

## Analysis of the Closing Confucius Institute in the United States

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### Abstract

*This study was made to analyze and find out the reasons for the closure of the Confucius Institute in the United States. The theories used in this research include Foreign Policy and Policy Making with the Iron Triangle concept. The concept discusses three institutions, each of which has a significant role in determining the process of making American foreign policy. The institution consists of the Bureaucracy, Congress and Interest Groups. The method used in this research is qualitative research with a descriptive analysis type. The results and discussion also explained why America closed the Confucius Institutes because of concerns over foreign influences operating within its academic institutions.*

### Keywords

United States; China; confucius institute; foreign policy; iron triangle



## I. Introduction

Currently, many countries in the world are competing to increase the influence of their country's position in the international sphere through soft power. Cultural diplomacy is one part of public diplomacy which, in practice, is carried out by a country to promote and protect its national interests. As for several aspects included in the cultural diplomacy activities, namely language, art and information (KBRI Wellington, 2021).

As one of the countries that have risen from adversity, China is now increasingly ambitious in enhancing and expanding its cultural diplomacy worldwide. Based on the described above, culture is considered a political tool to achieve a country's national interest. Therefore, China, in this case, began to make efforts through the Confucius Institute to promote its cultural influence.

The Confucius Institute is a non-profit public institution in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of China and was founded in 2004. The institution is established under the umbrella of the Hanban (International Chinese Language Council), which aims to promote the language, culture and all aspects of knowledge about China in the world. international and facilitate cultural exchange (Jan Servaes, 2014).

All Confucius Institute institutions spread throughout the world are under the authority of Hanban and consist of 12 Ministries and commissions by the central government of China (Hartig, 2018). However, the Ministry of Education has primary responsibility among the 12 Ministries.

The Confucius Institute cooperates with foreign educational institutions worldwide, including schools and universities. In 2004, the Confucius Institute was first opened in Seoul, South Korea, followed by the University of Maryland as the host for the first Confucius Institute in the United States the following year.

Based on The Global Americans, citing the Brookings page, there are currently more than 500 Confucius Institutes (CI) spread worldwide (Scott B. Macdonald, 2022). Institutions funded by the Chinese government also experience an increase every year.

In this case, China is considered successful in promoting its language and culture through the Confucius Institute in the international arena. It can be seen from the spread and development is so fast. However, in recent years, China has experienced considerable difficulties in carrying out its efforts.

The Confucius Institute has now lost its presence in the United States. This institution received much criticism related to its activities operating within American educational institutions and universities, so in August 2020, the United States Department of State designated the Confucius Institute as one of China's foreign missions, which was also considered a propaganda tool of the Chinese Communist Party's ideology. As a result, several universities in the United States have closed the Confucius Institutes because of alleged foreign influence.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to identify and analyze the closure of the Confucius Institute in the United States. Therefore, the problem formulation is "What is the reason for the United States to stop the Confucius Institute program in educational institutions and universities other than because of foreign influence?"

## **II. Review of Literature**

In conducting research, it takes a theory and concept as the first step to start a research. Besides that, using theories and concepts can facilitate researchers in answering problems theoretically and interpreting a phenomenon and social phenomena.

To answer the problems described previously, researchers will use foreign policy theory to see and analyze the primary considerations of the United States' policy toward the Confucius Institute which is under the rule of the Chinese government.

### **2.1 Foreign Policy**

According to its understanding, foreign policy is an action or idea issued by a country as a policy maker (decision maker) which aims to overcome a problem and make a change in politics, attitudes, and actions towards other countries with a specific purpose (Holsti, 1983). Foreign policy, in this case, prioritizes how a country's efforts to achieve everything stated in its policies.

Foreign policy must cover social and ideological values, domestic and international political needs, actual events, capabilities, threat levels, time elements, unforeseen consequences or impacts and costs for the action (Mas'oed, 1990). Human Resources (HR) is the most important component in a company or organization to run the business it does. Organization must have a goal to be achieved by the organizational members (Niati et al., 2021). Development is a change towards improvement. Changes towards improvement require the mobilization of all human resources and reason to realize what is aspired (Shah et al, 2020). The development of human resources is a process of changing the human resources who belong to an organization, from one situation to another, which is better to prepare a future responsibility in achieving organizational goals (Werdhiastutie et al, 2020).

