interest of the students at the beginning, then let the motivation helps them to go further in the advanced study. The teaching task involves not only grammar and vocabulary but also the origin and the development of the language, as well as Chinese history and culture. Hence, the Canadian co-director discussed with me that the ideal candidates would be a native Chinese speaker who is proficient in the English language, with a profound knowledge background of both cultures.

Furthermore, the Canadian co-director also gave out the reason for their expectations. There are lots of Chinese immigrants in Canada, which leads to the existence of a number of local Chinese language schools. People who are interested in Chinese language learning have many alternative choices besides the Confucius Institute. Many second-generation immigrants can simply learn Chinese with their parents at home. Facing this situation, the Confucius Institute is supposed to think about how to be more competitive in terms of Chinese language teaching.

Therefore, the coping strategy for being competitive in such a circumstance could never only focus on language teaching. In their insight:

It is necessary to introduce the background knowledge of Chinese culture and history to enrich the learning experience. Furthermore, I think it is a good way to discuss with students and scholars at cultural events if they have any questions about China. On such occasions, I would like to offer observations based on my knowledge and experience.

In addition to the proficiency of being a Chinese language teacher, the practical usage of textbooks is another critical topic to satisfy the real needs of Chinese learners in language
teaching. Although the Chinese language courses and textbooks offered by the Confucius Institute can help the students to dominate the language on the basic level, the Canadian co-director suggested that:

No textbook is perfect, nor can it be universally acceptable, so we also need to think about the need of our students. For example, do they learn Chinese for academic or business purposes? The textbook is like a base of the architecture to language teaching. But how to make this base suitable for the building need the effort of both parties. Further, how to make this building functional is the task of the teachers.

To sum up, the host university expects that all the textbooks and teaching strategies should be very different according to the needs of the target population and countries. Therefore, a lot of efforts ought to be made to improve the Chinese language teaching of the CAU-CNU CI. The Chinese language teachers are supposed to create and to tailor the courses to meet local demands. In this way, it would not only be better to meet the needs of the Chinese language learners, but also boost the cooperation between the Canadian and Chinese universities. Only when all the inside stakeholders actively work together can the Confucius Institute fulfill its mission in the long-term.

In terms of the cultural celebrations, the Canadian co-director provided their insights with the connotations of the cultural events for the CAU-CNU CI. Because there are considerable Chinese immigrants in Canada, it is reasonable to hold regular cultural events. Average cultural events like Moon-cake Festival tea parties and Spring Festival Galas are all good opportunities for students and staff members on campus to experience the classical Chinese culture. However, the Canadian co-director also pointed out that:

It certainly counts a kind of cultural celebration, and we still do it every year, but it should not be a core mission of the Confucius Institute here. We want to build the Confucius Institute into a platform that would enable people from different cultural backgrounds to communicate and learn from each other.

The ultimate goal of the Confucius Institute in the eye of the Canadian partner is to “promote a mutual understanding among human beings with different cultural backgrounds, to avoid misunderstandings caused by ignorance and to strengthen friendship and cooperation with all people in the world”. The goal also coherent the mission statement in the Confucius Institute By-Law created by the Headquarters. Because of that, the consideration of resource
reallocation should be on the list of the Confucius Institute to achieve its mission of cultural understanding.

Academic and cultural exchanges are crucial in the mission of the Confucius Institute. Both documents and the interview data show that they have received the attention of all the stakeholders in the partnership. A lot of exchange events have been designed and popularized by all the Confucius Institutes, such as Chinese Bridge competition, scholarship visiting, annual conference between Canada and China, and summer or winter study tours to China. Further, in practice, the CAU-CNU CI interprets the “academic and cultural exchanges” as organizing “high-quality academic-cultural communications between Canada and China”. Based on the narrative of the Canadian co-director, they treat the Confucius Institute as a bridge where people from Canada and China can achieve cultural exchanges and mutual communications. Both partners can use this platform to collaborate on research projects based on a common interest or to share their experiences in multi-cultural studies.

The reason for doing so is rooted in consideration of the local university where operates the CAU-CNU CI. The Canadian co-director mentioned that one of the essential features of the universities in Canada is the multicultural background of the students. A university like theirs in Canada has a lot of international students from all around the world. Besides, the local students also go abroad on exchange programs very often. To accord with the needs of academic and cultural exchanges in this globalization time, the CAU-CNU CI is supposed to promote these exchanges and to serve as a platform for clearing up misunderstandings between Canada and China.

5.2.2 The Role Played by Outside Stakeholders

Because the satisfaction and the needs of outside stakeholders are equally important to evaluate the effectiveness of the organization, and also strongly connected to its optimum development (Selznick, 1957; Scott & Davis, 2015), it is vital to know and to evaluate the appeals and opinions of the outside stakeholders (Daft, 2014) on the Confucius Institute.

The presentation of this section focuses on the feedback of outside stakeholders in the partnership of the Confucius Institute. It aims to respond to the third sub-question about the roles played by outside stakeholders for the university partnership. Data results cover the voice of the general public and the local community.
Table 4
Feedback of the General Public and the Local Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subdivisions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Documentary data.

