

# The Popular Perception of China in Latin America and the Role of Confucian Institutes

Thomas J. Nisley<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor of Government and International Affairs, Kennesaw State University

## ABSTRACT

As a rising great power, China is expanding its activities and interests globally, including in the region of Latin America. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Chinese trade and investments have grown precipitously throughout Latin America. Additionally, China has engaged in a public diplomacy campaign to enhance its soft power in the region. This has been led by its flagship cultural exchange program, the Confucius Institute. To what extent have China's activities in the region shaped the public perception of China? This study utilizes research from the Latinobarómetro public opinion survey. Analysis is conducted for the years 2015 and 2018. The results suggest that Chinese economic activities have had mixed and minimal effects while its Confucius Institutes have been counterproductive.

## Introduction

The rise of China into the ranks of the most powerful states in the international system is the defining characteristic of the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> In the last twenty years, China's international activity has steadily increased. The ambitious 'Belt and Road' initiative seeks to spread China's influence globally, including in Latin America, a region of the world where the United States is the preponderant power. Many scholars have documented the growing activities of Chinese actions in Latin America (Ellis 2009, 2014, Hearn and León-Manríquez 2011, and Jenkins 2019). China's actions in the region have evolved from the economic domain to increasingly political and even nascent military activity.<sup>2</sup> China's strategic goals for the region are less clear. Some, like Ellis (2009), view China's activities in Latin America as part of a broader geopolitical strategy to undercut a world order dominated by the United States. At the same time, others like Jenkins (2019) suggest that the relationship is primarily motivated by economics and driven by the commercial interests of China, Latin America, and transnational companies.

As a rising great power, China is following a similar pattern that the United States took in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like the United States before it, China is not only seeking to secure political and economic dominance in its region of the world but also seeks to increase its political and economic influence in other regions of the world. It is very likely that in the future, China will seek to disrupt the US's dominance in the region.<sup>3</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two great external powers (Germany and the Soviet Union) sought to disrupt the dominance of the United States in the Western Hemisphere and failed. The failure of those previous attempts hinged on many factors, including economic weakness relative to the United States and the strong relationship between Brazil and the United States (see Lochery 2014 and Poggio 2012). Although Germany was stronger in its relative economic situation to the United States than the Soviet Union, it was not able to appeal broadly to the people of the region. The universal claim of its ideology well-positioned the Soviet Union to challenge US hegemony in the region. Unlike Germany, which only offered political nationalism, the Soviet vision of Marxism-Leninism offered a strategy and a guide for indigenous political movements to follow. The broader attempt was undercut by the Soviet Union's economic fragility. In economic terms, China is a better position than any previous great power to challenge the United States. It is fast becoming a peer economic competitor to the United States. The ability of China

---

<sup>1</sup>By China, I am referring to the People's Republic of China.

<sup>2</sup>In March 2018, China opened operations of a space station in Argentina. Argentina gave China a 50-year tax-free lease on the \$50 million station run by the People's Liberation Army. The station, designed to assist in China's planned mission to the dark side of the moon, sits isolated in Patagonia outside of the town of Las Lajas. The Chinese government agreed only to use the base for civilian purposes. Nevertheless, the Chinese military runs China's space program, and the base remains closed to the public. There is concern that the facility could be used by China to jam, disrupt, and possibly destroy US satellites (see Londoño, 2018). Argentina is also negotiating with China to purchase JF-17 fighter aircraft (see <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/02/14/argentina-to-send-military-team-to-china-to-discuss-arms-deal>)

<sup>3</sup>This study is grounded in an "offensive realist" theoretical perspective. Offensive realism suggests that great powers seek to maximize power with the goal of being the only great power in the system. Although global dominance by a single state is beyond reach given current technological limitations, in the interim, states seek regional dominance or 'hegemony.' As great powers seek regional hegemony, they also seek to deny regional hegemony to other great powers (Mearsheimer 2001). It also incorporates a view of power that extends beyond material capabilities and utilizes the notion of 'soft power' (Nye 2002).

to displace the United States in Latin America depends heavily on China's efforts to convince the people of the region that they have a "shared destiny" with China (Cui 2016, 20). The purpose of this paper is to test to what extent have Chinese activities in Latin America improved the popular perception of China in the region and thus increasing the likelihood of China supplanting the United States in Latin America. The evidence suggests that the United States has little to worry about for now.

This article proceeds in three sections. The first section briefly describes the expansion of Chinese economic activities in Latin America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the second section, I present other Chinese activities in the region, including attempts by the Chinese government to promote its 'soft power' through cultural exchanges, with a particular emphasis on its Confucius Institutes. This necessarily includes a discussion of the Chinese government's view of soft power along with its emphasis on treating all countries based on strict sovereignty without concern for internal domestic politics.

In the final section, I empirically test the hypothesis that China's economic and cultural activities have increased the positive view of China held by the people of that country. Using logistic regression analysis, I assess which factors positively influence individuals' views toward China. I analyze survey research from the region of Latin America using datasets from the Latinobarómetro public opinion survey. An analysis is conducted for the years 2015 and 2018. In conclusion, I find that Chinese economic activities have had mixed and minimal effects. Countries that export to China tend to have slightly higher odds of having a positive view of China, while imports, loans, and investments tend to decrease the odds of having a positive view of China. The most startling finding is that China's attempts to improve its image through its Confucian Institutes are counterproductive.

## China's Growing Economic Influence in Latin America

The Chinese economy has rapidly grown since the reforms of Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s. For three decades, the economy has doubled in size every eight years (Zakaria 2009, 89). The boom in manufacturing in China and the ready access to US consumers fueled this growth. China's growth has led it to be a major consumer of raw materials and agricultural products. China has sought to secure a steady supply of resources to sustain its growth, not only in Latin America but also in Asia and Africa. According to the World Bank, the value of China's imports of raw materials has increased from \$8 billion in 1992 to \$444 billion in 2017. Although the Asia Pacific region remains the largest source of raw materials for China, its Latin American imports are not trivial.

In 2018, China's imports from the region amounted to almost \$158 billion, consisting of almost 7.5% of China's overall imports (Sullivan and Lum 2019). Latin America's exports to China are highly concentrated, with 80 percent of the region's total exports consisting of four commodities: soya beans, crude oil, iron ore, and copper (Casanova, Xia, and Ferreira 2016, 216). Growth in overall trade has been phenomenal, with total China-Latin America trade increasing from \$55 billion in 2005 to almost \$308 billion in 2019.<sup>4</sup> China is the top trading partner for Brazil, Chile, and Peru, the second largest for Uruguay, and the third largest for Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela (Koleski and Blivas 2018, 8).

China has also been engaged in 'renminbi diplomacy.' Reminiscent of the US's 'dollar diplomacy' of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, China's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the region has averaged \$10 billion a year. As with its trade, the Asia Pacific region remains the largest recipient of Chinese FDI (70 percent of the total); nevertheless, Latin America is the second largest of China's recipients of FDI.<sup>5</sup> Chinese banks have also been active, with the China Development Bank and the China Export-Import Bank becoming the largest lenders in Latin America. "Accumulated loans have surpassed \$140 billion (2005-2018); Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Argentina are the top recipients of that lending" (Sullivan and Lum 2019). For Ecuador and Venezuela, this financing has taken the form of loans for oil. In Ecuador, China financed a massive hydroelectric project building the dam at Coca Codo Sinclair. Although this project did not turn out well for Ecuador, as the dam has developed cracks, the Chinese will still get their money as they have secured the right to 80 percent of Ecuador's oil exports until the repayment of the loan (Cassey and Krauss 2018).

