

Critical Issues Confronting China Lecture Series featuring Naima Green-Riley – Pinyin and Paper Fans: China-Funded Education Programs in U.S. Schools, November 10, 2021

– All right. Perhaps we should begin. Welcome everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today for this week's installment of the critical Issues Confronting Contemporary China, seminar series. I am joined by one of the-- I am Michael Szonyi. I am the director of the Fairbanks Center for Chinese studies and one of the co-conveners of the series. I'm joined by Bill Overholt, my colleague and another co convener. And we are very glad to welcome you to this week's lecture by Naima Green-Riley. The Critical Issues series, as many of you will know, was founded originally by our dear colleague Esra Vogel. And we have tried since his death, now a year ago, to live up to the model and the ideals of the series that he created by bringing well informed analysis on pressing issues that involve China or that face China in the contemporary world. Let me, before I introduce our speaker today, make a brief plug for next week's session in the Critical Issue series, which is professor Scott Rozelle, a leading expert on poverty and poverty alleviation in China. He'll be speaking at this time a week from today. That is on, I wish I were better at math. That will be on November 17th. So, please join us for that. Today, I am very pleased to introduce someone I've known actually for many years, Naima Green-Riley. A Political Scientist and former US diplomat. She is a PhD candidate and Raymond Vernon fellow in the department of government here at Harvard, but she has actually already moved to New Jersey, where she will begin a position on the faculty of the Princeton Politics department and school of Public International Affairs next fall. She's also a non-resident fellow at the digital forensic research lab at the Atlantic council. She has, as contributor to "The China Questions 2" a new volume that Adele Karai, Jennifer Rudolph and I are co-editing, that will come out, we hope, in mid 2022. Naima's chapter is on China's global efforts at improving its international image and the implications for the US. A subject that I think she will touch on in her remarks today as well. Naima specializes in public diplomacy and the global information space. Her dissertation called, How States Win Friends and Influence People Overseas. Lays out a new theoretical framework for understanding the role of public diplomacy international relations, using case studies about both US and Chinese public policy. During her pre-academic career as the us diplomat, she ran public diplomacy operations for the US consulate in Alexandria in Egypt, during the Arab Spring, and then went on to serve as a consular officer at the US Consulate General in Guangzhou. She began her academic studies at Stanford, where she earned a BA in international relations and then an MPP from the Kennedy School where she was also a bill for Center, international and global affairs fellow. We've encountered one another in many, many sessions, mostly at the Kennedy School over the years. And I've always found her to be a really insightful commentator on all things China, but especially on China's public diplomacy. And so it is my great

pleasure to introduce her here. I neglected to say that our session is scheduled for an hour 15 minutes. Naima will speak for probably about 45 minutes, and then we'll have time for questions. Please post your questions in the Q&A, and then I will moderate a discussion once Naima finishes with her prepared remarks. So, please join me in welcoming, Naima Green-Riley.

- Thank you very much. That was a very kind introduction. I am going to do as I must and share my PowerPoint. So, I'll get that up on the screen. But as Michael, so kindly mentioned, I'm a scholar of public diplomacy. My research is actually located in a number of related fields. So, within the political science literature, I look at the domestic politics of international relations and public opinion. I think about how individuals envision politics through political psychology. And I focus on both US and Chinese foreign policy. And my work is also very much motivated by my previous career as a foreign service officer at the department of state. Where I performed public diplomacy. And so today I'm going to be talking about one particular type of public diplomacy that is done by China through its Confucius Institute and classroom program. And I think to start out, it's important to just ask the question, what is public diplomacy? Because it's not necessarily a very familiar term in everyday parlance. Practitioners use it quite a lot, and it is increasingly showing up in the academic literature of political science, whereas it's been around for long amount of time in fields, like diplomatic history and communications. Just like in traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy can be performed by any international actor. So, a representative of a country can do public diplomacy. A subnational actor can do public diplomacy, an international organization, or representative of that organization do public diplomacy as well. In my research, I tend to focus on public diplomacy by state governments. But once again, in the larger literature, this is a practice that can be done by a number of actors. And the primary difference between traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy is that public diplomacy is envisioned as communicating with and engaging with foreign publics with a whole of society, not just with top leaders or officials. So we often think of diplomacy more broadly, which traditional diplomacy as taking place between heads of states, officials, diplomats who go to summits or have negotiations or have one on one meetings with each other. But within public diplomacy, you see people reaching out to members of society, to students and university professors, to business elites and people who are heads of civil society organizations in different parts of the world. And so on the slide, you just see some pictures. The pictures will give you an idea of some different types of public diplomacy programming. So, one type of public diplomacy programming that's often pointed to is foreign broadcasting. Maybe the quintessential example of foreign broadcasting is the Voice of America Program, which has been around for many years. And many people think of that as sort of a classic public diplomacy program of the United States. But the pictures I have shows the logo for DW, which is a