Table 4 presents the results of the attitudes towards the Confucius Institute from the mass media outputs in Canada within the last 20 years. They reflected in certain ways the satisfaction degree of the general public on the performance of the Confucius Institute. According to the results retrieved from the database, 138 articles conformed to the search criteria. “Positive” stands for the affirmative attitudes toward the Confucius Institute showing in the article, with the keywords or expressions such as “contributing diversity”, “enhance local mandarin bilingual program”, “promote and share Chinese language and culture”, “praise Chinese culture”, “credit the Confucius Institute to teach Chinese language and culture”.

“Negative” attitudes can be subdivided into two categories. On the one hand, 97 articles show a negative opinion on the Confucius Institute from an ideological perspective. Common terms used by these articles to describe the Confucius Institute including but not limited to the following: “controlled by the CPC (Communist Party of China)”, “charm offensive”, “forms of spy agencies”, “Chinese government-controlled”, “soft power weapon”, “soft diplomacy”, “national security concern”, “Leninist bureaucracy”, “propaganda”, “infiltrate our various levels of government”. On the other hand, there are four articles among the total 101 which express the negative attitudes with addressing academic perspective issues. Concerns concentrate on curriculum, recruitment of academic staff, and the restriction of debate on politically sensitive topics. To be specific, the articles point out that the textbook of the Confucius Institute contains communist propaganda, such as promoting the teachings of Chairman Mao. Some other articles indicate that China’s hiring process of the Chinese language teachers excluded practitioners of Falun Gong, which is a kind of control of academic staff.

“Neutral” means the articles have not demonstrated a particular positive nor negative attitude towards the Confucius Institute, with the following two situations as examples: the
article discusses the Confucius Institute with a description of its basic traits, such as “a Chinese government-supported culture and language program”; the article mentions both the positive and negative role of the Confucius Institute at the host universities but have not made any subjective judgement on neither part.

In the “not related” category, the articles talk about the Confucius Institutes at Canadian universities without any discussion on it. These articles mention the Confucius Institutes and Canadian universities together in the content, whereas the reporter intends to focus on other issues. For example, the protagonist of the article once had ever worked in one specific Confucius Institute at a Canadian university; or a new Confucius Institute has launched at a Canadian university. These articles are not to discuss nor show any specific attitude to the Confucius Institute at Canadian universities.

It can be observed that the negative attitudes towards the Confucius Institutes that operate at Canadian universities possess the most substantial proportion in all the four categories, among which the ideological concerns are about 24 times higher than the academic issues. In other words, concerns tend to be related to the ideological and political perspective rather than about academic freedom or integrity. Furthermore, academic concerns are focus on the “communist propaganda” and the Chinese language teachers’ employment standards of the Confucius Institutes instead of their interfering in the academic freedom of the host universities.

The Canadian co-director has also experienced negative attitudes to the Confucius Institute from the general public. When talked about the challenges that they had ever found in operation, the Canadian co-director mentioned the “political pressures from the outside world now and then”. In their term of office, they noticed that “there are always some anti-China political groups and xenophobia groups who falsely consider the Confucius Institute as a ‘puppet’, a symbol of the Chinese government”. Because of that, it is pretty common that these two kinds of groups take the Confucius Institute as a target and spread slanders by attacking the Confucius Institute.

5.3 Summary

Chapter 5 has presented the findings based on the results of the documents and the interview data. All the data were collected from the official and unofficial documents in various stages of the Confucius Institute, along with the interview with the Canadian co-director. In the next chapter, I am going to gather all the findings to sort out the emerging themes and then make discussions.
Chapter 6

Discussion

The purpose of Chapter 6 is to discuss some emerging themes from my findings presented earlier. My strategy here is to combine the results from the documents and the interview data to answer the research questions. In the process of the data analyses, I started to see the overlap of themes that came from different data sources. They demonstrated similarities to some extent and eventually supported one another, so that they can be connected and categorized into two main themes. In addition, the ways in which the theories and literature reviews inform the findings will also be included in the relevant discussions.

6.1 Theme One: The Challenge of Partnership from Inside Stakeholders

The fulfillment of mission depends on the support of inside stakeholders in the partnership of the organization. As long as the inside stakeholders acknowledge the mission of the organization well and have been satisfied in their interaction with the organization, they will be reliable supporters of the organization’s achievements (Bart Baetz, 1998). Therefore, the organization is supposed to develop a functional management structure and motivate these inside stakeholders to coordinate with each other (Miner, 2005) to achieve the mission.

In the partnership of the CAU-CNU CI, both partners articulated well the mission of the Confucius Institute as inside stakeholders. These stakeholders, including co-directors and Chinese language teachers, were all devoted and shared significant resources, such as standardized teaching materials, localized teaching materials, and physical spaces, to support the flourishing of the partnership (Hutchinson & Campbell, 1998), and the building of the Confucius Institute. All of these factors were discussed in the previous chapter.