Twenty-one countries in the region have signed on to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with Argentina being the latest country to join in February of 2022.<sup>6</sup> The BRI, launched in 2013, is a massive Chinese infrastructure and investment project designed to create a transportation and energy network to facilitate Chinese economic growth and, by extension, global economic growth. In 2018, at the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Ministerial Forum in Santiago, China formally invited countries of the region to participate in the BRI. The effects of membership in the BRI will not be measured in this study since its inception falls outside the time period of analysis. However, a recent study by Rhys

<sup>4</sup>All trade data not specifically attributed to a cited source comes from the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution <https://wits.worldbank.org/Default.aspx?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup>This ranking is debatable as the figures come from the Chinese government. Sullivan and Lum (2019) caution that "these figures include flows to territories with large offshore financial sectors and may not reflect the final destinations of the FDI."

<sup>6</sup>In addition to Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela in South America, the twenty-one includes countries in Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama) and the Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago).

Jenkins (forthcoming) provides evidence that very little has changed in the economic relations of the countries in the region with China. The BRI simply represents a repackaging of preexisting economic relations. The BRI may reshape Chinese/Latin American relations in the future and contribute to China's soft power in the region, but that is yet to be determined.

## China's Soft Power Campaign

The Chinese government has fully embraced Joseph Nye's concept of soft power (Li 2008). Soft power is the ability to influence the behavior of others without the use of coercion or inducements (Nye 2002). Soft power is the power of attraction and the ability to get others to want what you want. John Givens (2011) correctly suggests that "China uses its soft power to pursue its interests, neither working actively for or against, human rights and democracy" (10). Although there is no overarching ideological motivation for Chinese foreign policy, Beijing does seek to promote the ideas of "non-interference and the supremacy of sovereignty, an anti-hegemonic anti-Americanism, developing world solidarity, and a self-interested pragmatism" (Givens 2011, 12). China's foreign policy is driven by the need for resources, but it is also very concerned with its image, particularly in the Western world.<sup>7</sup> China wants to avoid inducing fear in other countries and instead promote itself as a benign alternative to the hegemonic United States.

Although Nye argues that government promotion of soft power is not effective, China has nonetheless embarked on a diplomatic campaign to do so. The Chinese public diplomacy programs have received heavy investments from the Chinese government. China's leaders have made visits to the region as well. In his first three years in office, President Xi has visited the region three times. Xi made his fourth visit in April 2018 to attend the Summit of the Americas conference held in Lima, Peru. This was the first time that China attended a meeting of the Summit of the Americas (Serrano 2018). China has made major diplomatic inroads in the region, establishing 'strategic partnerships' with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Sullivan and Lum 2019). China has also been able to get countries in the region to break their diplomatic relations with Taiwan, recently luring El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Panama to switch their recognition to China (Kahn 2018). In late 2021, Nicaragua broke relations with Taiwan and recognized the government in Beijing as the legitimate government of China (Lee Myers 2021). Currently, in the Western Hemisphere, only Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, and Paraguay still recognize Taiwan.

The flagship of Chinese public diplomacy has been its global Confucius Institutes (CIs). Wei-hao Huang and Jun Xiang (2019) have empirically demonstrated that the Chinese government has designed the CI program to not only promote its educational and economic interests but its political interests as well. When China establishes a CI program in a country, it represents the full commitment of China's public diplomacy campaign in that country. Only countries that recognize Beijing as the legitimate government of China can host a CI. Jennifer Hubbert argues that China sees its CI program as a way to counter the prevailing narrative that China's rise is a threat to the world order. Chinese officials, she interviewed, suggest that "if foreigners understood the 'real' China, they would view China's rise to power less skeptically" (Hubbert 2019, 11). China started its Confucian Institute project globally in 2004, led by the Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), which is housed in the Ministry of Education.<sup>8</sup> The first CI program in Latin America opened in Mexico in 2006. This coincides with China's growing economic ties to the region. Most of the larger countries in Latin America, which had recognized Beijing since the 1970s and early 1980s, were the first to open CIs.

The focus of the CIs is to develop Chinese language and cultural teaching resources. Language and cultural exchanges also are designed to help facilitate business activities. Hanban sets up joint ventures with host countries' universities and schools to provide human and material resources to teach Standard Chinese (Mandarin or Putonghua), the official language of the People's Republic of China (Lo and Pan 2016, 521). CIs are established in various countries as joint ventures with local universities. China provides the teachers, books, and course materials. China also provides a deputy director, while the local partner provides the facilities and the administrative staff (Hartig 2016, 106). In addition to language education, the CI often hosts events like cultural exhibitions, film screenings, readings, concerts, and lectures. Additionally, the CI serves to facilitate scholarship programs for students to study in China (Kulver 2017). Through its CIs, China has set up programs for student educational exchanges and programs to bring political leaders from the region to visit China.

By 2018, China's Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in Latin America served over 50,000 students and involved more than eight million people in its cultural activities (Koleski and Blivas, 2018, 16).<sup>9</sup> According to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Confucian Institutes:

<sup>7</sup>Except for small pockets of people who have completely maintained their Pre-Columbian culture, Latin American culture is generally a Western culture.

<sup>8</sup>In 2021, the Chinese government changed the name of the Confucius Institutes Headquarters to the Center for Language Education after a wave of closing of CIs at US universities in response to the introduction of Senate Bill S.3453 - Transparency for Confucius Institutes. See the text of the bill at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/3453/text?r=7&s=1>

<sup>9</sup>Confucian classrooms are associated with secondary schools in the Confucian Institute network, while the Confucian Institute is partnered with a university.

Confucius Institutes devote themselves to satisfying the demands of people from different countries and regions in the world who learn the Chinese language, enhancing understanding of the Chinese language and culture by these peoples, to strengthening educational and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other countries, to deepening friendly relationships with other nations, to promoting the development of multi-culturalism, and to construct a harmonious world.<sup>10</sup>

Falk Hartig argues that China sees “CIs as an important tool in China’s public diplomacy which the Chinese government uses to communicate specific strategic narratives about China and its place in the world to foreign publics” (Hartig 2015, 299). This strategic dialogue is designed to promote a positive image of China to the world. Chen Qiang and Zhenge Guilan argue that the Confucius Institutes are a “pro-active expansion [. . .] to change China’s image” (quoted in Hartig 2016, 102). Even the name Confucius Institute is a conscious attempt at positive branding.

There is nothing typically Confucian about teaching Mandarin. They could have easily been called Mao Zedong Institutes. But as John Lennon accurately pointed out over 50 years ago, “if you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain’t going to make it with anyone anyhow.” Very few countries would host a Mao Zedong Institute, and that would be counter to the goal of Chinese public diplomacy. Xu Lin, the Director General of Hanban, argues that the purpose of the CIs is to promote an understanding of China. “If foreigners don’t understand us, they will fear our development, and this will prevent business and trade overseas” (quoted in Hartig 2016, 107). The CI seeks to introduce China and Chinese culture to the world. Nevertheless, not all subjects are open for viewing. There are topics that are taboo at CIs, such as the so-called three Ts: Tibet, Taiwan, and Tiananmen square, along with the Dali Lama and the Falun Gong.