According to K.J Holsti, foreign policy has several goals. The objectives include security; well-being; autonomy, and prestige (Holsti, 1983). Of the four goals, not all countries make them a top priority. Every policy made will be adapted to the international situation and conditions. Meanwhile, according to Henry Kissinger, foreign policy is a regulation made when the domestic policy ends and is influenced by the domestic political situation (Kissinger, 1969).

Holsti also stated that foreign policy is influenced by several factors, such as internal and external. Internal factors in the form of government structure, employees, social economy and security as well as national attributes (Holsti, 1983, pp. 269-306). Meanwhile, external factors include the structure of the global economy and system, regional and global problems and the actions of other actors.

According to Marijke Breuning, internal factors come from the influence of institutions in the form of Executive and Legislative institutions within a government, economic conditions, history and culture of a country, as well as domestic conditions, including ethnic groups, interest groups or public opinion (Breuning, 2007).

Based on the explanation above, the author will use foreign policy factors from Holsti's opinion to explain the United States' policy in protecting its country's national security from foreign influences.

Foreign policy emerges as an action made by actors as policymakers (decision-makers) to solve a problem and think about goals to achieve their national interests. In this case, the state does have a goal to achieve the national interest in making a decision. If it is related to the problems of this research, the researcher feels that the foreign policy concept is considered very relevant in answering the problems described previously.

In general, a country's foreign policy aims to influence other countries, maintain the country's national security, gain prestige, gain an advantage for their country, and act according to existing resources (Holsti, 1983, p. 107).

The concept of foreign policy itself is also related to the national interest, which has a role in deciding every interest of a country and is very influential in the lives of people in the region and the international sphere. According to Morgenthau, national interest has six types or purposes, including;

- Primary interests protect the international political system and state defence and security as well as national identity
- Secondary interest protects its citizens abroad
- Permanent interest achieve a state interest in a certain period
- Variable interest based on the domestic political system and public opinion
- General interest relates to positive behaviour according to several aspects such as trade economy, diplomacy and international law.
- Specific interest related to certain times and issue

Based on the types of interests that have been described above, American interests fall into the category of Primary interest in the closing of the Confucius Institute because the institution is considered a propaganda tool of the Chinese Communist Party's ideology, so America, in this case, wants to protect its citizens and country from foreign influences, especially in the education system in the United States.

Researchers will also use the assumptions of foreign policy theory based on internal factors from Marijke Breuning to describe and explain the involvement of interest groups such as the FBI, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), National Association of Scholars (NAS) in influencing American foreign policy making. States in the case of closing the Confucius Institute during the Trump administration.

## **2.2 The Iron Triangle Concept (Policy-Making Process)**

In this study, the researcher uses the concept of policy-making (iron triangle) because foreign policy, especially in the United States, is related to the policy-making process. Making a country's foreign policy is generally based on factors of national interest related to reasons to protect and maintain the power and security of the state.

Hagan argues that foreign policy-making theory is closely related to decision-making theory (Hagan, 2001). Richard Synder first developed the theory of decision making or decision making in the 1950s. In his writings discussing international politics, Synder alludes to action, reaction and interaction. According to his basic assumptions, Synder says that international politics combines these three things "action, reaction and interaction" (Synder, H, & Burton, 1969).

The policy-making process (decision-making process) has a relationship that is interrelated and affects each other between components with one. All these components are a single unit that cannot stand alone, so changes in the system also make it run dynamically (Easton, 1965).

Decision-making arises because there is a problem between the influence of power and the attitude of rationality. The decision-making includes

- several processes, namely recognizing and understanding the problems being faced;
- considering and compiling, and assessing which way is the most effective way to overcome these problems;
- deciding which method to choose or use;
- carrying out a decision that has been taken and evaluating the results of the decision that has been implemented (Sola, 2018, p. 209).

In compiling this research, the author will discuss the United States' foreign policy in the case of closing the Confucius Institute at their universities in the Iron Triangle concept, namely the theory of policy making during the Trump administration. The concept of the Iron Triangle is illustrated in the following picture



Source: <https://medium.com/@joshuashawnmichaelhehe/the-iron-triangle-of-america-16fd5e3f40da>

When making a policy, the main principle or reason for the Iron Triangle concept is a foreign policy that connects with parliament (legislators). The aim is to get legislative support in the future and vice versa. In this case, the parliament also has an interest in being able to be re-elected, so the government needs a lot of support and encouragement from parliament and interest groups so that later work programs that are carried out can get support in the form of budget and technology (Noll, 1971).