Although they share common aims, the lack of common strategy in the partnership brings challenges to the partnership of the CAU-CNU CI. Empirical research shows that in the first decade of the Confucius Institute’s development, key challenges focused on the cooperation between Chinese and host universities regarding the limited understanding of each other’s languages and cultures, as well as the competences and working models of both directors (Li & Tian, 2016). These challenges have also been proved in this study from the four aforementioned perspectives, and also lead to the incompatibility among the different inside stakeholders.
6.1.1 Governance

The partnership of the CAU-CNU CI was created based on the common goals of Chinese language teaching and cultural promotion, which were approved and initially financially supported by the Confucius Institute Headquarters. Later, in the implementation stage, the governance of the partnership was in the form of a joint board. That is, there was a Canadian co-director from the host university, and a Chinese co-director sent by the Chinese partner university. Together they are both in charge of the operation of the CAU-CNU CI. Although the partnership model between Chinese and local universities can be found in the form of shared governance, it appears that this cooperation is more likely to rely on the governmental offices of both countries (Li, 2017) rather than solely between the two universities. In this study, two challenges can be observed in the governance of the partnership: funding considerations and joint board effectiveness.

Previous research has shown the concerns that the initial funding provided by the Confucius Institute Headquarters is a kind of economic power relation (Zhou & Luk, 2016) in the partnership, which makes partner host countries worried that the Headquarters may be involved in the partnership as the umbrella organization (Hartig, 2012; Lo & Pan, 2014) of the Confucius Institute. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the start-up funds typically continue three to five years, then the host organization and the Confucius Institute Headquarters are supposed to share the financial responsibility on a 1:1 ratio in the subsequent years. That is, the Headquarters will not be fully funding the Confucius Institute all the way, nor will the Headquarters directly engage in the usage of funding in practice.

Here I argue that the real concern about the funds is how and where they have been expended rather than whether the CAU-CNU CI or any other Confucius Institute should receive funds from the Headquarters. It is natural and reasonable for any nation to support its language and culture promotion through funding its own non-profit educational institution. Therefore, ensuring the budget’s transparency to the public might be an approach to eliminating this concern about funding. Besides, it may also be helpful if both partner universities would like to monitor the usage of the funding in practice and release related reports, which can clarify the funding disposition.

The other concern goes to the effectiveness of the joint board. So far, the current governance mechanism does not seem reasonable enough in supporting the functioning of the CAU-CNU CI. For example, it is difficult to allocate duties in practice with two directors. Although both directors are supposed to be in charge on paper, there is always someone who
is more likely to act in assisting role in decision making and to carry forward the functioning of the CAU-CNU CI.

Due to the fact that contradictions between the Canadian and the Chinese co-directors might be encountered due to different expectations in quite a few cases in Canada, alternative choices for the governance mechanism might be considered in the future, especially the director assignment. One possible option is not to send the Chinese co-director to every single Confucius Institute unless it is really needed. For instance, Canada is an immigrant country. Many Chinese international students have settled in Canada over a long period of time. On the one hand, they know Chinese culture well and speak perfect Chinese because it is their native language. On the other hand, they also have abundant knowledge about the Canadian education system, the culture and the society because they were all educated in Canada and have been living here for many years. Under this circumstance, they are already the perfect fit for the director position. However, for some countries, such as in Asia, Central and South America, and Africa, there are not enough Chinese immigrants with proper knowledge and experiences to run the Confucius Institutes, nor do they have enough native citizens aware of the Chinese language and culture, so it might be necessary for them to have a director sent from China to help the local people to run the Confucius Institute. In a word, it really depends since circumstances alter cases.

Another choice could be adjusting the distribution of rights in the Boards of the Directors of the Confucius Institute in accordance with the individual cases. That is, in countries where there is not enough experience and resources to support Chinese language teaching, it is reasonable that the Chinese co-director play a vital leadership role and shoulder more responsibility than the host director. Nevertheless, if the host country has a fundamental understanding of Chinese culture and enough resources to support standard Chinese language teaching, or perhaps the host universities are equipped with qualified staffs who are well prepared to teach standard Chinese language and Chinese culture, then it makes sense for the host director to take primary charge of the joint Boards. This can not only save on capital resources for other Confucius Institutes in need but also reduce potential confusion in operations.

6.1.2 Equity

As mentioned by the Canadian co-director and also in the By-Law, the Confucius Institute is running a win-win model. The partnership is expected to generate effective outcomes for both sides. On the one hand, local universities can share their professional
teaching resources to satisfy the local needs of Chinese language learning and cultural understanding. On the other hand, the Chinese partner university can get hardware and facility support to realize Chinese language and culture exchanges at the same time. All these attributes emphasize that equity is one of the most important principles in each partnership for the Confucius Institute, either in planning or in practice.

However, it can be observed that equity has not been applied well so far. To be specific, the Confucius Institute Headquarters has been taking up the dominant role in some decision-making processes in practice. Meanwhile, the voices of inside stakeholders have been missed to some degree. Hence, scholars have expressed their suspicion of the possible political interventions of the Confucius Institute Headquarters (Lo & Pan, 2014; Park, 2013; Starr, 2009) in terms of its over control of these partnerships.

One of the most typical issues is the selection of language teachers. Currently, the Chinese language teachers are selected and approved by the Confucius Institute Headquarters, where the teachers from the Chinese partner university could receive preferential consideration under the same qualifications. In this respect, the Canadian partner university is absent from the selection process of the Chinese language teachers. In other words, it is difficult for the Canadian university to endorse the qualification of the candidates, and thus, the equity between Chinese and Canadian partner universities has not been ensured in terms of the language teachers’ selection.