## The Popular Perception of China and Chinese in Latin America

Latin America is exceedingly diverse, and most of the people of the region define themselves by their nationalities. There are different national responses to China and Chinese. Chinese immigrants fought alongside the other Cuban rebels in the war for independence from Spain. Cuban history records the Chinese as patriots. In contrast, Peruvian history casts Chinese immigrants as traitors. In the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), over 1000 Chinese agricultural workers in southern Peru joined the invading Chilean military (López 2014).

Chinese encounters in what is today Latin America extends back to the very earliest colonial days of Spain. The Spanish colony in the Philippines brought Chinese and other Asian peoples to New Spain (Mexico) in the early 1600s (see Mann 2011, 323-328). “*Chino* barbers in New Spain performed both medical and non-medical services, which included bloodletting, dental surgery, cutting hair, shaving beards, and ear cleaning” (Slack 2009, 45). In the 1800s, Chinese laborers came in large numbers to the region. As in the United States, many of these workers came to construct railroads.

In some parts of Latin America, like Central America, Mexico, and Peru, they came in large enough numbers to form communities that persist today (Ellis 2014, 180). Chinese laborers were often “simultaneously promoted as efficient workers for progress and prosperity and criticized as harmful to the physical and moral well-being of the nation” (López 2014, 182). And as in the United States, there were episodic violent acts carried out against Chinese communities, such as the 1911 massacre of Mexico’s Chinese community in Torreón, Coahuila (Jacques 1974 and Hu-Dehart 2010). Violent acts against Chinese Latin American communities are not historical artifacts. In 2004, shops of ethnic Chinese in Maracay and Valencia, Venezuela, were looted by angry mobs (Ellis 2014, 183).

Anti-Chinese sentiments remain prevalent in Latin America today. In an innovative study by Ariel C. Armony and Nicolás Velásquez (2015), the authors use Facebook’s Application Programming Interface to examine users’ comments on news articles about China from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. Their analysis revealed a distrust of Chinese products and their quality. Chinese businesses are viewed as illegal, morally wrong, or abusive. Half of the negative comments “refer to local retail shops owned by Chinese immigrants” (Armony and Velásquez 2015, 332). These businesses offer an opportunity for direct interaction with Chinese immigrants and thus receive more negative comments than large Chinese corporations. Nearly 70 percent of the negative comments about Chinese culture are related to “preconceptions of cultural/educational differences (particularly culturally determined lack of hygiene), different food habits (such as the consumption of pets), and cruelty towards animals” (Armony and Velásquez 2015, 334). Language differences are seen as insurmountable.

A recent study by Miguel Carreras (2017) finds similar results. Latin Americans do not view China’s authoritarian political system favorably. “Moreover, most Latin Americans do not like or do not know the Chinese popular culture (music, television, and movies), making it harder for China to seduce the Latin American publics” (Carreras, 2017, 23). All this implies that China’s soft power campaign has not provided results.

<sup>10</sup>([https://confucius.nju.edu.cn/\\_t489/94/9f/c6277a169119/page.htm](https://confucius.nju.edu.cn/_t489/94/9f/c6277a169119/page.htm))

## The Popular Perception of China in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The popular perception of China in Latin America has generally been positive throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Figure 1). In only two years, 2003 and 2015, less than half of the respondents from the Latinobarómetro survey said that they had a positive view of China.

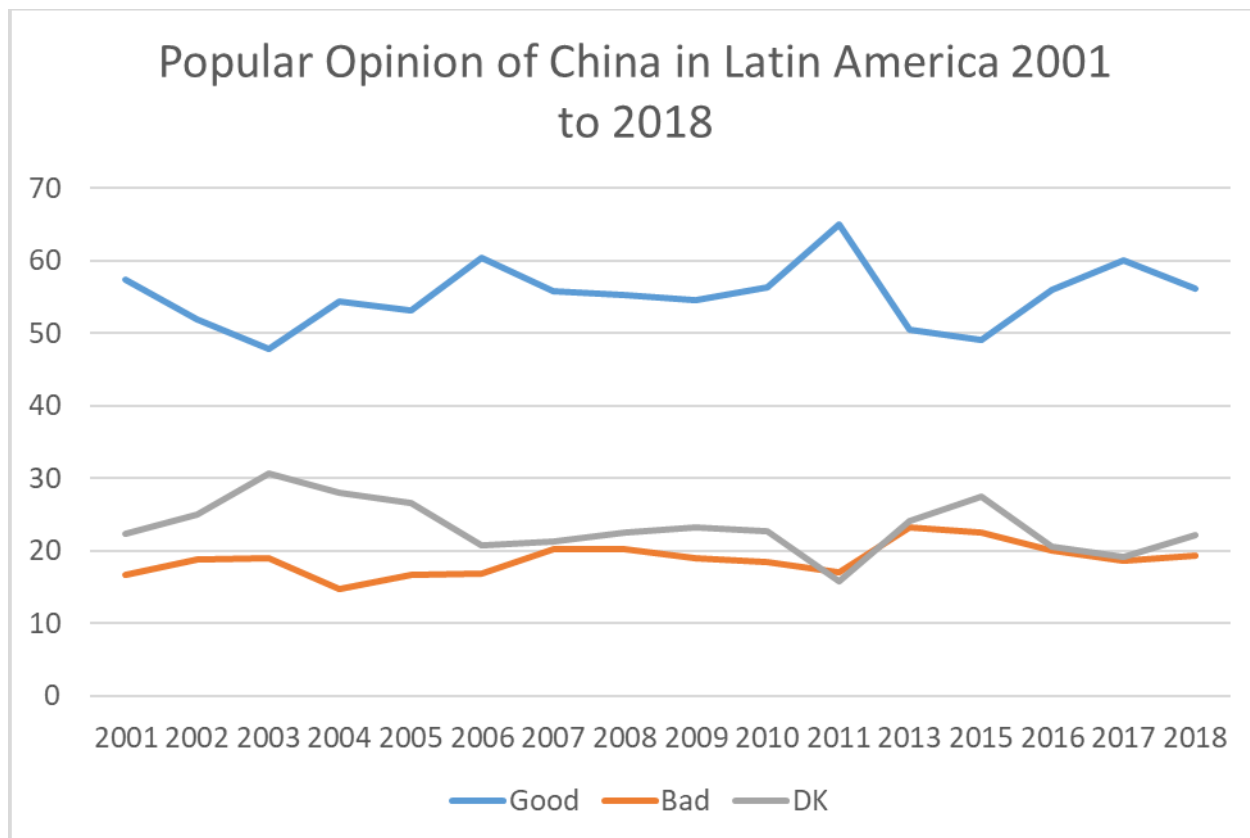


Figure 1. Latinobarómetro various years.

Nevertheless, the trend from 2001 to 2018 for those indicating that they had a bad opinion of China grew. This marks a period of greater activity by China in the region. Of course, the region of Latin America contains many different countries, each with different levels of interaction with China. In 2018, the country that had the highest percentage of respondents indicating that they had a "very good" opinion of China was Costa Rica, followed by Brazil. For that same year, the two countries that had the highest percentage of respondents with a "very bad" opinion of China were Ecuador and Venezuela. Both Ecuador and Venezuela have had extensive economic interactions with China and have a very small percentage of respondents (8.9 percent and 12 percent) who do not have an opinion of China. Some countries like Guatemala and Honduras have a high percentage of respondents (41.4 percent and 33.1 percent) who have yet to form an opinion of China.