### III. Research Method

In compiling this research, the researcher will use qualitative research methods. The qualitative method is a method that examines the condition of natural objects where in this case, the researcher is the key instrument, and the data collection technique is carried out using a combined technique (triangulation) which is inductive data analysis with results that emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2018).

Meanwhile, according to Bogdan & Biklen, qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of writings and the behavior of the people observed. This study aims to gain a general understanding of social reality from the participant's point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Furthermore, Lexy J. Moloeng stated that qualitative research aims to understand all phenomena related to what is experienced by the research subject descriptively through the form of language and words (Moleong, 2007).

This research is structured using a descriptive research method where the data collected is not in the form of numbers but through the description of a phenomenon, facts, and behavior. The researcher also uses a literature study as a data collection method. This is because this research will be supported by library literacy in data collection techniques related to the research title so that the data will be library research. Therefore, data collection will be carried out through literacy studies such as journals, books, library media, articles on the internet, and other valid sources. Meanwhile, to obtain the latest data, this research will be supported by many data sources via the internet, such as articles and journals or reports and other sources, so that it can be ascertained that the origins of data obtained are relevant and accurate to the problems being studied.

## **IV. Result and Discussion**

### **4.1 Confucius Institute in the U.S**

Confucius Institute (CI) opened in 2005 at the University of Maryland, the United States, as the country's first host university (Peterson, 2017, p. 28). CI is an institution where they (students) can learn the language and culture of China. In addition to providing Mandarin language teaching programs, the institute is also designed to remove negative images, reduce international misunderstandings about China, and improve good relations between China and other countries. The other goals are to enhance Chinese language courses, train teachers, provide HSK exams (Mandarin fluency tests), hold events about arts and culture, and provide knowledge about the country of China.

Based on the explanation above, the Confucius Institute is one part of China's long-term strategy or project to expand its country's influence in the international world, including in the United States.

According to a study by the National Association of Scholars | NAS in 2017, since 2005, there have been more than 100 Confucius Institutes institutions opened in public and private schools and universities in the United States. In addition, the Chinese government has also opened more than 500 Confucius Institutes spread all over the world. In 2011, as many as 200 Chinese teachers worked in the United States (Tsung & Cruickshank, 2011).

According to a report by the US Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation, between 2006 and 2019, China spent more than \$158 million on the Confucius Institute in the United States (Congressional Research Service, 2021). In 2019, the agency also sponsored about 500 Confucius Classrooms in elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States. According to the National Association of Scholars | NAS, Hanban often funds the Confucius Institute in America for around \$100,000 per year and sometimes gives much more than that. Stanford University, for example, received \$4 million, while Western Kentucky University received \$1.5 million to build the Confucius Institute (Yan, 2022).

In this case, Hanban, in addition to funding, the organization also provides a Chinese director, a Chinese language teacher, scholarships for international students, and learning materials such as free textbooks. Meanwhile, the host university (in this case, the United States) also facilitates or provides its resources such as an American director, classrooms



for the Confucius Institute, administrative staff support, and part of the funding as a form of contribution, which usually includes office space facilities, libraries, and other equipment (Peterson, 2017, p. 27). In terms of funding, the Confucius Institute is shared by the Hanban (International Chinese Language Council) with the host university (United States) and Chinese partner universities.

Every school and university in America, both private and public, signed a contract agreement with Hanban as a requirement to establish or host the Confucius Institute. And vice versa with the director of China and the teachers who will teach at the Confucius Institute of the host university.

US school officials told the US Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation that under the contract agreement, Chinese teachers and directors would be dismissed if they were found to have violated Chinese government laws and were directly involved in activities deemed to be detrimental to China's national interests. The contract states that Chinese directors and teachers must safeguard their country's national interests and report to the Chinese Embassy within one month of arriving in the United States (United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 2019, p. 2).

These Chinese teachers and directors generally come from Chinese partner universities that have been contracted for two years and paid by Hanban which will later cover their living expenses while working at the host university Confucius Institute. Hanban also covers transportation costs ranging from air tickets and health insurance (Yan, 2022).