German public broadcaster that is actually foreign facing in nature. There are also examples like the China global television network CGTN, which is the international arm of CCTV. Public diplomas can also involve exchange programs. So these would be sponsored trips by a government for a group of people in a different country. The full right is a great example of this, but many countries actually host exchange programs for members of other societies to come and understand their culture and their institutions and certain sectors more clearly. Cultural programs can also fit into public diplomacy. There are a number of different types of cultural programs that states often host. Some are one off events, some tend to be longer engagements where people are in some sort of a class. You'll see here a picture of the Alliance Francaise, which is a French language learning program that is funded by the French government, but many governments do this. The Institute of Cervantes, which is a Spanish public diplomacy program. The go to Institute that is funded by the German government, the British council. So, cultural programs seem to be another sort of core type of public diplomacy program. And as you can see from the slide and from the discussion, there are many different types of public diplomacy and many countries do this all over the world. So, I am generally interested in the practice of public diplomacy internationally, by different governments. But China, in particular, has in recent years really started to focus in on its public diplomacy, programming and outreach. According to my research, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs first began to seriously consider how to start doing public diplomacy, as specifically public diplomacy, in the early 2000s, so that's rather recent. There is a Chinese scholar at Renmin University named Wang Yu-wei, that writes that China really began to pay attention to the practice of public diplomacy after September 11th, 2001, when Chinese leaders were watching the United States suffer from this major terrorist attack and saw how anti-Americanism had such impact on US foreign policy and impact on US influence in different parts of the world. So, in September 2003, a Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs began hosting a lecture series. And it was an internal series that was focused on understanding more about what public diplomacy was and how it was performed by different actors all over the world. And it was primarily scholars that were coming in, who had focused on public diplomacy for many years, who were coming in speaking to officials at the MFA, that led to, in March 2004, the MFA creating a new division for public diplomacy in its department of information. And this was the real official start of a move toward using public diplomacy and seeing the term, public diplomacy appearing in Chinese official documents, in the PRC. In more recent years, it's been estimated that every year China spends about 10 billion on outreach to foreign publics, that's no small amount. And so I thought yesterday, I happened to come across a video that fits quite well into this talk. So I thought I would show it to you. And basically, what I'm gonna show you is a video from CGTN, China Global Television Network. The video will display a lot of different types specifically of Chinese public diplomacy in the United States. So,

you're going to see video footage from a Chinese Confucius classroom in the US. You'll also see a meeting on Zoom between the Chinese Ambassador to the US, Qin Gang. And some American youth who speak Chinese. You will be watching this clip from CGTN, which is itself, a public diplomacy broadcaster. And then in the video, you're gonna see some American youth, who are pretty advanced Mandarin speakers. Some of whom have competed in the Chinese bridge competition, which is a Mandarin language competition held in China every year. And another example of Chinese public diplomacy. So I'm gonna have to unshare my screen and reshare my screen in order to show you this video. So one second as I do that. Okay, and I'm sound so you can hear it as well. All right. So we can take that as, basically, an example of how Chinese broadcasters or Chinese public diplomacy implementers are thinking about the practice of public diplomacy internationally and the values that they wanna promote through public diplomacy internationally. Hopefully it also paints a picture of what people who are involved in these programs actually do, the committees they engage in and the ways that they engage with representatives of China. But today, I'm gonna talk specifically about, Confucius Institutes and Classrooms and Confucius Institutes are Language and Cultural Learning Centers. So, usually established at universities around the world. The first Chinese Confucius Institute was opened in South Korea in 2004. And remember, 2004 was the same year that that division for public diplomacy was open at the information department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since then, nearly 550 Confucius Institutes have been opened worldwide. And, within that over 500 Confucius Institutes, just over 100 of those institutes were opened inside of the United States. Now Confucius Institutes involve memoranda of understanding between the Chinese implementing organization and an institution, once again, usually university. And there's almost always a partner Chinese university that's affiliated with the particular Confucius Institute that's opening as well. Grants for these programs can be in the six figure range. And until 2019, an office in the Chinese government called, The Hanban, was responsible for overseeing Confucius Institutes. And basically this office was more greatly responsible for overseas Mandarin education, broadly written. It had affiliations to both the ministry of education and other foreign facing institutions within the Chinese government. In 2019, management for Confucius Institutes is actually transferred to another entity called, The Chinese International Education Foundation, which is described by the website as a non-governmental education foundation. Now, 2019 was a year of quite a bit of political scrutiny of these institutions, especially within the US and in the West. And so it is likely due to that scrutiny that, that change is made because now, of course, it is presented as a program that is not government funded directly, but instead administered by this non-governmental educational foundation. Though, of course, many of the educational institutions that are related to these Confucius Institutes still have strong ties to the Chinese government. I'll talk more about the political scrutiny as well, but before I do, I wanna make sure that I give them a more