As discussed earlier, China has been very concerned with the concept of soft power and its ability to portray itself as a leader of the Global South.<sup>11</sup> In order to claim that role, it must be seen positively by the people of the Global South. Research on the role of Chinese activities in the world on its popular perception has generally been limited. To date, only one study has attempted to quantitatively assess the effect of China's aid, trade, and investment on China's image in Latin America. In an analysis of Latin American public opinion for the period 2002-2013, Vera Z. Eichenauer, Andreas Fuchs, and Lutz Brückner find "no average effects of China's economic activities. . ." (2021, 484). They do find that Chinese economic activities have a polarizing effect, with some individuals developing very negative or very positive opinions of China. This they conclude "that China's economic engagement creates winners and losers" (Eichenauer et al. 2021, 484). This finding dovetails with Rhys Jenkins's (2019) findings in the important book, *How China is Reshaping the Global Economy*, that some individuals, and some countries, benefit handsomely from China's need for raw materials. At the same time, others find themselves displaced from the flood of Chinese products. Chinese investments and aid also had mixed results in the Eichenauer et al. study.

<sup>11</sup>The Global South refers broadly to those countries in the regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and excludes Australia, Canada, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States.



## Testing the Effects of Chinese Activities on the Popular Perception of China

Building on the research of Vera Z. Eichenauer, Andreas Fuchs, and Lutz Brückner (2021), this study seeks to test the effects of Chinese economic activities on the popular perception of China in Latin America. This study will update the previous study with an analysis of the years 2015 and 2018. Additionally, instead of measuring the variables of interest as a percentage of each country's GDP, I measure economic activity annually per capita. Since this study is concerned with popular perceptions, it is better to assess the effects based on the size of the population and to determine how much China's economic activities trickle down to the broader population. Additionally, my study will test the effects of the Chinese soft power strategy by including a variable on Confucius Institutes.

Using pooled data from the Latinobarómetro survey for 18 countries in the year 2015 and 17 countries in 2018, I attempt to measure the effect of Chinese activity on the popular perception of China.<sup>12</sup> For each survey year, the dependent variable is captured by a question that asks, "I would like to know your opinion about the following countries that I'm going to read you. Do you have a very good, good, bad, or very bad opinion of?: China." The variable was transformed into a dichotomous variable. For the question, a response of "very good" or "good" was coded as 1 and a response of "bad" or "very bad" as 0. For the 2015 survey, I have two additional dependent variables that seek to assess the respondent's perceptions of China. One asks, "In general, how much confidence do you have in the ability of China to deal responsibly with Latin American problems" and the other asks, "In general, how much confidence do you have in the ability of China to deal responsibly? With world problems." These two variables are transformed into dichotomous variables. For the questions, a response of "a good deal" or "a fair amount" was coded as 1 and a response of "not very much" or "not at all" as 0.<sup>13</sup>

There are four economic variables of interest for each country: exports to China (*Exports*); imports from China (*Imports*); loans made by the China Development Bank and China-Export Import Bank (*Loans*), and investments and construction projects funded by various private and state-owned Chinese business entities (*InvestCon*). For each of these economic variables, I assess each in per capita dollars and measure changes in \$10 increments.<sup>14</sup> To control for what might be a deeper economic relation, I include a variable for a free trade agreement. Three countries in this study have a free trade agreement with China. Chile signed an agreement with China in 2006, and both Costa Rica and Peru signed one in 2010. I constructed a dichotomous variable (*FTA*) with a value of 1 indicating a free trade agreement with China and 0 indicating no such agreement.

Unlike some other studies, I have opted not to try and measure the effect of Chinese Official Development Assistance or "foreign aid" (Zhicheng Phil Xu and Yu Zhang 2020 and Eichenauer et al. 2021). I do so for two reasons. One, China does not report its foreign aid and considers it to be a state secret. Therefore, we do not have any information that can approximate the accuracy of OECD reports or USAID's Greenbook. Studies that use Chinese aid data have had to rely on approximations that track underreported financial flows.<sup>15</sup> I am not comfortable using this data, particularly to compare it to the effects of other countries' foreign aid programs that have detailed reporting systems. Second, even by these approximations of Chinese foreign aid, the aid to Latin America is negligible except for Cuba, and Cuba is not considered in this study.

For both *Exports* and *Imports*, I lagged the data by two years for the 2015 and the 2018 surveys. This allows the effects of trade to permeate throughout the entire country. Since the effect of loans, investments, and construction projects can take time to register in the popular psyche; I use the value over an extended period. For the 2015 survey, I use the period 2005 to 2013, and for the 2018 survey, 2005 to 2016. As with the variables *Exports* and *Imports*, these are also assessed in per capita dollars and measured in changes in \$10 increments.

To assess Chinese soft power action on the popular perception of China in the region, I measure the effects of the presence and duration of operations of Chinese Confucian Institutes (*ConfYears*) in the target country. As stated above, the Chinese flagship entity of their public diplomacy is the Confucian Institutes. These institutes seek to actively promote Chinese culture and the Chinese language. Only countries that recognize Beijing as the legitimate government of China can receive a CI.

We can use the presence of a Confucian Institute as a proxy measurement for Chinese commitment to a soft power public diplomacy campaign in the target country. The CI is far more than just a language program institution. It also serves as the platform for student and faculty exchange and scholarship programs. As Ying Zhoua and Sabrina Luk argue, establishing CIs

<sup>12</sup>The 18 countries in 2015 are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. In 2018, Venezuela was excluded. The political turmoil along with the refugee crisis in the country makes the survey data results questionable. Additionally, the last reliable trade data for Venezuela is from 2013. This is useful for the 2015 survey but not for 2018. Information on the Latinobarómetro survey data is available at <http://www.latinobarometro.org>

<sup>13</sup>I opt to transform the dependent variable into a dichotomous variable as a matter of clarity and certainty. The difference between "good" and "bad" is clear for everyone. The difference between "very good" and "good" could vary widely for different individuals.

<sup>14</sup>The trade date is from World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution <https://wits.worldbank.org/Default.aspx?lang=en> Loan data is from The Dialogue [https://www.thedialogue.org/map\\_list/](https://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/) Investment and construction data from <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>

<sup>15</sup>See <https://www.aiddata.org/methods/tracking-underreported-financial-flows>

in foreign countries has become China's main effort to enhance soft power and "is part of the Chinese government's efforts to enhance China's positive image" (2016, 631). According to Jake Gilstrap (2021, 20), the CI program serves "to create a generation of future political and business leaders that will support [China's] ascent and serve as its diplomatic allies in the international order." Given the long-term nature of the CI program, we should expect to see it leading to an increased attraction to China in the target country over time. That is if the program is successful.

For each country, I measure if a Confucian Institute is present and for how many years it has operated in that country to the year before the survey. For those countries hosting a CI in 2015, the range in years was from four to nine years, with Mexico as the longest host and Bolivia as the most recent. In the 2018 survey, the range was twelve years to one year, with Mexico at twelve and Panama at one year. Panama recognized China in 2017 and was immediately given a CI located at the University of Panama. All the countries in the two survey years for this study that recognize Beijing have a CI program, except for Uruguay. China opened a CI at the University of the Republic, Uruguay, in 2018, which falls outside of the variable's domain for this study. Some large countries like Brazil have many Confucian Institutes in multiple cities, while smaller countries often only have one. An interesting preliminary finding is that those countries that recognize Taipei as the legitimate government of China have, on average, a 10 percent higher approval rating of China than those that recognize Beijing.