Furthermore, based on reports examined by the US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, the contract terms for the host university (in this case, the United States) contain provisions relating to applicable Chinese and US laws; limit exposure or disclosure of contracts to the public, and terminate the contract if American schools or universities take actions that damage China's image through the Confucius Institute (United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 2019, p. 2).

With such rapid development, these institutions have now invited many problems in carrying out their expansion. One of the problems faced by Confucius Institutes abroad, especially in western countries, is the vigilance and attention to Chinese influence (Ren, 2012).

The Confucius Institute has now become controversial and has caused repeated criticisms over the past few years, so many universities in the United States have decided to terminate the cooperation contract with the institution and close the Confucius Institute program in their country's educational institutions, but some of them continue the CI program at his university.

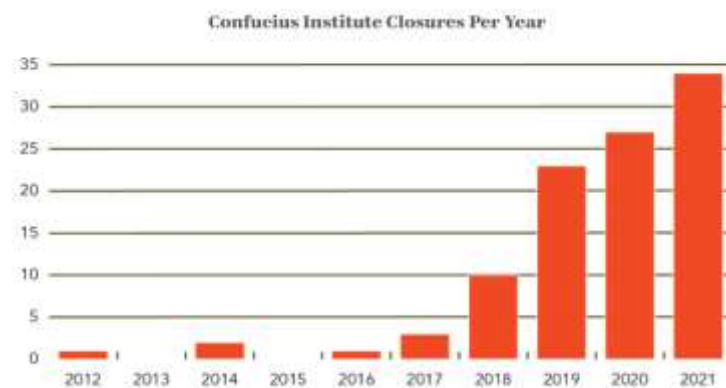
According to the National Association of Scholars | NAS, The number of Confucius Institutes in America has been reduced, and there will only be about 30 Confucius Institutes still operating in the United States until the end of December 2021, while 104 Confucius Institutes at several private and public universities have now closed and suspended programs in their term. University and is in the process of closing.

In February 2012, Dickinson State University became the first university in the United States to close and cancel its agreement with the Confucius Institute (Yan, 2022). Based on Cutting Ties With Confucius Institutes | In the Name of Confucius (inthenameofconfuciusmovie.com), Two years later, in 2014, the closing of CI was followed by the University of Chicago and also Pennsylvania State University. Meanwhile, the University of Maryland, the host of the first Confucius Institute in America, began closing its CI in 2020.

Based on the pages of the National Association of Scholars in its report entitled *After Confucius Institutes* by Flora Yan | Report | NAS, said that when the University of Chicago announced it would close its Confucius Institute in September 2014, the decision spread to national news in the United States. The University of Chicago closed their CI program three months after the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) opposed the Confucius Institute. The disappearance of the existence of the Confucius Institute at the University of Chicago was due to criticism from Marshall Sahlins, a professor of anthropology at the university.

Previously in 2013, Shalins had criticized the Confucius Institute operating within his university. Shalins said he could post a photo of the Dalai Lama in his office but not on the 4th floor (Confucius Institute). While the reason Pennsylvania State University closed the Confucius Institutes at the university was that the goals of the institution were considered inconsistent (Yan, 2022).

The actions taken by Shalins failed to spark a sustainable movement because, in 2014, no other university closed its CI besides Pennsylvania. In 2016, Pfeiffer University decided to close its Confucius Institute and continue until the number of Confucius Institutes decreased yearly.



Source: <https://www.nas.org/reports/after-confucius-institutes/full-report>

The data above shows that in 2019-2021 the peak of the Confucius Institute began to lose its existence in the United States. Every year there is an increase in the number of Confucius Institutes that decide to close and stop their programs at their universities.

#### 4.2 Confucius Institute di Amerika Serikat pada Novermber 2021



Source: NAS and additional research • Map: USC U.S – China Institute

Based on the distribution map above, the red sign represents the Confucius Institute in the United States which has closed. In comparison, the green sign shows the Confucius Institute institutions that are still operating in the United States, including Stanford University, Webster University, and the University of Utah. Some are the University of Washington, University of Maryland, Pennsylvania State University, Texas A&M University, University of Arizona, University of Minnesota, and many more.

Some reasons for the closure of the Confucius Institute program at some universities were repeated concerns about foreign influence, which could threaten security and academic freedom in their educational institutions. Critics also point out that there is alleged censorship in discussing sensitive topics such as human rights cases, the Tiananmen Square tragedy, Tibetan independence, undermining Taiwan's influence, Falun Gong, and so on.