granular explanation of what Confucius Institutes are and what they do. So once these institutes are established, they have the opportunity to open up Confucius classrooms, which offer programming for primary and secondary school or K through 12 students. And in both Confucius Institutes and in Confucius classroom programs, the primary focus is for students to learn Mandarin. But in addition to that, they have the opportunity to do arts and crafts. They can learn to make dumplings. They can take classes in Tai Chi, they get very broad exposure to Chinese culture. It is worth talking in some depth about the content of the curricula of these classrooms, which is avowedly apolitical. And by that, I mean that the lessons tend to focus very much on culture, on history, on ancient philosophers, old art forms. In many of the lower level classes, that sort of predominate these institutes, the students are not speaking at that advanced level of Mandarin that you heard in the video, but rather learning their ABCs, and one, two threes. And so people are learning how to count, how to explain who different family members are in relationship to them, how to introduce themselves and talk about their academic and extracurricular interests. And there's a real limiting of the curricula to those areas, in addition to Chinese culture. Many other researchers, including a group of prominence China scholars that were convened by the Stanford's Hoover institution, have reviewed the textbooks and the curricula of Confucius Institutes that Hoover Institution reported no overt political content. And in fact, there's been anecdotal evidence that teachers are encouraged to avoid political topics in these classrooms. So sometimes people refer to the three Ts being, Tibet, Taiwan and Tiananmen, and they're being sort of a sense that the teachers are not to stray into the political arena during their classes. And so for the most part, instructors eschew entrees into touchy subjects like these, in the classes. And instead, really stick pretty strongly to talking about culture. Well, in the US, a number of congressional representatives and political elites have been very concerned, about these programs and their impact on youth attitudes. And here are some quotes from people that you may have heard of. In 2018, a columnist at the Washington Post, Josh Rogin wrote that the more important challenge is the threat that these institutes pose to the ability of the next generation of American leaders to learn, think, and speak about the realities in China and the true nature of the Communist Party regime. In that op-ed, he quoted Senator Marco Rubio by saying, "Their goal is to exploit America's academic freedom to instill in the minds of future leaders, a pro-China viewpoint. It's smart, it's a long term, patient approach." And so, in reaction to these concerns, there have been a number of moves in recent years to restrict the activities of Confucius Institutes and classrooms in the United States. In 2019, the National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA, included a clause that said that, universities could not simultaneously receive funding from the defense department and the Chinese government for their language programs. And so, universities who were receiving both, and there were a large number who were, had to make a choice at that point. And many

chose to close down their Confucius Institutes, because they didn't want to cut off the possibility of getting defense department funding for these programs then, or in the future. In 2020, the Trump administration made a decision to designate the Confucius Institute US Center, which is a Washington DC based organization that, that administration saw as a coordinator for all Confucius Institutes in the United States, though, the center denies that. They declared this center a foreign mission of the people's Republic of China. And in an announcement about the decision, the state department called the center and entity advancing Beijing's global propaganda and malign influence campaign on US campuses and K through 12 classrooms. So, this foreign mission designation meant that the Institute would be treated as a Chinese diplomatic mission, kind of like an embassy or consulate, rather than a foreign cultural center. And that meant that it had to adhere to stringent requirements for reporting to the US government about its staff, about its recruitment, about its funding, about its activities, staff is limited. The Trump administration is simultaneously or not exactly at the same time, during the same year had also decided to designate a number of state sponsored broadcasted from China as foreign missions as well, which greatly limited their capacity to be able to do reporting in the United States. And so, as a result of actions like these, Confucius Institutes have been closing since 2014, but really quite rapidly in the past three years or so. 89 of the 103 Confucius Institutes that have been open to the United States, have been shut down. As of this September, the National Association of Scholars, has reported that only 36 Confucius Institutes remain open in the United States. And the National Association of Scholars, has been very keenly tracking closings across the country since they began. Well, as you saw, many of the concerns that have been expressed about Confucius programming had to do with the potential of ideological effects on American youth. So, for my own academic research, I wanted to try and determine the effects of these Confucius public diplomacy programs. And in order to do that, like most researchers, I did field work during my doctoral studies, and I will just say this, I know that field work experiences vary, but I have to say that my field work took me to perhaps one of these zaniest places I have ever found myself in. And that place was, the US high school. I found this to be a new and exciting experience to witness high school as now a grown adult. But I wanted to test the effects of Confucius programming in comparison to other types of global education programming in US schools. At its root, there is a fundamental puzzle about the use of public diplomacy because states implement public diplomacy out of inception that primping their international image, internationally, will help them to withstand negative impressions due to unpopular policies or leadership choices. But at the same time it's not really clear that such a strategy should work. So, the puzzle that motivated my own research was, does public diplomacy, as performed by China through these Confucius classrooms, affect the beliefs and or the behaviors of student participants in a way that actually benefits China? Now, before moving forward, it's important to understand what

these programs aim to do from the Chinese point of view. So many of the Chinese intellectuals that I've spoken with have said that public diplomacy should improve Chinese soft power bronchially, in Mandarin. And the concept of Soft Power is one that is often tied to public diplomacy. Soft Power is a term that was coined in the late 1980s, early 1990s by a Harvard professor, Joe Nye. And the basic idea is that countries can use attraction to get what they want internationally. And so improving Soft power is one main goal of Chinese public diplomacy. And it's often linked to public diplomacy done by many states. Now, those who are listening to the video, that I showed you earlier, may have heard the Chinese ambassador use three adjectives to describe how he hoped learning about China would affect American attitudes. So, he hoped that they would become more... Or to translate, objective, comprehensive and authentic. So, it's interesting. It's not the first time I've heard those words. This is something that I heard in my interviews as well when I was working on this project. The idea that the point of Chinese public diplomacy is to give foreign publics a clear objective understanding of China is one that is repeated often by policy makers and public policy practitioners in China. And so, we can keep these goals in mind as we evaluate the effects of Chinese public diplomacy in the United States. So I set out to understand how students in US high schools, that had Confucius classrooms reacted to the programs throughout the 2019,2020 school year. And I'm gonna tell you a little bit about the two schools that I spent the year studying. But, because I do have to protect the privacy of those schools, I've created pseudonyms for them, fake names for them. However, I can say a little bit about the schools. Both schools had a communis classroom. When I was reaching out to schools, I was looking for schools that were different from each other, not two schools that were basically the same. And so, these schools differed along several dimensions, first diversity of the student body and surrounding area. Second, the politics, the local politics of the areas. So, while Clover Springs High School was located in a more wealthy suburban region in the Mid-Atlantic and offered, you know, Spanish and French, in addition to Chinese. Silver Brook High School was located in the south. It was a much more mixed class neighborhood. It was also much more diverse than the area where Clover Springs was located. And the student body was also much more diverse, both in terms of its Asian American student population, but also in terms of its larger ethnic minority population. And actually that school also was located in a more conservative area within the school, offered more foreign language options. In the end, I'll say I did a number of different types of analyses on this data. And in my data, I basically found very similar trends for the two schools in question. And so, that was heartening just from the standpoint that it didn't seem like one particular type of school was reacting in one way, and another was reacting in another way. And so for my research, for my study of Confucius classrooms and global education programs, I focused on several main sources of data. The first source of data was a set of surveys that I did, in these schools. And so in the schools, basically