The coping strategies for mitigating this inequity can be allowing room for decision making between the two partner universities. First, the hiring of the Chinese language teachers may be done based on the cooperation of both Chinese and Canadian partner universities, with the approval of the Headquarters at the end. It is reasonable for the two partners to have a rounded perception of the candidate from the beginning, especially their professional proficiency in Chinese language teaching, which is also beneficial for future work together. Second, in addition to sending teachers from China, the instructors who are selected and trained from the local pool can also be encouraged to become language teachers at the Confucius Institute. The local candidates who also meet the requirements for teaching the Chinese language at the Confucius Institute have advantages given their cultural connection with the local community compared with those candidates sent from China. They are familiar with Chinese language teaching and both Chinese and local cultures, which allows them to be competitive in satisfying the needs of the inside and outside stakeholders, i.e., the Canadian partner university and the Chinese language learners.
6.1.3 Standards

Academic standards have always been a core matter in partnerships between higher education institutions. Further, raising academic standards is always at the top of the agenda for all partners (Maeroff et al., 2001). As mentioned above, the standards controversy between different inside stakeholders in the partnership of the CAU-CNU CI falls into two perspectives: language teaching and the connotation of cultural understanding.

From the academic perspective, curriculum and textbook standards still need to be explored. Existing research has pointed out the academic controversy of the Confucius Institute, which mainly focuses on the feasibility and adaptability of Chinese language teaching. For example, scholars indicate that the teaching materials of the Confucius Institute are more suitable for the Chinese language competence insisted upon by the Headquarters rather than enabling students to handle daily conversations (Wheeler, 2014; Zhao & Huang, 2010), something also been proved in this study.

As previously mentioned, the curriculum of Chinese language courses is fixed on several levels to prioritize the underlying coherence of HSK exams. Besides, standardized teaching materials represented by the “International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education” are also designed and revised to support the six levels of standard Chinese language knowledge points, such as characters, words, grammar and topics, required in the HSK examinations. That is, the teaching materials are designed to primarily enhance students’ competition in HSK examinations and in Chinese language competence such as Chinese Bridge, which may not represent true needs considering the various circumstances of the host countries.

The status of Canada as a multicultural immigrant country has been addressed several times in the interview data. Since there exists no single standard for all the language education institutes around the world, the multicultural backgrounds and specific needs of the students require specific teaching materials and strategies for the students in Canada.

Therefore, the individual Institutes can attach more importance to developing more theme-based Chinese language courses to enrich the current fixed levels curriculum. Business, travel, medicine and law are all worth considering based on the interests and needs of the local public as shown in Chapter 5. In addition, more attention should be attached to exploring localized textbooks, which can precisely fit the needs of the target Chinese learners. Because the localized textbooks are designed based on the different situations of countries and every single individual Confucius Institute, they can also expect a higher acceptance in the host countries compared with the standardized textbooks.
Meanwhile, the standards of Chinese cultural promotion are another key controversy among the insights of different inside stakeholders, despite they are not having been emphasized by scholars in the existing research. Since the Confucius Institute devotes itself to contributing cultural diversity all around the world, cultural promotion can be seen as equally important as language teaching in its mission statement, if not more.

So far, the Confucius Institutes at Canadian universities in general are inclined to pay more attention to the themed Chinese cultural celebrations and recreation. It can be interpreted that social media is more friendly in the dissemination of cultural celebrations because the activities’ pictures are more attractive to the average person who might potentially be interested in Chinese language learning and Chinese culture understanding. However, social media also reflects the tendency of Confucius Institutes to emphasize cultural celebrations in their practices.

What is more, as stated before, the cultural celebrations mainly are scratching the surface of the Chinese culture with regular cultural celebrations, such as Chinese New Year galas, art shows and exhibitions, Chinese movie nights, Chinese Kungfu classes, mid-autumn festival galas, etc. Although these regular cultural celebrations can offer a sensual experience of the Chinese culture to the people in the host country, they are too fundamental to be the core mission of the Confucius Institute in terms of cultural understanding and multicultural contribution.

The Confucius Institute is more than a simple resource summation of the two partner universities. It is supposed to be a platform that enables different stakeholders to work together to create outcomes and influences greater than one plus one. Hence, as stated by the Canadian co-director of the CAU-CNU CI, the partner universities should work together to build the Confucius Institute into a platform that enables people from different cultural backgrounds to communicate and learn from each other. Here, I argue that the connotations of cultural promotion should not be a one-way task, nor should it be restricted to a basic level. Regular celebrations can familiarize people with Chinese culture, but the gap still persists between familiarity and understanding. Cultural understanding is always based on communication and discussion, both of which call for interaction and mutual intelligibility. Therefore, partner universities could reconsider the standards and core elements of cultural promotion in practice, and in this way draw more attention to developing mutual understanding among human beings with different cultural backgrounds, eliminating misunderstandings caused by ignorance, and building up friendship and cooperation. Again, bilateral interaction and mutual understanding are supposed to be the two core connotations of culture promotion throughout the practice.
6.1.4 Teachers

The qualifications of the Chinese language teachers have always been the key issue in the academic construction of any higher education partnership, and the partnerships of the Confucius Institute are no exception. Practical problems focus more on the shortages of professional Chinese teachers (Hartig, 2015; Zhao & Huang, 2010) and the teachers’ unfamiliarity with local culture (Hartig, 2015; Zhou & Luk, 2016). However, few studies concentrate on the proper qualifications of the Chinese language teachers, as well as teacher education in the ongoing teaching practice, which have been addressed as the main issue in this study.

