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CULTURAL INSTITUTES AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT: Culture is “driver and enabler of sustainable development”. In the context of globalization, cultural exchanges are increasing, the role of language as a carrier of culture is more and more evident. Many countries even include it in the national strategy, and it became an important government action. Confucius Institute is an important platform for Sino-foreign cultural exchanges and mutual learning”. And the same of the other cultural institutes which have been mentioned in this paper. They are all playing a role of the international community civilization messenger, they are bridges to connect the native countries and abroad, they are Culture Ambassadors who help the comprehension and cooperation among people and countries.

KEYWORDS: culture, cultural institutes, language teaching, cultural exchange

1. CULTURE

Culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."⁷ E.B. Tylor said. Instead, in a contemporary variant, "Culture is defined as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses, and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held in common."⁸ The United Nations agency UNESCO has defined culture as the "set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs."⁹ In its rich diversity, culture has intrinsic value for development as well as social cohesion and peace.¹⁰ Acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity... are conducive to dialogue among civilizations and cultures, respect and mutual understanding.¹¹ The promotion of cultural diversity and its corollary dialogue, has become one of the most pressing contemporary issues, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001 has mentioned.¹²

2. CULTURAL INSTITUTES

In this paper, we will take the six main cultural institutes as examples: the British Council, Alliance Francaise, Goethe-Institut, Instituto Cervantes, Romanian Cultural Institute and Confucius Institutes.

2.1. Cultural institutes and the role in society

2.1.1. British Council:

It was firstly founded in 1934, with the vision of that the future for the UK depends on people of all cultures living and working together on foundations of education, mutual understanding, respect and trust.¹³

The mission of British Council is to create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide.¹⁴

The British Council offers three kinds of services which includes:

- English teaching;
- Education and Society;
- The Arts.

The aim of each service is:

English teaching aims to bring high quality language materials to every learner and teacher who wants them. In developing and post-conflict countries they teach English and train teachers through radio, web and TV broadcasts. The British Council offers over three million UK examinations worldwide, helping people gain access to trusted qualifications to support their career and study prospects.

Education and Society aims to help transform national education systems, builds more inclusive and open societies and increases young people's opportunities. The British Council encourages

⁷ Tylor, E. in Seymour-Smith, C. (1986) *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*. The Macmillan Press LTD.

⁸ James, Paul; with Magee, Liam; Scerri, Andy; Steger, Manfred B. (2015). *Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Circles of Sustainability*. London: Routledge. p. 53.

⁹ UNESCO, *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Retrieved October 14, 2007.

¹⁰ http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=34321&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

¹¹ http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=34321&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

¹² *The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001*

¹³ <http://www.britishcouncil.sg/about/vision-mission>

¹⁴ <http://www.britishcouncil.sg/about/vision-mission>

international students to go and study in the UK, and British students to experience life abroad. It also brings schools around the world together so young people and teachers from different countries can share with and learn from each other.

The Arts involves the very best British and international artistic talent. They help increase audiences for international work in the UK and for UK work globally. It brings artists together and support the development of skills and policy in the arts and creative industries. Through this work they ensure that culture in its broadest sense plays a vital role in connecting with and understanding each other.

In these ways, the British Council builds links between UK people and institutions and those around the world, helping to create trust and lay foundations for prosperity and security around the world.

2.1.2. *Alliance Francaise:*

It was firstly created in the year 1883, with a vision of

The mission of Alliance Francaise is to promote French language and culture around the world.

All Alliance Française work towards three essential tasks:

- Offering French classes both in France and abroad
- Spreading awareness of French and Francophone culture
- Promoting cultural diversity

Alliance Française have shared values which drive the network, acting as the basis for all their actions:

- Respect for cultural diversity, a passion for exchanges and solidarity
- The values of the not-for-profit sector
- Conviviality
- Striving for excellence in all activities undertaken
- Modernity and innovation¹⁵

2.1.3. *Goethe-Institut:*

The first Goethe-Institut was set up in the year 1925. The vision of Goethe-Institut is to encourage intercultural dialogue and enable cultural involvement, to convey a comprehensive image of Germany by providing information about cultural, social and political life in their nation.¹⁶

The mission of Goethe-Institut is to promote knowledge of the German language abroad and foster international cultural cooperation.