I did three waves of a survey, one at the beginning of the school year in 2019s, one at the end of the fall semester in December, 2019. And then one at the end of the school year in May, 2020. At the same time, I did parallel nationwide surveys online that were done for me by a professional survey company called Dynata, used to be called SSI. And these surveys were of young people aged 12 to 18. So meant to mirror the students who were at the schools. But then I thought, most of the scholarship that I read on public opinion and foreign policy tends to focus on the ways that adults think about these issues. And so I wasn't necessarily sure how to interpret, you know, thoughts about international affairs from young people. So I thought it'd be useful to also do surveys at the same time of adults. And during the both, the first and the third survey, I actually had Dynata capture small samples of adults just answering the same questions so I could get some sort of an idea of how the ideas that were being expressed by the track with an older population of people. In addition to that, I was able to engage in ethnographic classroom observations at both schools. I did interviews with a range of different individuals at both schools, and I've, throughout my research, been able to do the public diplomacy interviews with practitioners and experts who are both American and Chinese and in Europe as well. Just to better understand public diplomacy and to put these findings in context. Now, ideally in order to do a study like this, and most social scientists, especially those who do quantitative research, would suggest that I randomize which students were treated and which students were not. So basically, to translate that, they would say that you should randomize which students at the schools took Chinese and which students did not. And that would mean that every student would have an equal chance of taking Chinese classes and you wouldn't have other potential variables that made certain students more interested in Chinese than other students. And that is a great suggestion that works sometimes in research. It did not work with the school districts that I was speaking to. I was not able to dictate which students were assigned to certain language classes. And so, instead I use a technique called, difference in difference regression, in order to chart changes and attitudes throughout the school year for different groups of students in the school, students who were in these classes and students who were not. And then I used some other types of analyses, like different means estimations to get an idea of what was happening at these schools. And so overall, I ended up doing two different types of analyses, and I did those two different types of analyses in order to get at the issue of selection, once again, into these classroom. So, I looked at the views of students of China over the course of the school year. And I compared students who were taking Chinese to students who were not taking Chinese. But then, there's a potential problem because we might expect that the views toward China of a student who's taken an interest in Chinese, would not necessarily be likely to move in the same way as infused toward China with a student who selected into a different form language class. As I mentioned, this is an issue of selection. I haven't randomized these students into different



classrooms, but rather just observed what is happening in the classroom. So I did a second set of an analyses. And in this set of analyses, I looked at a broader spectrum of how education affects different groups of students. And so, in this case, I looked at views toward a country that was relevant to the students course of study. For French language students, I looked at their views towards France, for Spanish language students, I looked at their views toward Mexico, for Russian language students, I looked at their views toward Russia. And then for Chinese language students, I looked at their views for China. And with that framing, all of the students in the sample had selected into their language classes. So at least you had sort of an equal footing from that standpoint. For the empiricists who are here, for the people who particularly do, quantitative empirical work, as opposed to qualitative empirical work. All my difference in differences, regressions incorporated standard features like demographic controls, cluster standard errors. I cluster the students according to the classrooms that they were in. So I would consider French one versus Spanish two versus Spanish three students, different clusters of students. And there were some effects that the unexpected COVID pandemic had on my research, as well, as it did on everyone's research and everyone's lives during this school year. So of course, no one expected that this pandemic was going to take over the world during this year. And one thing that that led to was school closures or all the schools going virtual. So both the schools in my sample ended up going virtual, before my third survey was administered. That ended up making it much, much more difficult to reach students, because we were doing these surveys and publicizing these surveys at the schools in person. So, in my third sample, only 11% of the initial number of students took the survey. So, I think there were 123 people who took the third survey. Whereas there were over 1100 people who took the first survey. So it was a substantial decrease in the number of students who took the survey. But beyond sample size, you might envision that a pandemic like this one and what happened afterwards could have affected the views of China, of these students, given that there was a heavy political focus on China by president Trump, by other political elites, using language that vilified China and that particularly called out China, Chinese government, certain Chinese cities. And therefore, I wondered, well, I assume that all of that activity would also affect student views of China in addition to whatever they were experiencing at school and perhaps even more so since school was virtual. And so in order to deal with that fact, the analyses that I'm going to show you in my presentation and that I focused on in my research are really narrowed down to changes between the first two surveys that were administered in September and December 2019, because those surveys wrapped up before public reports of the pandemic had emerged. And so we get around that issue of the pandemic potentially being a confounder or an event that skewed results later on. I will show you a limited number of results from the third wave of surveys for comparison, or to add color or nuance or depth to my argument. But, what's interesting is that we actually can see some