Under the current partnership model, all the Chinese language teachers are sent by the Confucius Institute Headquarters from China. Doubtlessly, the Confucius Institute Headquarters sets a concretized standard for the teachers to ensure qualifications for standard Chinese language teaching, such as a master’s degree, certain number of years of teaching experience, a certificate of the Standard Chinese Proficiency Test with a minimum level 2-A (or equivalent), all of which are all measurable and fair standards by which to filter the qualified candidates of the Confucius Institute.

However, in the expectation of the host university, a standard Chinese language teacher can never only be evaluated by these factors. I was sensitive to the desire to have highly qualified Chinese language teachers expressed by the Canadian co-director during the interview for my observation. Despite the host university acknowledging the standards settle down by the Confucius Institute Headquarters, the ideal candidates are also expected to have a profound knowledge background, other than just specializing in Chinese language teaching. Language teaching involves not only grammar and vocabulary but also the origin and the development of the Chinese language. A good elaboration of the cultural background that generates the language can be a strong motivation for the students to boost their language study to a higher level.

In addition, even once the Chinese language teachers have already been selected and dispatched, there is still room for improvement in their teaching according to the various circumstances of local learners. That is, it is necessary to progress the teachers’ education throughout their daily practices. The Chinese language teachers are expected to know their students and the culture they are in well enough to build a connection between the students and the Chinese language and culture. In this way, they are able to inspire the motivation of the students and in this way boost their language learning. Thus, there is still room for both partner
universities to negotiate the standards of the qualified candidates to fulfill the Chinese language teaching.

6.2 Theme Two: Minimize the Resistance from the Outside Stakeholders through Community Building

Organizations are political and social systems embodying norms and values of importance to their participants (Selznick, 1957; Scott & Davis, 2015) rather than simple technical systems to perform certain functions. In this sense, the interactions with the outer world and the coherence in satisfying the demands of the outside stakeholders are important for the organization in achieving its goals. In the meantime, the social-cultural environment and key drivers are shaping the creation and development (Nelson & Zadek, 2000) of the partnership. Therefore, the Confucius Institute is supposed to listen to and consider the environment where it operates to realize its long-term goals of implementing Chinese language teaching and promoting cultural understanding between different countries. However, scholars find that the Confucius Institute has not yet integrated into the local environment, nor does it fully serve its role as a cultural envoy in the international community (Li & Tian, 2016), which can be interpreted as a potential challenge in its future development.

In the partnerships between higher education institutions, the key step to getting support from the outside stakeholders and minimizing the resistance from the environment on a macro level is putting efforts into community building. However, community building is extremely dynamic and explorative based on the market economy in this neo-liberal time (Li, 2017), which can be seen in the Confucius model partnerships with higher education institutions. As a representation of the partnership, the Confucius Institute is connected to the local community in a tangible way. On the micro-level, the local community provides the potential customers who are interested in the services (Hannagan, 2001), such as Chinese language courses, academic or business information consultations, and academic-cultural exchanges with China. On the meso-level, the voices of the general public and the consensus in the mass media can have a huge influence (Hannagan, 2001; Scott & Davis, 2015) on the Confucius Institute. On the macro-level, the Confucius Institute model is a fresh attempt at an international higher education partnership, which has been closely followed by the international community. Whatever level we put ourselves in to frame the Confucius Institute and its partnership model, it is still a long way to go for all the partners to contribute to their community building.

On the micro-level, although the CAU-CNU CI is physically located in the Canadian university, it has not yet established any strong network with the community of higher
education institutions. A university is a resourceful community where there are scholars who are interested or specialized in the Chinese language and studies. The scholars here are not only referring to the professors and the students of the host universities but also including all the scholars who are from other Canadian universities and research institutions.

The connections with the community of higher education institutions and their professors and students can not only enhance the creditability and acknowledgement of the Confucius Institute but also potentially contribute to the cultural communication for both Chinese and Canadian parties. However, according to the research mentioned above, the physical existence of the Confucius Institute on campus turns out to be a huge complication because of the concerns of academic freedom interference (Wheeler, 2014). Then, in this vein, it is vital for the Confucius Institute and its partners to put more effort into community building with the host university and the universities in the host country as appropriate.

As suggested by the interviewee, one possible strategy could be building the CAU-CNU CI along with other Confucius Institutes in Canada as a platform for high-quality academic-cultural communications between the host country and China. Both partner universities can use this platform to collaborate on research projects based on a common interest or to share their experiences in multi-cultural studies on a broader scale. It is an excellent opportunity for the Confucius Institute to polish its community building at the same time.

On the meso-level, the Confucius Institute has not been well engaged in the local community in Canada as a whole. According to the unofficial data reflected in Table 4 from Chapter 5, 73% of the local communities have expressed their negative attitudes about the Confucius Institute at Canadian universities through mass media. Among these, 96% of the concerns concentrate on the ideological issues, which are about 24 times higher than the academic ones. In other words, concerns tend to be related to the ideological and political perspectives rather than about academic issues.