To assess how regime type may affect the popular perception of China, I constructed a variable (*Free*) using data from Freedom House for the years 2015 and 2018, each year of the survey. Freedom House rates each country's level of freedom of political rights and civil rights on a scale of one to seven, with one being the "most free" and seven the "least free." I combine each country's assigned scores of political rights and civil rights and reverse the scale so that the higher the number, the greater the level of freedom. Many researchers use the Freedom House data as an indicator of democracy. By contrast, this study follows the argument advanced by Diego Giannone (2010), which suggests that we should understand Freedom House as an instrument of the US government that does not measure "freedom" but instead measures how much a state conforms to the neoliberal ideological model advanced by the United States.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, variables that account for the individual characteristics of the respondents that may influence their attitude toward China were incorporated. The sex of the respondent is coded as 1 for male and 0 for female (*Male*). Two more variables were included, one for the actual age of the respondent in years (*Age*) and a second for the number of years of education of the respondent (*Educ*).<sup>17</sup>

I begin the analysis by examining the same dependent variable of the respondent's opinion of China using binary logistic regression on the pooled data from all 18 countries for the 2015 survey and from 17 countries for the 2018 survey. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Models three and four measure the respondent's confidence in China's ability to deal with the problems of Latin America and the world, respectively (Tables 3 and 4). The results are drawn from the 2015 survey. These questions were not asked in 2018. Since the purpose of this analysis is to assess the impact of the independent variables controlling for other effects in the model, the test statistic of concern is the odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}[B]$ ). "The odds ratio is an exact summary measure of the net multiplicative impact on the odds of an event for each unit increase in a given predictor and is, therefore, a multiplicative analog of the partial slope in linear regression" (DeMaris 1993, 1057)

**Table 1.** Opinion of China – 2015

| <i>Variable</i>  | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Wald</i> | <i>Sig</i> | <i>Exp(B)</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>Exports</i>   | 0.003    | 0.001             | 9.99        | 0.002      | 1.003         |
| <i>Imports</i>   | -0.001   | 0.001             | 141.076     | 0.001      | 0.989         |
| <i>Loans</i>     | -0.001   | 0.001             | 1.289       | 0.286      | 0.999         |
| <i>InvestCon</i> | -0.004   | 0.002             | 7.682       | 0.006      | 0.996         |
| <i>FTA</i>       | 0.363    | 0.065             | 31.157      | 0.001      | 1.438         |
| <i>ConfYears</i> | -0.039   | 0.006             | 37.178      | 0.001      | 0.961         |
| <i>Free</i>      | 0.002    | 0.015             | 0.012       | 0.914      | 1.002         |
| <i>Male</i>      | 0.087    | 0.036             | 5.715       | 0.017      | 1.091         |
| <i>Educ</i>      | 0.013    | 0.005             | 7.806       | 0.005      | 1.013         |
| <i>Age</i>       | -0.009   | 0.001             | 57.822      | 0.001      | 0.991         |

Notes: n = 14,548 pseudo-R squared = .030. Negative—31%; positive—69%

Table 1 reveals that a majority of Latin Americans had a positive opinion of China in 2015 (69 percent). This fits with

<sup>16</sup>Eighty percent of Freedom House funds are derived from the US government (Giannone 2010, 75)

<sup>17</sup>A variance inflation factor test was conducted to check for multicollinearity, and it was found not to be a problem. The data were weighted.

**Table 2.** Opinion of China – 2018

| <i>Variable</i>  | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Wald</i> | <i>Sig</i> | <i>Exp(B)</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>Exports</i>   | 0        | 0.001             | 0.001       | 0.973      | 1             |
| <i>Imports</i>   | 0.002    | 0.001             | 0.003       | 0.855      | 1             |
| <i>Loans</i>     | 0.003    | 0.001             | 5.722       | 0.017      | 1.003         |
| <i>InvestCon</i> | -0.008   | 0.001             | 29.836      | 0.001      | 0.992         |
| <i>FTA</i>       | 0.288    | 0.075             | 14.792      | 0.001      | 1.333         |
| <i>ConfYears</i> | -0.028   | 0.005             | 30.406      | 0.001      | 0.972         |
| <i>Free</i>      | 0.036    | 0.014             | 6.229       | 0.012      | 1.036         |
| <i>Male</i>      | 0.295    | 0.039             | 56.675      | 0.001      | 1.343         |
| <i>Educ</i>      | 0.005    | 0.005             | 115.676     | 0.001      | 1.056         |
| <i>Age</i>       | -0.006   | 0.001             | 25.344      | 0.001      | 0.994         |

Notes: n = 14,405 pseudo-R squared = .035. Negative 25%; positive—75%

the pattern revealed in Figure 1 above.<sup>18</sup> Of the ten variables, we find that eight of them are significant at the .10 or .05 level. Neither *Loans* nor *Free* is significant. Therefore, we can conclude for 2015 that Chinese loans by the China Development Bank and China-Export Import Bank had no effect on the public's opinion of China. Since the variable *Free* is not significant, this indicates that regime type is not a factor. This supports John Givens's (2011) argument that China treats all countries the same regardless of political and civil rights policies.

In 2015, an increase in exports to China increased the odds of having a positive opinion of China, while an increase in imports reduced the odds of the respondent having a positive opinion. Both are statistically significant but of limited effect, with less than a half a percent increase for every \$10 per capita change of exports for a positive view and a one percent increase in the odds of having a negative opinion of China for an increase in imports. Chinese investments and construction projects have a slightly negative effect on the odds of having a positive view of China. For respondents in those three countries with a free trade agreement with China, the odds of them having a positive view of China are 44 percent higher.

The most striking finding is the effect of Confucius Institutes on the popular opinion of China. This Chinese soft power program was designed for people to get to know and like China. According to the data, it has had the opposite effect. In 2015, the odds of having a negative opinion of China increased by 4 percent for every year that a Confucian Institute was in operation in that country and by 3 percent in 2018. More will be said about this in the conclusion.

In the 2018 survey, neither exports nor imports are significant. This further supports the supposition that general trade relations do little to nothing in shaping public opinion toward China. However, having a free trade agreement again increases the odds of having a favorable opinion, this time by 33 percent. Loans and investments and construction are both significant in 2018, with loans having a slight positive effect and investment and construction having a negative effect on public opinion. Interestingly the variable *Free* is significant in the 2018 survey and suggests that respondents in countries that are more like the United States are slightly more likely to have a positive view of China.

Finally, there is a clear gender gap when it comes to having a favorable opinion of China. Men are more likely than women to see China favorably. Those with higher levels of education are more likely to have a favorable opinion of China, while older people are less likely. People with higher levels of education are often more open to different cultures. The older generation is likely still influenced by the anti-communist orientation of Latin America during the cold war. China today is far from following the state-socialism advanced by communist countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is best described as a state-capitalist model. Nevertheless, the rule by the Communist Party still colors many people's perceptions.

The next two models address the respondent's view on the ability of China to deal with the problems of Latin America and with the problems of the world. In both cases, the majority of the population does not have confidence in China's ability to deal with the problems at either level. In contrast, in that same survey year, 57 percent of the respondents said that they had confidence in the US's ability to deal with the problems of Latin America, and 55 percent said that they had confidence in the ability of the United States to deal with the problems of the world. Unfortunately, these questions were not asked in the 2018 survey, so we cannot determine if China has made progress with its continued economic growth or that perhaps that confidence in the United States fell with the presidency of Donald Trump.