really interesting trends just from looking at the fall semester and what happened there at these schools. And so now I'm going to move on to results and the first results that I'm gonna show you are sort of main results. This is going to be a plot of the favorability of views toward China over the course of the school year. So this is a plot of how favorably or unfavorably students viewed China over the course of the year. I took a survey that asked how favorable or unfavorably do you view China? And because these were young students, I included in parenthesis, how favorably good or unfavorably bad do you view China over the course of the school year? And then I translated those survey responses into numerical likert scale scores, which is why I can plot them here on these axis. But basically, what we see here is that for all of my groups in the sample, over the course of the entire school year, there was a decrease in the favorability of views toward China. So the top line in the plot shows you, there's a top dark, red solid line, students who were in Confucius classrooms at these schools. They, over the course of the fall semester, had a decrease in how favorably they viewed China over the course of school year. And then they continued to have a decrease in the spring that was actually lesser in magnitude. The second line shows you students who were at the two schools, but were not studying Chinese and Confucius classrooms, they were studying other foreign languages or they weren't in a foreign language class that year. They also had a negative trend in the way that they view China over the course of the school year. That was mainly focused actually on the first semester. The third line is almost even. It's just, I think it's just slightly negative in its trend and that is the online sample of youth. And so interestingly there, you see a real decrease over time, but mostly concentrated in the fall to spring, as you might expect. And then I only surveyed adults in the first and third semester or third survey. I would've done the second survey, but I didn't have the funding to do that many surveys. And so all we can tell is that there was a negative trend over time for adults and adults had the least favorable views of China over the entire course of the project. When you look at some of my regression analysis, and I haven't gone through the trouble of showing you complex regression tables in this presentation, but I have in my own research done them. There are some advantages to that. So this shows you differences in means over time, but means don't incorporate controls for things like different demographics. And they also don't include those clustered standard errors. What's interesting is that the differences in differences regressions were not significant. Meaning that, in fact, the decrease in trend was not really very different for the students who were in the Confucius classrooms and the ones who were not. There was no real difference in how students were reacting to China over the course of the school year, regardless of whether they were in Confucius classrooms or not. That being said, one thing that you can't necessarily tell from this plot, but that is true is that there is a statistically significant decrease in the favorability of views towards China over the course of the fall semester. So, from fall, beginning of fall to end of fall, the

difference in scores is statistically significant and it is negative. So that means that students at the schools broadly read, exhibited a decrease in favorability of China over the course of the fall semester. Now, let's take a look at changes in knowledge over just the fall semester. So, this is a different kind of a plot. And in this plot, I am not showing you what happened in the spring. We're only focusing on the fall because I think this is really interesting. So, these are differences in mean estimates for the period between surveys one and survey two. And anytime you see a dot in whiskers indicator, that is to the right of the vertical line, that means that there was an increase in knowledge. Anytime you see a dot in whiskers indicator, that is to the left of the line, that means that there was not learning, but actually a decrease in scores. Or I don't know if you wanna say a decrease in learning, but a performing less well by the end of the semester. And so, what we see here is that students who were inside of Confucius classrooms, became more knowledgeable about China. They scored better on their second quizzes about China than they did on their first. That's the students who are in the top of this graph who have the dark red line. For the lighter red line, students who were in other language classes, they did not exhibit the same learning about China. They scored lower on quiz questions about China in the second survey than they did in the first survey. For that gray line, online youth also scored worse. And in fact, even worse on their second quiz in comparison to their first quiz about China. And then this fourth blue line is slightly different. So we're gonna go back to that group of students who is at the schools, but is studying a different set of languages. So they could be studying Spanish, French, or Russian, and their knowledge about language relevant countries, was going in a negative direction over the course of the semester. So, they did not exhibit the same learning about those countries that students in the Chinese computer classrooms learned that exhibited about China over the course of that school year. So we know, or it's specifically that fall semester. So we know that students who were in Confucius classrooms had their China relevant knowledge going in an increasing direction, but the favorability of their views toward China was decreasing over the fall semester. Now, let's take a second to understand what was going on inside of these classrooms. It's time for a story because sometimes the numbers can only tell you so much. So, one day I was sitting in on a Chinese class at Silver Brook High School, and the teacher told the students, they were going to be making Chinese paper fans, hence the name of this talk pinging and paper fans. So, the teacher told the students I'd like you to use calligraphy to decorate your fans. And in order to show students different examples of Chinese calligraphy, the teacher put a set of pictures of historical Chinese people on the projector. And next to each picture was an example of that person's penmanship. So, one student, in the class, got very excited about this activity and the student said which means teacher, I wanna see my name in calligraphy, which one should I use? Because I can't wait to get started, basically. And the teacher decided to demonstrate by choosing