Organizations are supposed to make positive and timely coping strategic choices to decrease environmental pressures, adjust to the local community, satisfy the interests of the outside stakeholders, and in this way produce the expected outcome to better fulfill its mission (Hannagan, 2001; Miles & Snow, 2003). Hence, it is concerning that in the partnerships with the Confucius Institute, involved partners do not attach proper attention to the community building of the Confucius Institute on the meso-level.

On the macro-level, it is complicated and difficult for the Confucius Institute to develop its international partnerships. First, the Confucius Institute is a fresh attempt in respect to the
international partnerships among higher education institutions. As mentioned before, transnational partnerships typically exist between universities on the academic level (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Leask, 2004; Woodfield et al., 2009), whereas the Confucius Institute, as a platform that enables university partnerships, possesses an essential perspective of cultural understanding and promotion in its mission, which is equally important as its academic perspective of Chinese language teaching. The two parts of the mission determine that the Confucius Institute would face more challenges when the partner institutions and the host countries cannot fully acknowledge the cultural values embedded in the Confucius Institute.

Second, traditional transnational partnerships within higher education institutions mainly focus on “exchange”, which refers to the communication between students, professors and scholars, and also includes the exchange of programmes, projects and services (Haritos Tsamitis, 2009; Knight, 2004). However, the Confucius Institute is establishing a brand-new institution under the contribution of two partner universities rather than simple academic exchanges. The partnership is based on academic support, cultural understanding, negotiation and collaboration of both sides, with unceasing exploration in terms of decision making, management strategy, and problem-solving. The partnership goes beyond resource sharing and is more like an ongoing polishing of the new co-operative construction.

Third, in operation, the partnership often consists of several organizations in a complex web because these organizations may be in charge of different responsibilities (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). In the case of the Confucius Institute, the recruitment of students is a charge of the Confucius Institute, the support of teaching resources mainly comes from the Chinese partner university, and the provision of campus and technical equipment is the responsibility of the Canadian partner university. Moreover, the involvement of the Confucius Institute Headquarters in the process of teacher recruitment and the support of the initial funding can double the complexity of the partnership development.

All these factors have led to the dilemma such that the Confucius Institute has not been well regarded by the international community so far. According to the literature review from Chapter 3, a large proportion of scholars deconstruct the Confucius Institute as an organization that is responsible to the soft power propaganda and ideological infiltration directed by the Chinese government to some extent. Besides, despite the significant number of established satellites in the report, the shutdown of Confucius Institutes all around the world has also been reported as mentioned in the first chapter. Therefore, it is long way for the Confucius Institute’s partnership model to go in terms of being well regarded internationally.
6.3 Reflections on the Existing Research and Theoretical Framework

The abovementioned two themes, totalling five different components, have highlighted the existing research from two specific perspectives. First, transnational partnerships usually involve various commitments and personnel from different organizations in their implementations (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Leask, 2004). In the case of the Confucius Institute, the Canadian university is responsible for the provision of campus space and technical equipment, whereas the Chinese partner university offers the supports of language teachers and teaching resources. Therefore, the mission fulfillment of the Confucius Institute depends on the accumulated efforts accomplished by both parties.

Second, the coherence of various stakeholders is positively correlated to the success of the organization. In the partnership with the two partner universities, the Confucius Institute possesses various inside stakeholders, which easily causes confusion among students and staff members in practice (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). Hence, the collaborations of the inside stakeholders and their flexibility in fulfilling the needs of the outside stakeholders are both challenges for the Confucius Institute in its future partnership development.

Nevertheless, as elaborated before, the partnership model of the Confucius Institute is a brand-new attempt at partnership building within higher education institutions. Unlike the traditional transnational partnerships between universities that basically focus on academic exchanges, the Confucius model requires a huge commitment to cultural understanding by both partner universities. However, this commitment has not been given enough attention yet in the existing research. Enhancing and realizing mutual cultural understanding in the transnational partnerships between higher education institutions require equal emphasis in academic exchanges in the future.

The theoretical framework that I chose to analyze the partnerships of the Confucius Institute provides five distinct measures of partnership building, governance strategy, equity awareness, standards-setting, teachers’ education with inside stakeholders, and community building with outside stakeholders. These five elements indicate from what angles the inside and outside stakeholders of the Confucius Institute can influence and shape their partnership. They help to deconstruct the university partnership of an organization into five dimensions, then further outline how the key stakeholders of this organization echo their partnership from these five perspectives. Thus, the framework well establishes that the Confucius Institute is a language education institute that enables partnerships between universities. However, it also should be noted that several key stakeholders are missing in the analyses under this framework. For example, the framework does not cover the Chinese language learners who are attracted
by the Confucius Institute, though they should be recognized as essential outside stakeholders in this partnership. Moreover, there is no specific dimension in the framework to address the positionality of the Confucius Institute Headquarters in its partnership development. As the authority that approves the partnerships of the Confucius Institutes, the Headquarters is one of the essential inside stakeholders in the establishment of the Confucius Institute. In the meantime, given the Headquarters never directly engages in the operations of the individual Confucius Institutes, it does not explicitly operate as a stakeholder in practice. However, it should be noted that the Headquarters exerts an influence on the partnerships of the Confucius Institutes throughout. Nevertheless, the analysis of this changing and complicated identity has not been adequately included by adopting this framework.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, I explored two emerging themes through the theoretical framework based on the data from the documents and the interview. Along with the findings, I discussed the individual findings and reflected how these findings respond to the existing research. Besides, I also discussed the absence of certain stakeholders by adopting the theoretical framework. In the next chapter, I am going to conclude this study, come up with implications, and make suggestions for further research directions.
Chapter 7
Concluding Remarks

Drawing on organization theory through the lens of higher education partnerships as the theoretical framework and using a qualitative research method with a case study approach, this study explored university partnerships with the Confucius Institute in Canada. I conducted a comprehensive study of the key stakeholders involved in each partnership and in what ways they shape the partnerships of the Confucius Institute in these higher education settings. Further, I made several suggestions based on the findings with the aim of enhancing the partnerships and achieving the mission of the Confucius Institute in practice.