The results from Table 3 reveal the variables *Export*, *Imports*, *InvestCon*, *Free*, and *Age* were not significant. *Loans* have a slight positive effect and, there is and an education and gender gap in the results. The presence of a free trade agreement has an

<sup>18</sup>In Figure 1, those with a positive view are lower than the results found in Table 1. For all the models, those individuals who responded that they did not know their opinion of China were excluded from the study. In 2015, 27.5 percent responded, "Don't Know"



**Table 3.** China's ability to deal with Latin America's problems – 2015

| <i>Variable</i>  | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Wald</i> | <i>Sig</i> | <i>Exp(B)</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>Exports</i>   | 0        | 0.001             | 0.009       | 0.962      | 1             |
| <i>Imports</i>   | -0.001   | 0.001             | 1.161       | 0.281      | 0.999         |
| <i>Loans</i>     | 0.003    | 0.001             | 16.559      | 0.001      | 1.003         |
| <i>InvestCon</i> | 0.001    | 0.001             | 0.396       | 0.529      | 1.001         |
| <i>FTA</i>       | 0.632    | 0.056             | 125.542     | 0.001      | 1.881         |
| <i>ConfYears</i> | -0.037   | 0.006             | 43.332      | 0.001      | 0.963         |
| <i>Free</i>      | -0.003   | 0.012             | 0.047       | 0.829      | 0.997         |
| <i>Male</i>      | 0.142    | 0.032             | 20.206      | 0.001      | 1.152         |
| <i>Educ</i>      | 0.032    | 0.004             | 61.989      | 0.001      | 1.033         |
| <i>Age</i>       | 0        | 0.001             | 0.048       | 0.827      | 1             |

Notes: n = 16,592 pseudo-R squared = .028. No—55%; yes—45%

even larger positive effect on the perception of China's ability to deal with Latin America's problems than on a respondent's general opinion of China. Once again, the presence of a Confucian Institute had a negative effect, reducing the odds that a respondent would have confidence in China's ability to deal with the problems of Latin America by 4 percent for every year of operation of the CI. Table 4, the ability of China to deal with the problems of the world, is very similar to Table 3.

**Table 4.** China's ability to deal with world's problems – 2015

| <i>Variable</i>  | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Wald</i> | <i>Sig</i> | <i>Exp(B)</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>Exports</i>   | 0.001    | 0.001             | 1.143       | 0.285      | 1.001         |
| <i>Imports</i>   | 0.001    | 0.001             | 2.18        | 0.14       | 1.001         |
| <i>Loans</i>     | 0.002    | 0.001             | 11.171      | 0.001      | 1.002         |
| <i>InvestCon</i> | 0.004    | 0.001             | 1.11        | 0.292      | 1.001         |
| <i>FTA</i>       | 0.683    | 0.057             | 145.32      | 0.001      | 1.979         |
| <i>ConfYears</i> | -0.034   | 0.006             | 36.375      | 0.001      | 0.966         |
| <i>Free</i>      | -0.034   | 0.012             | 7.502       | 0.006      | 0.966         |
| <i>Male</i>      | 0.128    | 0.032             | 16.4        | 0.001      | 1.137         |
| <i>Educ</i>      | 0.04     | 0.004             | 93.95       | 0.001      | 1.041         |
| <i>Age</i>       | 0        | 0.001             | 0.133       | 0.715      | 1             |

Notes: n = 16,580 pseudo-R squared = .034. No—55%; yes—45%

However, regime type (*Free*) is significant and negative. The presence of a free trade agreement has an outsized positive effect. Finally, as in the previous three models, *ConfYears* is significant and has a modest negative effect (3 percent per year) on the perception of China's abilities to deal with the world's problems.

## Conclusion

China's economic activities have continued apace. Although the pandemic has slowed global trade, economic activities are quickly rebounding. Argentina's trade with China expanded 56 percent from 2007 to 2019, driven by exports of beef and soya. China even surpassed Brazil as Argentina's most important trade partner for part of 2020 (Sweigart and Cohen 2021). China remains the largest export and import partner for Brazil, Chile, and Peru. Investments have also continued, with billions of dollars being invested in major countries of the region for projects such as railway construction in Argentina, energy projects in Chile, and monorail systems in both Brazil and Colombia.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, from the analysis above, trade only has a minor effect on the popular perception of China. Countries that have found a market for their commodities in China do benefit economically, but the economic relationship fits the pattern of dependency as described by scholars such as André Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and Osvaldo Sunkel. This type of relationship makes many Latin American countries vulnerable and leaves them in a precarious position vis-à-vis China.

<sup>19</sup>Since 2019, China has invested \$5.8 billion in Argentina, \$5.4 billion in Brazil, \$7 billion in Chile, \$6.4 billion in Colombia, \$2.73 billion in Mexico, and \$7.98 billion in Peru.

Investments from China were shown to have a negative effect on the popular opinion of China. Chinese mining and petroleum activities have sparked protests in Ecuador and Peru. In addition to the environmental damage caused by these investments, modern mining and resource extraction are no longer labor intensive and thus do not provide many jobs for the local people. Furthermore, China has not hesitated to use its economic leverage to achieve its goals. Countries like Argentina, which are highly dependent on China for trade and financial backing, remain vulnerable to Chinese coercion. In 2015, President Macri of Argentina told China that he wanted to suspend the construction of two dams in southern Patagonia. The Chinese government informed him that all investments in Argentina were linked together, and the suspension of the dams would lead to a suspension of a Chinese railroad project that Macri favored. China also told Macri that it would reduce imports of Argentine soybeans by 30 percent. Macri quickly backtracked. Both Ecuador and Venezuela find themselves trapped in a situation where they must repay loans to China with oil. Ecuador has to pay for the faulty Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric dam project. Venezuela struggles to repay its \$20 billion debt to China in its oil for loans relationship as oil production in Venezuela has faltered (Sweigart and Cohen 2021).

The findings of this article are preliminary because they only account for a brief period in the history of China and Latin American relations. Nevertheless, the most important finding of this study is the effect of China's premier public diplomacy program, its Confucian Institutes, on the popular opinion of China in Latin America. The CI program which China developed as a means to enhance soft power is backfiring. Whereas the Chinese government hoped that their CIs would advance a narrative of solidarity in a harmonious world and promote a positive image of China, the evidence suggests that each year of operation of a CI in a country only reduces the odds of having a positive view of China. China has continued to open new CIs throughout Latin America with a new program in Uruguay in 2018 and in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador in 2019. Recall from figure 1 above that there is a sizable percentage of respondents who have yet to form an opinion about China. Evidence from the recently released 2020 Latinobarómetro survey does not bode well for China's CI program. After two years of activities from the CI in Uruguay, the evidence shows a 14 percent drop in those who had a positive view of China and a 25 percent increase in those who had a negative opinion. The percentage of the respondents in Uruguay who responded that they did not know their opinion of China dropped from 27 percent to 14 percent

China's CIs are not likely to sway 'the undecided' about China to a positive opinion and are likely to change the opinion of those who currently hold a positive view of China. Rudolph Kulver has observed "that economically and politically important countries with large publics suspicious of China seem to merit a large number of CIs, while nations with a largely positive public opinion toward China have fewer" (2014, 204). The evidence presented here suggests that this strategy is counterproductive in the long term, at least in Latin American countries

Why have CIs been so unsuccessful? In her study comparing a Confucian Institute to two private Chinese language schools in Costa Rica, Monica DeHart (2017) finds deficiencies in the pedagogical approach of the CI. In her field research over a period of five summers, she saw nothing in her observations that indicated an overt ideological agenda in the CI. Nevertheless, in comparison to the privately run Chinese language schools, the CI rarely addressed Chinese culture and focused more on pure language training. According to Dehart (2017, 194), the CI instructor she observed: "tended to draw upon characters from popular animated films (at that time Kung Fu Panda or Madagascar) to illustrate her points." DreamWorks Animation, the producers of Kung Fu Panda, is not known to address controversial topics.