a picture of one of the men on the screen. So she pointed to one picture and said, "Who's this?" And the student didn't seem to know. So the teacher gave her a hint. She said, "Chairman." And suddenly the student yells. "Male of course." And then the girl paused for a minute and she said, "Wait a minute. That's communist." And in her voice were a mix of contemplation and condemnation, this mix of feelings. So she showed excitement about Chinese culture, about the activity that they were doing. But once she started to see any hint of talking about politics, and this was about as political as you're gonna get in a Chinese Confucius classroom, because as I said, teachers avoid real political topics. The student got very hesitant and that mix of emotions seemed ever present in the students who were in the Confucius classrooms. I also saw a similar mix of emotions in the way that students answered open ended responses about China in the third wave of the survey. So I just asked the question on the third wave of the survey about how students felt about China. Just tell me and tell me what you like or tell me what you dislike, and I just left it open. They could write as much or as little as they wanted. Well, here are some open-end responses. And I know this is a lot of text. I'm gonna leave it on the screen for a while. And I'm also going to help you out by doing some highlightings. These are quotes from two students at the two different schools talking about China. And both of these students are students who are in Confucius classrooms. As you can see in both of the quotes, you have a number of negative evaluations about the Chinese government. You see mention of events related to COVID-19, talking about treatment of Uygheras in China, concerned about Chinese policies. So you see some real negative thoughts. You also see a number of positive evaluations. You see mentioning that China's a beautiful place, that they are enamored with the people or the culture. They enjoy the food, they watch Chinese dramas. They're like Chinese innovation. So you see this real positive and negative mix in these quotes that sort of helps you to envision the way that students who are in the Confucius classrooms, were really thinking about China. And what this shows is that students held a number of positive and negative evaluations about the country in their minds at the same time. So, what does all of this mean? Well, one outcome of my research seems to point to the fact that learning Chinese and getting exposure to Chinese culture in Confucius classrooms was producing students that were gaining pretty complex views of China. They were informed about China. They could articulate a lot about what exactly was positive and what they thought was negative about China. And they were able to do that at greater rates than were students who were not in the Confucius classrooms at the schools who tended to actually present more one-sided views of China when asked about China on surveys. But despite the mix of views, the negative evaluations clearly held weight for the students who were in the Confucius classrooms, because when using a cut and dry measure of favorability to rate China over the course of the school year on surveys, students at these schools did not demonstrate the increasing pro-China attitudes that Josh Rogin and Marco Rubio have warned about. Instead, students who were in these

classrooms expressed that China was less favorable as the school year progressed, just as their peers did. Now, there are many aspects of the contemporary debate on Chinese Confucius classrooms that this project hasn't addressed, right? So, there are questions of academic freedom, institutional influence, administrative practices. Nevertheless, on the question of ideology, the findings for my project, they indicate to me that political claims about, the potential ideological effects of these programs may be overblown. So, I'm gonna stop here, but I very much look forward to your questions and engaging with you on this topic right there.

- Thank you so much, Naima, for just a fascinating discussion about something that we hear a lot about in the US China relations space, but actually know very little about what it actually means in practice. Let me just start. So, I have a couple of questions, but let me just begin by congratulating you and saying how much I appreciate the way you handled, in such a matter of fact way, the disruption that the pandemic caused to your research. As you said, we've all been profoundly affected. And our research is only, those of us who are researchers, as researchers working on China, by and large, even those of us who have been most badly affected, have nothing to complain about in relation to the people who have really suffered from the pandemic. But I think it was a really refreshing way you handled that. This happened, I dealt with it and I really appreciated that. So, I wanna ask you to kind of wear two hats in responding to my question. We tend to focus in this seminar on the implications of a particular phenomenon for US policy, but I'm gonna ask you both to be a scholar of public diplomacy and to think about the implications for China, for China policy that is policy in China. So would you say, as an analyst of public diplomacy, that what this indicates is that the Confucius classrooms are a failure? That is to say that they do not meet their objectives. So, leaving entirely aside their effects on the whole American perspective, does your research suggest that the Confucius classrooms fail as public diplomacy? And then the second part of the question is, if in some extraordinarily, almost unconceivable world, the leadership in the ministry of education, or in the Hanban asked for your advice, what should China do about this situation? What's the policy response that you would recommend in dealing with the clearly complex situation that you're facing? So, let's start with that. And I see Bill has a question to follow up, but over to you first time, Naima, thank you.

- Sure, so on that first question, one thing to keep in mind is that the United States is one of many countries in which China is doing this work. And so, I have looked at responses to Confucius classroom programming in the United States. And of course the United States is one of the places where there's been the most vigorous debate and the highest level of concern, I would say about this type of programming and thus quite a response to it. I think that what was happening in the Confucius classrooms is that students were learning about China in

their schools. They were thinking about China outside of their classes, because when you study a language, you tend to be interested when you hear news about the language. And when they went and looked at news in the outer setting, they were reading a lot of negative news, but they already had that focus on China from before. That might not be the case in other countries where that heavy political focus on China is not necessarily there and having that impact. So, if I asked the same open end in a country where students were getting a lot of positive impact about-- Or a lot of positive input about Chinese culture, and then they were paying attention to China, but they didn't hear these things in the news sphere. I don't know necessarily that they would have the mixed views, because I don't know where they would come from. Students were mentioning in their open ends, things that they weren't learning about in classes, right? And so they were getting them from the news stream. So it depends on what the alternative to classrooms is in the country where the student is studying to some extent, I think. Are they a failure? Well, the criteria that was presented in the criteria that I sort of laid out was two-fold, right? So Soft Power, and then this comprehensive objective understanding of China. Soft Power tends to be more attractiveness. And so usually measures like Soft Power tend to rely on things like favorability. So probably not creating more Soft Power for China and the particular schools that I studied. Were students views of China becoming more comprehensive? Yes, they were becoming much more comprehensive. Were they're becoming more objective? Eye of the beholder, I think. I think a lot of people would say that, yeah, it was objective. They were able to take input from one side that said, that China was really interesting and sort of absorb that. And then also take this input from the other side that said China was really problematic and they were absorbing both. I think that for Chinese policy makers, when they say objective, they have a sense that criticism of China is blatantly not objective. And that the media in the United States is not objective. And so from that point of view, probably they would not be satisfied with the comprehensive viewpoints that were being developed by these students. What is the way forward? Well, I mean, I think that it's important for all public diplomacy practitioners to be wide eyed and aware of the actual impacts of their programming, to be realistic about what's possible with their programming. And so certainly I've seen reactions to sort of like the increasingly negative rhetoric just within the US public and some other places to closures of Confucius Institutes in the US. But also Sweden closed all of its Confucius Institutes, just the scale's a lot smaller because Sweden had about five, whereas the US had a hundred. And there are definitely concerns there. I'm interested in seeing how policy makers react, because I think sometimes, when many practitioners talk about public diplomacy and this is not just Chinese practitioners, but a number of public diploma practitioners, sometimes that awareness of the possibilities, but also the limitations of what is possible through public diplomacy are not quite so developed or they're not expressed in a very nuanced way. And so I think that's