Another reason for the closure of the Confucius Institute in the United States was also due to the Chinese government's risk to US national security; changing curricular needs in this regard, including influence over teaching and research; law problems; lack of interest in learning Mandarin, resulting in a decline in support from CI institutions; operational difficulties due to Covid-19; and the encouragement by some members of Congress to the differences between educational institutions in America and the Institute that are not in line with their mission and goals (Congressional Research Service, 2021).

In addition, the closing of CI in almost all-American universities is the lack of transparency in financial administration arrangements, policies in recruiting Confucius Institute staff, and supervision of Chinese people abroad (Peterson, 2017).

### **4.3 Confucius Institute Closing Policy in the United States**

The Confucius Institute is now losing its existence in the United States. Criticism of the institution continues to this day. Initially, CI was designed like other foreign-owned institutions that promote language and culture, such as the UK's British Council Institute, Germany's Goethe Institute, Japan Foundation, and France's Alliance Francaise. However, it turns out that the Confucius Institute has differences from other foreign-owned institutions. CI operates and enters the educational institution of the host university (in this case, America), whereas they do not.

In its operation, CI invites a lot of suspicion and concern from observers, interest groups, and the United States government for allegedly spreading foreign influence in US educational institutions. The institute is suspected of posing a threat to security, undermining US academic freedom.

In 2018, FBI Director Christopher Wray told Congress that all American universities should immediately terminate cooperation contracts with institutions under Chinese government regulation (Confucius Institute) because they are considered involved in espionage (Yan, 2022).

A year later, America passed a National Defense Authority Act for FY2019, P.L. 115-232 Section 109 contains a prohibition on the use of funds from the Department of Defense to support Chinese language and culture teaching programs within American educational institutions that host the Confucius Institute.

Last August 2020, Trump, through the United States Department of State, designated the Confucius Institute (CI) as one of China's overseas missions, which was also considered a propaganda tool of the Chinese Communist Party's ideology.

During the Trump administration, the closure of the Confucius Institute in America experienced a very rapid increase. This is due to federal pressure as contained in the National Defense Authority Act (NDAA) in 2019, which forced all schools and



universities in the United States to choose between CI and obtain foreign language program funding from the federal (Department of Defense). Furthermore, apart from alleged foreign influence and academic freedom, many of the closures of the Confucius Institute in America were also due to domestic political pressure to reform the law regarding the requirements of the Confucius Institute.

#### **4.4 The United States Foreign Policy-Making Process**

In this study, the researcher uses the ideas of Kegley and Wittkopf, where several internal and external factors influence the American foreign policy-making process (Charles & Eugene, 1994). Meanwhile, external factors can change China's attitude towards criticism of its Confucius Institute in the United States. These two factors are included in the decision-making process. The internal factors are Congress, Civil Society, interest groups, and the mass media.

Researchers use the Iron Triangle concept, and when making a policy, the main principle or reason for the idea is a foreign policy that connects with parliament (legislators). The goal is to get legislative support in the future and vice versa. In this case, the parliament also has an interest so that later it can be re-elected so that from the government it needs a lot of support from each parliament and interest group so that after the work program is implemented can get help in the form of budget and technology (Noll, 1971)

##### **a. Bureaucracy**

Here the researcher will try to describe a little about Bureaucracy, one of the bodies in the concept of the iron triangle (Iron Triangle). Bureaucracy is an essential instrument for every country, especially in modern society. In this case, the presence of the bureaucracy itself cannot be avoided because the bureaucracy and the state are interrelated.

According to Thoha (2003), Bureaucracy, in this case, includes four definitions, namely one particular institution or group of institutions; two, leading to the allocation of resources within a country; three, Refers to the nature of the organization; and the last is a group of people.

If the title of the research being studied at this time, in the process of making US foreign policy always involves three government institutions, namely the executive, legislative, and judiciary, and also includes several agencies and institutions such as the CIA, National Security Council, National Security Agency, Department of Defense, Department of State and so on.

##### **b. Kongres**

Based on Dewandaru, R.P et.all. (2016), In the United States constitution, Congress is the body that has all the highest and most authoritative powers in the legislature. Congress holds the legislature, including the House of Representatives and the Senate.