According to Falk Hartig (2015), CIs suffer from the problem of credibility that emerges from an authoritarian government that seeks to strictly control the strategic narrative. Instead of introducing the 'real China' to the world, CIs promote a 'correct China.' This creates a credibility problem as the Chinese government provides the material for Chinese language training, and these materials consistently represent Chinese people in a positive light and describe very few social tensions in China.

Kennesaw State University (KSU), my home institution, used to host a CI. One of my students, Joe Aldridge, related to me the incongruity of an event he went to presented by KSU's CI. It was a cultural dance performance of the many ethnic groups in China. This included the Uyghurs, the ethnic group in China that is experiencing cultural genocide. According to Joe, there was no mention of human rights, repression, or any ethnic tension, just cheerful and happy dancers in their traditional costumes. "They seemed desperate to project a sense of harmony between the major ethnic groups in China that ran counter to the reports coming out of Xinjiang, which made the performance feel eerily dissonant."<sup>20</sup>

With certain topics off limits, such as Taiwan, Tibet, Tiananmen, and the genocide of the Uyghurs, CIs become propaganda machines and not soft power enhancers. The people of Latin America are generally connected to the rest of the world and have access to information about topics that the Chinese government would not like to address. Evidence from the 2018 Latinobarómetro survey shows that 90 percent of households have a cell phone, 46 percent have a smartphone, and 43 percent have a computer. Of those households that have a computer, 32 percent do not have a smartphone, and 30 percent of those that have a smartphone do not have a computer. This indicates that more than half of the population has access to a device that connects to the internet. In 2018, the World Bank reported that almost 67 percent of the region's population had

<sup>20</sup>The event took place in late 2018. Quote from Joseph C. Aldridge, email message to author, April 29, 2022.

access to the internet.<sup>21</sup> According to Nye (2011, 83), "[s]oft power depends upon credibility, and when governments are perceived as manipulative, and information is seen as propaganda, credibility is destroyed." Therefore, Confucian Institutes are counterproductive to other aspects of China that enhance its soft power, like its striking economic success over the last 20 years.

The United States should not worry that the countries of Latin America will embrace China to the detriment of the United States. Concerns of R. Evan Ellis (2014) that China is replacing the United States in Latin America are overblown. Jake Gilstrap's (2021) view that China is making a leftist/corrupt connection with Latin American countries is also exaggerated.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, China is politically and economically at odds with Latin America, and even more so today since the ascendancy of Xi Jinping.

Xi has been moving the Chinese economy away from the liberal market reforms of his predecessors. Chinese capitalists like Jack Ma, who were once ubiquitous, have disappeared from public view (Zhong 2021). Xi has also spoken of the Communist Party pursuing common prosperity for all (Buckley et al., 2021). In contrast, Latin Americans remain committed to the market economy. In the 2020 Latinobarómetro survey, 65 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the "Market economy is the only system with which the country can become a developed country." Even in a country often perceived as socialist, such as Bolivia, we find 70 percent supporting the market economy. As the Chinese Communist Party exerts more control over the Chinese economy, it also gains more political control.

China has turned in a more authoritarian direction politically under Xi as he prepares for a precedent-breaking third term as president. Chinese authoritarianism does not match current governing structures in Latin America. The democratic government continues to be the norm throughout the region, with only two exceptions among the countries in this study, Nicaragua and Venezuela.<sup>23</sup> Again from the 2020 Latinobarómetro, 55 percent of Latin Americans say that democracy is preferable to all other forms of government, and only 15 percent said that under some circumstances would, an authoritarian government be preferable.

China has displaced the United States as the most important economic partner for many countries in the region. Nevertheless, the United States remains a strong second in many countries and the most important trade partner for Mexico. Large-scale trade activities alone by China are not a threat to US dominance in the region. Dinorah Azpuru (2016) has shown that Latin Americans continue to perceive the United States as the most influential country in the region, and she concludes that the United States will likely continue to be so. She does caution that the "U.S. needs to make more efforts to reach out to more informed and educated Latin Americans who, at the end of the day, will more likely be in charge of government and businesses in the region" (Azpuru 2016, 466). The United States remains broadly popular in Latin America, and as long as the United States remains positively engaged in the region, its influence can continue well into the future.<sup>24</sup> From the 2020 Latinobarómetro survey, a majority of Latin Americans (56 percent) have a favorable or very favorable opinion of China. Nevertheless, a much larger percentage (72 percent) have a favorable opinion of the United States, with 20 percent compared to 14 percent for China having a very favorable opinion. China has a long way to go to overtake the United States in Latin America. The Confucius Institutes will not help close that gap.

## References

- Armony, Ariel C. and Nicolás Velásquez. 2015. "Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Latin America: An Analysis of Online Discourse." *Journal of Chinese Political Science*. 20: 319-347. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-015-9365-z>
- Azpuru, Dinorah. 2016. "Is US Influence Dwindling in Latin America? Citizens' Perspectives." *The Latin Americanist*. December: 447-472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tla.12092>
- Buckley, Chris, Alexandra Stevenson and Cao Li. 2021. "Warning of Income Gap, Xi Tells China's Tycoons to Share Wealth" *New York Times* November 11, 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/07/world/asia/china-xi-common-prosperity.html> (Assessed April 28, 2022).
- Carreras, Miguel. 2017. "Public attitudes toward an emerging China in Latin America." *Issues & Studies: A Social Science Quarterly on China, Taiwan, and East Asian Affairs* 53 (1): 1-28.

<sup>21</sup><https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=ZJ>

<sup>22</sup>Moreover, Gilstrap's analysis is flawed and suffers from many factual mistakes. He identifies both Chilean President Sebastián Piñera and Peruvian President Alan García as leftists. Although García was left of center in his first term as president in 1985, he had clearly embraced the right-of-center neoliberal economic model for his second term in 2006. To label the billionaire Piñera as a leftist is risible. He also asserts that Mexican President Felipe Calderon was hostile to the United States without any evidence. In 2007, Calderon ordered 30,000 military personnel into the fight against drug traffickers, a policy clearly aligned with US interests.

<sup>23</sup>Cuba is not considered in this study. Freedom House classified Nicaragua as "not free" in 2019 and Venezuela "as not" free in 2017. Nevertheless, support for democracy is still high in both countries, 56 percent in Nicaragua and 73 percent in Venezuela (see <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>)

<sup>24</sup>By positive engagement, I mean such things as the US government attending all multilateral functions, maintaining regular country visits by senior State Department officials, and having high-level representation at presidential inaugurations. Vice President Harris's attendance at the inauguration of Xiomara Castro, the first female president of Honduras, in January 2022 is an excellent example. Expanding the Peace Corps in Latin America is another means of positive engagement (see Nisley 2018).