very important.

- Thanks, I'm gonna ask Bill for you just to hold on for one second, because my colleague, our colleague, Nora Dylan, also a co-convenor of this asks a question that's quite related to the one I just asked. What tools for public diplomacy do you think are most effective? The educational programs you talk about, media, popular cultural, academic exchanges, et cetera. So I guess you could ask this one, you would answer this one question as a China question, as a US question, or as a general question, I think we'd be interested in all of them actually.

- Right, and here's another thing that I am interested in, as a scholar of public diplomacy. So, I once did public diplomacy and I was interested in trying to-- So I talked about nuance and understanding sort of the expectations for public diplomacy. I think that another way of thinking about expectations for public diplomacy is really thinking about, what different types of programs are able to do because of the audiences that they're likely to pull in, right? And so, with a broadcaster, with someone who is broadcasting around the world, there often is not any type of face to face interaction. And so, a lot of times when we think about the impacts of human contact with things like intergroup contact theory from politic science literature, what the effects of interacting with people actually are. Is it possible to actually have this impact on people that is personal in nature when you don't ever see them? I don't know about that. Thinking about exchange programs. Now you have the personal capacity, but a much smaller group of people that you can reach because you're spending thousands of dollars getting them across the sea to come and visit you. And so I actually think that different types of public diplomacy can be effective for different purposes. And another hope that I have, in doing this type of research, is to get us as people who are interested in public diplomacy, to get practitioners to think really carefully about being more specific, about what different programs that are designed in different ways and have constraints, but also opportunities can do. And so, that's my interest it's less about, okay, well just throw all your money into this one type, but really think about who you're involving in these programs and how that will affect things.

- Thanks very much, Naima. I haven't looked at the list of attendees. I don't know who's here, but if there's anyone here from DC, let me just jump in and say, bring the fold right back. That's what Naima's really saying, right? That's the important takeaway. Bill, over to you?

- My question is similar, but from a US point of view. So, we look at these Confucius Institutes and on the one hand you have Josh Rogin saying, they're ideological indoctrination. And on the other, you have some high school principal who doesn't have any money to teach Chinese

and really would like the funding of, how do we get an objective view into public policy? Would it help if the state department, for instance, announced a set of criteria? Programs are okay if they're just language or just language and no political content, and then people like the Hoover Institution and yourselves could be cited as evidence. So one way or, in this case, the other, how do we use this to refine the American public debate and get out an atmosphere of McCarthyism?

- So I was surprised in my research to find that, for example, there were lists of where Confucius Institutes were, in the United States. I could never come up with a list in of all of the Confucius classrooms in the United States from others. And so really worked to try and compile information on where these Confucius classrooms were existing. Because there are many more, compared to the number of a hundred institutes, many more classrooms, because each institute could have like several, five, 20 classrooms that are affiliated with these institutes. So one thing is that the US is a very open society. We are not-- Some countries are very, they're very closed. And so it's harder for foreign actors to come into to implement programs without like a wide amount of sort of knowledge and tracking by the institutional government. The us is not that way. And so, I am not sure that US policy makers really have a clear idea of where these Confucius classrooms are. And I think that that actually is, I think that's kind of interesting. I mean, like I think it would be useful to know like, oh, is this a program that's more popular in this place or this place and what type of school is doing this type of programming? I think that's actually something that's useful if you're gonna make policy about them. Another thing I've notice is that, so each institute at least has to set up a memorandum of understanding previously with the Hanban, now with this foundation that basically says, "These are the terms of our agreement and that regulates everyday things like sending teachers from China to be contracted, to work at the centers or how much funding you're gonna receive or what the materials are and when they come and things like that. But, MOUs are individualized and different from institution to institution. So you might have one institution, where the folks who are working on setting up this Confucius Institute are quite keen on or are quite tuned in to the contemporary debate about the potential harms of maybe having a center where there's not a focus on academic freedom or there's not a real concern to allow just anyone to be able to teach or to speak at an institute, and then you might have another school, where people don't actually have a lot of exposure to China who are running the institutions. Avery Goldstein, who is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, had what I thought was a really great idea that I saw once he wrote, he thought it'd be a great idea if there were a standardized MOU that were required and circulated for these types of agreements, moving forward. Something that was really thought about from the standpoint of the major concerns of potentially having one of these institutes on campus, by people who had a lot of institutional



knowledge who had a lot of knowledge of China. And that could be one way of really trying to prevent just sort of ignorance or a lack of exposure or a lack of consideration of potential issues getting in the way of a more permissive MOU that sort of led into concerns about hiring practices or concerns about who could speak on campus or concerns about even what could happen in the classrooms. So I think that that is something that policy makers could do, as well in order to think about this. I mean, it seems like neither of those are the way that we've gone and instead the solution is, well, if they don't exist, then we don't about them anymore because that has been the way that we've gone now, 89 have been closed, that's a huge percentage of the number that have been open in the US.