The Goethe-Institut offers four kinds of services which includes:

- German language teaching;
- Organizing cultural activities;
- Organizing Gesellschaft für Akademische Testentwicklung e.V. exams;
- Providing information on German culture, society and politics.

By the above services, it aims to change the militant German image, and establish a colorful image of Germany.

2.1.4. *Instituto Cervantes:*

The Instituto Cervantes was firstly set up by the Spanish government in 1991. The vision of Instituto Cervantes is to

fostering knowledge of the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries throughout the world.

The mission of Instituto Cervantes is to promote the study and the teaching of Spanish language and culture.

The Instituto Cervantes:

- Organizes the Diplomas of Spanish as a Foreign Language (DELE), as well as issuing the official certificates and diplomas to the participants in our courses.
- Organizes Spanish courses.
- Organizes Spanish teacher training.
- Supports Hispanists in their work.
- Organizes cultural events in conjunction with other organizations.

2.1.5. *Romanian Cultural Institute:*

The Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI) was founded in July 2003 by reorganizing the Romanian Cultural Foundation and Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing. It is a public agency dedicated to cultural diplomacy and international arts exchange.¹⁷

The primary mission of RCI is to promote Romanian culture and civilization in Romania and abroad.

The most important action lines of RCI are:

- Presenting compelling Romanian culture to international audiences;
- Connecting specific Romanian cultural domains to broad international venues and intellectual networks;
- Subtly designing a new approach based on the encouragement of daring contemporary arts on one hand and, on the other, the creative preservation of traditional cultural Romanian values.

2.1.6. *Confucius Institute:*

Confucius Institutes (CIs) are non-profit public institutions which were firstly established in 2004. The vision of CIs is to meet the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world.

The mission of CIs is to provide Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide and to promote Chinese language and culture internationally.

The CIs shall provide the following services:

- Chinese language teaching;
- Training Chinese language instructors and providing Chinese language teaching resources;
- Holding the HSK examination (Chinese Proficiency Test) and tests for the Certification of the Chinese Language Teachers;
- Providing information and consultative services concerning China's education, culture, and so forth;
- Conducting language and cultural exchange activities between China and other countries.

The aim of CIs is to meet the needs of people who'd like to learn Chinese and to know about Chinese culture, to promote bilateral exchanges between young people and build up mutual understanding and friendship.

¹⁵ <http://www.alliancefr.org/en/who-are-we>

¹⁶ <https://www.goethe.de/en/uun/org.html>

¹⁷ http://www.icrny.org/au9-The_Romanian_Cultural_Institute.html

3. CONCLUSION

From the above we can see that all the Cultural Institutes have been mentioned are in common with promoting language teaching, promoting cultural exchange and integration, deepening mutual understanding, etc. As is said in a 2012 thematic think piece drafted by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda “culture as driver and enabler of sustainable development”.¹⁸ They are more focused on the dialogue and cooperation. Li Yuanchao, the vice President of China, mentioned in the Africa Confucius Institutes Conference on the 24th June, in the year 2014, “Confucius Institute is an important platform for Sino-foreign cultural exchanges and mutual learning”.¹⁹ The Cultural Institutes have been mentioned in this paper are all playing a role of the international community civilization messenger, they are bridges to connect the native countries and abroad, they are Culture Ambassadors who help the comprehension and cooperation among people and countries.

Besides, the British Council is committed against cultural infiltration; Alliance Française is committed to cultural diversity; Goethe-Institut tries to change the militant German image, and establish a colorful image of Germany; Instituto Cervantes tries to challenge the English cultural hegemony, and efforts to develop commercial value of Spanish, and to support their political and economic interests; The Romanian Cultural Institute dedicates to cultural diplomacy and international arts exchange; Confucius Institutes dedicates to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world.

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<https://en.unesco.org/post2015/sites/post2015/files/Think%20Piece%20Culture.pdf>

¹⁹ 李军、田小红, 《中国大学国际化的一个全球试验——孔子学院十年之路的模式、经验与政策前瞻》, 《中国高教研究》2015年第04期