- Casanova, Carlos, Le Xia and Romina Ferreira. 2016. "Measuring Latin America's export dependency on China." *Journal of Chinese Economic and Foreign Trade Studies* 9 (3): 213-233. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/10.1108/JCEFTS-08-2016-0022>
- Cassey, Nicholas and Clifford Krauss. 2018. "It Doesn't Matter if Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid." *New York Times*. December 24, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/world/americas/ecuador-china-dam.html> (Assessed May 22, 2022).
- Cui, Shoujun. 2016. "China's New Commitments to LAC and Its Geopolitical Implications." In *China and Latin America in Transition: Policy Dynamics, Economic Commitments, and Social Impacts*, edited by Shoujun Cui and Manuel Pérez García, 15-33. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- DeHart, Monica. 2017. "Who Speaks for China? Translating Geopolitics through Language Institutes in Costa Rica" *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 13 (2): 180-204. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17932548-12341354>
- Demaris, Alfred. 1993. "Odds versus Probabilities in Logit Equations: A Reply to Roncek." *Social Forces* 7 (4): 1057-1065. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2580130>
- Eichenauer, Vera Z., Andreas Fuchs and Lutz Brückner. 2021. "The effects of trade, aid, and investment on China's image in Latin America." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 49 (2): 483-498. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2020.08.005>
- Ellis, R. Evan. 2009. *China in Latin America: The Whats & Wherefores*. Lynne Rienner: Boulder, CO.
- Ellis, R. Evan. 2014. *China on the Ground in Latin America*. Palgrave MacMillan: New York
- Giannone, Diego. 2010. "Political and Ideological Aspects in the Measurement of Democracy: The Freedom House Case." *Democratization* (17) 1: 68-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340903453716>
- Gilstrap, Jake. 2021. "Chinese Confucius Institutes in Latin America: Tools of Soft Power" Perry Center Occasional Paper, October National Defense University, the US Department of Defense. [https://williamjperrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication\\_associated\\_files/Chinese%20Confucius%20Institutes%20in%20LATAM.pdf](https://williamjperrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication_associated_files/Chinese%20Confucius%20Institutes%20in%20LATAM.pdf) (Accessed April 30, 2022)
- Givens, John Wagner. 2011. "The Beijing Consensus is Neither: China as a Non-Ideological Challenge to International Norms." *St Antony's International Review* 6 (2): 10-25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26226762>
- Hubbert, Jennifer. 2019. *China in the World: An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power. And Globalization*. University of Hawai'i Press: Honolulu.
- Hartig Falk. 2015. "Communicating China to the World: Confucius Institutes and China's Strategic Narratives." *Politics* 35 (3-4): 245-258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12093>
- Hartig, Falk. 2016. *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Rise of the Confucius Institute*. Routledge, New York.
- Hearn, Adrian H. and José Luis León-Manríquez (eds). 2011. *China Engages Latin America: Tracing the Trajectory*. Lynne Rienner: Boulder, CO.
- Hu-DeHart, Evelyn. 2010. "Indispensable Enemy or Convenient Scapegoat? A Critical Examination of Sinophobia in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1870s to 1930s." In *The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean* edited by Walton Look Lai and Chee-Beng Tan, 65-102. Boston: Brill.
- Huang, Wei-hao and Jun Xiang. 2019. "Pursuing Soft Power through the Confucius Institute: a Large-N Analysis" *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24 (2): 249-266. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9571-6>
- Jacques, Leo M. Dambourges. 1974. "The Chinese Massacre in Torreon (Coahuila) in 1911" *Arizona and the West* 16 (3):233-246. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40168453>
- Jenkins, Rhys. 2019. *How China is Reshaping the Global Economy: Development Impacts in Africa and Latin America*. Oxford University Press: Oxford
- Jenkins, Rhys. Forthcoming. "China's Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America: What has Changed?" *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026211047871>
- Kahn, Carrie. 2018. "China Lures Taiwan's Latin American Allies." *NPR*. October 13, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/13/654179099/china-lures-taiwans-latin-american-allies> (Assessed October 24, 2021).
- Koleski, Katherine and Alec Blivas 2018, *China's engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean*, Staff research report / U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China%27s%20Engagement%20with%20Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean>
- Kulver, Randolph. 2014 "The Sage as Strategy: Nodes, Networks, and the Quest for Geopolitical Power in the Confucius Institute" *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7 (2): 192-209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12046>
- Kulver, Randy. 2017. "Chinese Culture in a Global Context: The Confucius Institute as a Geo Cultural Force." In *China's Global Engagement: Cooperation, Competition and Influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein, 389-416. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press: 389-416.
- Lee Myers, Steven. 2021. "Taiwan Loses Nicaragua as Ally as Tensions with China Rise" *New York Times*. December 9, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/10/world/asia/taiwan-nicaragua-china.html?searchResultPosition=1> (Accessed May

10, 2022).

- Li Mingjiang. 2008. "China Debates Soft Power." *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2 (2): 287–308. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48615>
- Lo, Joe Tin-yau and Suyan Pan. 2016. "Confucius institutes and China's soft power: Practices and paradoxes." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 46 (4): 512–532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2014.916185>
- Lochery, Neill. 2014. *Brazil: The Fortunes of War*. New York: Basic Books
- Londoño, Ernesto. 2018. "From a space station in Argentina, China expands its reach in Latin America." *New York Times*, July 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/world/americas/china-latin-america.html?searchResultPosition=1> (accessed on 29 October 2020).
- López, Kathleen. 2014. "In Search of Legitimacy: Chinese Immigrants and Latin American Nation Building." In *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America 1850-1950* edited by Nicola Foote and Michael Goebel, 182-204. Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida.
- Mann, Charles C. 2011. *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.
- Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- Nisley, Thomas J. 2018. *The Peace Corps and Latin America: In the Last Mile of US Foreign Policy*. Boulder, CO. Lexington Books.
- Nye Jr., Joseph S. 2002. *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nye Jr., Joseph S 2011. *The Future of Power*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Poggio Teixeira, C.G. 2012. *Brazil, the United States, and the South American subsystem: Regional politics and the absent empire*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Serrano, Miguel. 2018. "China Fills Trump's Empty Seat at Latin America Summit." *New York Times*. April 13, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/opinion/china-trump-pence-summit-lima-latin-america.html?searchResultPosition=1> (Accessed October 24, 2021).
- Slack, Edward R. (2009) "The Chinos in New Spain: A Corrective Lens for a Distorted Image." *Journal of World History* 2 (1): 35-67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40542720>
- Sullivan, Mark P. and Thomas Lum. 2019. "China's Engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean." *Congressional Research Service* (Updated April 11, 2019) <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10982/3> (Accessed May 10, 2022)
- Sweigart, Emilie and Gabriel Cohen. 2021. "Latin America's Evolving Relationships with China." *Americas Quarterly*. October 19, 2021. <https://americasquarterly.org/article/latin-americas-evolving-relationships-with-china/> (Accessed May 10, 2022).
- Zakaria, Fareed. 2009. *The Post American World*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Zhicheng Phil Xu and Yu Zhang. 2020. "Can Chinese aid win the hearts and minds of Africa's local population?" *Economic Modelling* 90 (August): 322-330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2019.12.017>
- Zhong, Raymond. 2021. "A Chastened Alibaba Tones Down Its Singles Day Retail Bonanza." *New York Times* November 10, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/10/technology/china-alibaba-singles-day.html> (Accessed May 10, 2022)
- Zhou, Ying and Sabrina Luk. 2016. "Establishing Confucius Institutes: a tool for promotion China's soft Power?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 25 (100): 628-642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1132961>