- Thank you, we've got about five minutes left and some really good questions are coming in. So I'm gonna ask two or three questions all in a row and let you respond to them as you will. The first question, from an anonymous attendee, is a kind of basic question, but actually hugely important. It has to do with the scale of this issue. What do we know about, how many students are learning Mandarin in the US? And to that, I would add the qualification, do we know how many students are learning Mandarin in the US, in Confucius classrooms and outside of Confucius classrooms? So, some discussion of the scale of the, of the question would be great. Jared Mazanti asks a very interesting question. And by the way, all these questioners begin by saying, "Thank you for a fascinating talk." But I'm just gonna save time by not repeating that. So, from Jared Mazanti, high school students have, in theory, already been exposed to some level of American history politics. Have you or do you plan to examine how the situation may differ for younger students, who may not have preconceptions about communism? You showed in your clip the four or five year olds learning, I guess, learning to sing in Chinese or whatever they were doing. This is gonna be different for them. And then let me just ask a third question from an anonymous attendee, which is the most specific of these questions. The attendee is quite impressed by the comments of the students, who recognize the good and the bad. The Confucius Institute classrooms focus on the positive representations of China. What have you found out about this question? Does the interest in studying Chinese and Chinese culture have an effect on students' interest in paying more attention to reports about China in US media and exploring more about China on their own? Does the study in Confucius classrooms actually help in directly the students develop more nuanced, critical perspectives, thus becoming more curious and informed citizens? A terrific question. I'll give you the floor for the last few minutes to discuss any or all of them.

- Sure, and I'll do my best to stick to two minutes to answer. In terms of the number of Mandarin language learners, part of this actually goes back to what I was saying previously, not great tracking on our part, just in terms of how many Confucius classrooms there are, how many Confucius Institutes, a little clearer. So the statistics

that I've seen on Mandarin language learners in the US have actually come from Chinese government sources. And I can see why those sources might be actually much more interested in the number of Mandarin language learners in the US, because of course, this is something that is a source of pride for China. And so, I saw some reports a few years ago from sources like CGTN or Shinhwa that the range was in the 400,000 range. I don't know how they would get that number. And beyond that, I will say this. So during the Obama administration, there was a real sense that language learning was important. There was this hundred thousand strong initiative, where we were trying to increase the number of exchanges between Chinese and American students going to the other country, not something that we see in the current environment, both because of the pandemic, but also because of the shift in policy-

- Can I just interrupt for one sec? I just checked and that their website is now advice on how to get out of gambling addiction. The one million strong organizations website.

- Yeah. It doesn't-

- I'm sorry. I couldn't resist.

- That initiative is a thing of the past. So, there was this huge push and I once heard a factor that we wanted to get a million Chinese language learners in the United States. And I think that that estimate was never reached. In terms of younger kids learning about China, I think, what I found is there was a range of different students. So like a elder high schooler to the youngest in our sample that were actually like advanced middle schoolers, seemed to pick up on cues in different ways. So it was a lot less nuanced. So like they wouldn't mention all those particular policies that one of the quotes mentioned. But they would just get the sense that people felt negatively towards China. And that still could have an effect on how they're understanding China in the world. And I'll just say yes to the third question. I do think that studying Chinese language made people pay more attention to China in all aspects of their life, and therefore pay more attention to the news about China as well.

- Great. Thank you, thank you so much. We have a last question coming in from Terry Lautz, an old friend of the Fairbank Center. I won't actually invite you to answer the question, but it's a great question. And I will just raise it for the sake of the audience. Terry asks, "To what extent is Taiwan moving into the gap left by the closure of so many Confucius Institutes and classrooms in the US? And what are the implications of this?" I don't think, Naima, that's something you've worked on, but certainly a fascinating and important question for us to think about. Do you wanna comment on it or?

- I will say two things. First of all, Terry has been a great mentor.

I am a public intellectual fellow with the national committee on US channel relations, and he is an extremely supportive advisor of that program. So thanks to your question, Terry. I do think that there is probably interest from the Chinese side in filling this gap, and I've heard some policy proposals in op-eds and the like that that's something that should be pursued.

- Great. All right. We had better stopped there. We're we're already a little bit past time. Naima, thank you so much for a really stimulating and fascinating and important presentation on an issue that as I said, we hear a lot about, but we get a lot more heat than light. So thank you for sharing light. Congratulations on your new position at Princeton. I would say we are sorry to lose you at Harvard, but I'm fairly confident that we will keep in touch and that you will be back and both online. And when that's possible in person, you're always welcome here at the Fairbank Center. Thank you all very much for joining us today. Have a pleasant afternoon or morning wherever you are. And we look forward to seeing you at future Fairbank Center events. Thank you very much. I do have another meeting to go to, but that was fabulous. I'll just leave it there.

- Thank you. Thanks so much.