7.1 Implications

Based on the profound understandings of the functioning of the Confucius Institute from all the data sources, implications can be sorted into three categories to support the partnership exploration of the Confucius Institute: formulating a common strategy, enhancing cultural understanding, and advancing internationalization.

Although the partnerships of the Confucius Institute are supposed to consist of two partner universities, it can be noted that some key strategies in the decision-making process are overly reliant on the Confucius Institute Headquarters instead. This trend can be observed in both teacher selection and financial support. The absence of the Canadian partner university in decision-making may lead to an imbalance in the joint board governance, which brings equity concerns to the table and also results in a lack of mutual trust in practice. Since the Confucius Institute cannot flourish without any partners, common decision-making in respect to key issues is necessary to enhance the partnerships and further forward the functioning of the Confucius Institute.

In another respect, more efforts in enhancing cultural understanding is the second implication in the partnerships of the Confucius Institute. As mentioned before, the success of each partnership depends upon attitude and culture, which emphasizes building mutual trust, recognizing differences and finding common ground (Coupar & Stevens, 1998). Considering the attributes of the Confucius Institute as a language and cultural exchange institution, cultural understanding weighs a lot more in its partnerships compared with those of traditional higher education institutions. However, both partner universities have not yet developed cultural understanding well enough. On the one hand, language teaching and cultural celebrations have not been tailored well to fit the local circumstances. On the other hand, the local partner has
not engaged enough either, other than offering hardware and facilities. This lack of mutual cultural understanding hinders partnership building and the willingness to find common ground to cooperate in the functioning of the Confucius Institute.

The third implication is how the Confucius model partnership can articulate and reassure its positioning given its methods of internationalization in this period of globalization. As addressed before, the establishment of each Confucius Institute is based on the needs for Chinese language and cultural learning around the world. That is, the partnerships of the Confucius Institute adopt a market-driven mechanism on the global stage in their design. This market-driven mechanism requires the satisfaction of the Chinese language learners and it also faces competition from other Chinese language teaching providers, such as the faculties of Chinese language studies in local universities and private Chinese language schools. However, in practice, the partnerships of the Confucius Institute are not recognized to the same degree as the organization’s image of a language education brand from China. Hence, the general public assumes the product-oriented mechanism in its functioning and is inclined to focus on the planning and design of this “product”. As a result, any discussion on the ideological intentions of the Confucius Institute pull people’s attention away from its function as an academic and cultural exchange platform derived from these higher education institutional partnerships.

Despite the rapid spread and global scale of the Confucius Institute, its partnership model has not been well comprehended and regarded internationally. Many Confucius Institutes end up shutting down, which reflects the immaturity and potential problems of the partnerships. Therefore, how the Confucius model partnership can define its positioning on its way to internationalization should be taken into consideration. In return, the general public should be more aware of the ideological bias they may exert on the Confucius Institute.

7.2 Future Research Directions

This exploratory study of the Confucius Institutes is a small component of the research topic related to language and culture institutions, as well as their partnerships with partner universities. For now, the Confucius Institutes around the world are mainly supported by the Chinese government, structurally and financially, so future studies can pay attention to the potential relationships between universities and states. Research can also be directed to the partnerships of the Confucius Institutes on the governmental or non-governmental levels, such as the possibility of cooperating with the local governmental or non-governmental organizations.
Meanwhile, as mentioned in the introduction, the re-titling of the Confucius Institute Headquarters to Centre for Language Education and Cooperation, without yet an official announcement, has suggested a trend for future research as well. Since “language education” and “cooperation” are clearly indicated in the latest title, it turns out to be obvious that the Confucius Institute is going to emphasize Chinese language education as its primary mission as usual and try to seek for more cooperation in its further development. Therefore, a deeper investigation of the partnership model of the Confucius Institute, possible cooperation mechanisms, potential partners besides universities, and solutions to resistance in these partnerships could all be directions for further research.

What is more, it is also necessary for scholars to concentrate on a specific issue. For example, how to evaluate student outcomes, or how to modify the policies of the Confucius Institute to accelerate its functionality? Moreover, another problem that we should keep in mind is that the partnership strategy may be different, considering the various socio-cultural backgrounds of different countries. Hence, researchers can categorize the target countries according to their different circumstances, and in this way explore specific partnership strategies for the Confucius Institutes that operate in different settings.