In addition, Congress is the most competent body in declaring war, and Congress, for that matter, has authority in the areas of national security and foreign policy of the United States. Congress also enacts laws specifically aimed at limiting the making and execution of American foreign policy by the President.

In essence, Congress is the last place in the process of making United States foreign policy which also plays a vital role in accepting, rejecting, and changing a foreign policy at the request of the President. In this case, Congress is the actor who decides which approach to take and which not.

If it is associated with this research, Congress has an essential role in making and issuing laws in policies related to the closure of the Confucius Institute in US universities.

One of the laws that have been made by congress and have passed the Senate is related to the limitations and requirements of the Confucius Institute program, among others; lain;

- S.939 - *Confucius Act, 116th Congress (2019-2020) passed Senate 06/10/2020* Concerns Over Nations Funding University Campus Institutes in The U.S. Act or Confucius Act.

The law contains a prohibition on funding from the federal or the United States Department of Education to American educational institutions that host the Confucius Institute except on the condition that the educational institution must have an explicit contractual agreement with the Confucius Institute in which it is written about academic freedom, prohibiting the application of the Confucius Institute. foreign law (China) in U.S. educational institutions gives full managerial authority to U.S. educational institutions including in the design of teaching (curriculum), activity, and research plans (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

### c. Interest Group

In the Iron Triangle concept, interest groups are one of the bodies that play an essential role in the order of the political system. Benditt (1975, p. 34) defines an interest group as a group of people in political competition with other interest groups, each of which has the same goal.

Based on this definition, it could be concluded that the function of the group's interests is only limited to articulating interests. These interest groups, in this case, have a common goal: actively jointly trying to influence government policy-making by the group's wishes.

There are various types of interest groups that grow during society and, in this case, include non-government players including universities, professional groups, labor unions, traders and entrepreneurs, student union organizations, religious organizations, think tanks, company associations, associations of scholars or experts, ethnic organizations, regions and so on (Maiwan, 2016).

The National Association of Scholars is the type of interest group of associations of scholars or education as described above. Here, the researcher will discuss a little about NAS as an interest group that is pro against the policy of closing the Confucius Institute in universities in the United States.

The NAS is an independent membership association devoted to education in the United States. NAS is also involved in public advocacy that can influence American policy-making, such as passing a law to promote higher education in America (Peterson, 2017).

In 2017, NAS made a report on the investigation entitled "Outsourced to China: Confucius Institute and Soft Power in American Higher Education," which in its report conducted a study of 12 Confucius Institutes in America (New Jersey and New York) and conducted investigations related to recruitment policies, financial arrangements, contracts between host universities and hanban and much more. In addition, the NAS report also found irregularities in the learning curriculum within the Confucius Institute. There is censorship on sensitive topics such as not being allowed to discuss or discuss human rights cases, the Tiananmen Square case, the territorial status of Taiwan, Tibetan independence, and Falun Gong (Yan, 2022).

## V. Conclusion

Based on what has been described above, the following conclusions can be conveyed by researchers:

The closure of the Confucius Institute in the United States is one of the efforts made by the United States government to protect its country's national security from foreign influences operating within the academic sphere. The reasons for closing CI from universities in America include; concerns about foreign impacts operating within American educational institutions that pose a threat to national security and academics; domestic political pressure from the U.S. government; there are allegations of censorship in discussing specific topics (Tiananmen Square, Status of the Taiwanese, Tibetan Independence, Falun Gong) as well as lack of transparency regarding financial administration arrangements, policies in recruiting Confucius Institute workers.

In this case, the concept of the Iron Triangle is very relevant in the policy-making process. This is because there are institutions that work together in the process of making policy designs. The institutions include the Bureaucracy, Congress, and Interest Groups.

The bureaucracy consists of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education. Then the second is Congress, consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate as the last place in the process of making United States foreign policy which also has an essential role in creating and issuing a law. The last one is the Interest Group. In this case, the researcher only focuses on discussing the National Association of Scholars as a public advocate involved in American policy making, such as passing a law.

The existence of the policy-making process produces a decision. The result of the decision is in the form of a law covering restrictions and requirements in the operation of the Confucius Institute in the United States. These laws include National Defense Authority Act for FY2019, P.L. 115-232 Section 109; S.939 - Confucius Act, 116th Congress (2019-2020).

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