Comparative case studies are also needed in future exploration. As I explicated in the beginning, and also mentioned with the interviewee, many language education institutes are well established around the world, the Confucius Institute has been launched based on their experiences and practices. Therefore, comparative case studies of different partnership modalities between these language education institutes would be a great chance for those institutions to learn from each other and improve their partnership building according to individual cases.

7.3 Conclusions

This study has shown the lack of common strategy among inside stakeholders in the partnerships of the Confucius Institute in the Canadian setting, which brings challenges to its partnerships. Concerns have been demonstrated in funding usage, effectiveness of the joint board, imbalanced status of the partner universities in decision making, standards of language teaching, connotations of cultural understanding, and qualifications of Chinese language teachers. Moreover, there is still a long way for the Confucius Institute to go in building up strong connections with the higher education community, the local public and the international community. Based on the results, this thesis provides insights into the possible solutions for the abovementioned issues in the partnerships of the Confucius Institute. It is the hope that this
case study will facilitate the future partnerships of the Confucius Institute by highlighting the challenges with relevant discussions. Hopefully, it can benefit Chinese language learners and the cultural understanding between various civilizations at the same time.
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Appendixes

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What are the motivations for pioneering the Confucius Institute at a Canadian university/in Canada?
2. What are the greatest benefits offered by the Confucius Institutes?
3. What are the challenges have you ever found in the operation of the Confucius Institute and how do you cope with them?
4. How do you see the main differences between the Confucius Institutes and the Chinese Language or Chinese Studies Department in a random Canadian university?
5. Do you have any experience about how to balance the management of the Confucius Institute and the expectation on the Confucius Institute from the university?
6. From your viewpoint, what are the key features of a qualified director of the Confucius Institute?
7. Do you have any thoughts about the ideal cooperative mode between the Confucius Institute and the university?
8. In your opinion, what are the essential factors to successfully hold a language education institute in a foreign country?

In the fourth question, the Canadian co-director mentioned the lecturers’ qualification for the credit courses in the Canadian university. Then I further invited them to talk about the non-credit courses in the Confucius Institute and encouraged them to share more about the academic circumstances of the Confucius Institute, such as textbooks and teaching methods.
Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent Form

Letter of Information

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jun Li
Affiliation: Western University
Email address: jun.li@uwo.ca
Telephone number: +1(519)661-2111 x 88564

You are being invited to participate in a study about understanding the modality of language education institutes and their partnership with Canadian public universities because you are 1) the principals of the Confucius Institute / the Cervantes Institute / the cooperative Canadian universities or 2) you are teachers of the Confucius Institute / the Cervantes Institute.

The purpose of this study is to bridge the gap between language education institutes and Canadian public universities, promote collaboration between the two sides.

It is expected that you will be in the study for 6 months, there will be 1 study visit during your participation in this study and it will take approximately 1 hour. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an in-person interview to answer 5 questions about the operation of the Confucius Institute at [Institution 1] / the Cervantes Institutes at [Institution 2]. The interview will be taking place at your convenient place or via remote technology. The conversation between you and the researcher will be audio-recorded during the interview upon your voluntary consent, and the data will only be used for the research purpose. Your personal information will NOT be revealed unless you consent to do so, and all the data is under the protection of confidentiality.

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. You may not directly benefit from participating in this study, but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include the future development of language education institutes and foreign language learning on the international stage.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be compensated for your participation in this research. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request by E-mail withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed
please let the researcher know and your information will be destroyed from our records. Once the study has been published, we will not be able to withdraw your information.

The study may need your full name, initials, telephone number, email address, professional role (e.g., principal/director, teacher of institutes or universities) for consent, communication and identity reference purposes. All data will be de-identified to protect participants’ confidentiality. Nobody else except for the researchers will have access to your personal information as a research participant. The data will be stored on a secure server at Western University and will be retained for a minimum of 7 years. Your data may be retained indefinitely and could be used for future research purposes (e.g., to answer a new research question). By consenting to participate in this study, you are agreeing that your de-identified data can be used beyond the purposes of this present study by either the current or other researchers. Representatives of Western University’s Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact the Principal Investigator of this research: Dr. Jun Li (Email: jun.li@uwo.ca).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics, email: ethics@uwo.ca. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
Letter of Consent

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jun Li
Affiliation: Western University
Email address: jun.li@uwo.ca
Telephone number: +1(519)661-2111 x 88564

Contact Information:
Researcher: Yinan Wang
Affiliation: Western University
Email: ywan3563@uwo.ca
Phone: +1(226)977-

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research.
☐ YES  ☐ NO

I agree to have my name used in the dissemination of this research.
☐ YES  ☐ NO

I consent to the use of personal, identifiable quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research.
☐ YES  ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research.
☐ YES  ☐ NO

I agree to have my professional title and organization name used in the dissemination of this research.
☐ YES  ☐ NO

I consent to the use of my data for future research purposes.
☐ YES  ☐ NO
CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Please check the appropriate box below and initials:

___ I agree to be contacted for future research studies
___ I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name of Participant
Signature
Date (   )

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent
Signature
Date (   )
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Yinan Wang

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2018-2020 M.A.

Renmin University of China
Beijing, China
2015-2018 M.L.I.S.

Beijing International Studies University
Beijing, China
2008-2012 B.A.

Related Work Experience:

GED Tutor
Frontier College
2020-Present

Research Librarian
National Library of China
2012-2018

Presentations: