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Chinese Confucius Institutes in Latin America: Tools of Soft Power

By Jake Gilstrap



**WILLIAM J. PERRY CENTER
FOR HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE STUDIES**

National Defense University

Cover concept: China has established Confucius Institutes (represented by flags) in numerous Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Credit: Vivian Edwards, Perry Center

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Introduction

China, over the course of the 21st Century, has grown immensely economically and militarily. In 2020, it held the second highest global total GDP at \$13.4 trillion, behind only the United States at \$20.49 trillion¹ and the second highest military spending in the world at \$252 billion, behind, once again, only the United States at \$778 billion.² However, despite the U.S. maintaining a significant lead in each of these categories, the general global consensus is that China is catching up with the U.S. and will overtake it economically as soon as 2028.³ This estimate paints the states as two competitors engaged in an economic race for supremacy, with the U.S. desperately trying to stave off usurpation by the Asian power. As the U.S. welcomes a new administration and withdraws from its 20-year war in Afghanistan, it finally appears ready to embrace the 21st Century as one of great power competition with China and one it is committed to “winning.”⁴ While, typically, competition with China is framed as being centered in the Indo-Pacific, Latin America is emerging as a key region in the global power struggle between China and the U.S. and will be one of the most telling indicators of China’s ascent.

Latin America, which has historically been a stalwart of American influence and power, has in the last two decades experienced a significant shift towards China. Since the turn of the millennium, Latin American states have increasingly engaged with China economically and diplomatically, highlighting the Chinese Communist Party’s soft power efforts to gain more influence in the region. While the tool kit of these soft power efforts has typically taken the form of diplomatic state visits, foreign direct investment, infrastructure projects, bilateral trade agreements, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is also attempting to employ cultural soft power techniques to create a more holistic and pervasive system of influence. To achieve this cultural influence mission, Beijing has utilized its controversial

¹ “Ten Countries with the highest GDP in 2020: US is No 1, find out where India ranks.” CNBC, March 18, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/photos/economy/10-countries-with-the-highest-gdp-in-2020-us-is-no-1-find-out-where-india-ranks-5503891.htm>

² “Countries with the highest military spending worldwide in 2020.” *Statista*, May 6, 2021.

³ Cheng, Evelyn, Lee, Yen N. “New chart shows China could overtake the U.S. as the world’s largest economy earlier than expected. *CNBC*, January 31, 2021. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/01/new-chart-shows-china-gdp-could-overtake-us-sooner-as-covid-took-its-toll.html>

⁴ Tharoor, Ishaan. “Biden’s foreign policy aims to ‘win the 21st century’.” *Washington Post*, April 28, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/04/28/biden-foreign-policy-100-days-speech/>

Confucius Institutes (CIs), establishing 548 throughout the world as of January 2019,⁵ a number which has likely grown in the last two years but one for which there was no readily available data. While these cultural and language centers have received significant attention from American media, government, and academia, the presence and implications of CIs in Latin America has been little discussed. This paper addresses the lack of coverage of this topic by examining the motivating factors behind Chinese-Latin American engagement, what Confucius Institutes are and how they function as tools of Chinese soft power, and what its implications are for the U.S. as it pivots its focus to great power competition.

This paper will be divided into three sections with the first exploring the existing literature on soft power, discourse surrounding Confucius Institutes, and the recent history of Chinese-Latin American engagement. Then it will investigate why Confucius Institutes open in Latin America by tracking when they opened, the leaders who were in power during their opening, the economic context surrounding their opening, and the physical location of the institutes. Finally, this paper will conclude by discussing the future of Confucius Institutes in Latin America and what the implications are for U.S. foreign policy.



Photo title: China has opened Confucius Institutes in 19 Latin American and Caribbean nations.

Photo credit: CGTN News

Soft Power

To understand the importance and implication of Chinese Confucius Institutes as tools of soft power, one must first understand what “soft power” is and how it differs from more traditional hard power. The existing literature on the subject broadly defines soft power as “when one country gets other coun-

⁵ Jakhar, Pratik. “Confucius Institutes: The growth of China’s controversial cultural branch.” *BBC*, September 7, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49511231>

tries to want what it wants”⁶ by shaping the other country’s beliefs and preferences. This is understood to receive less resistance and have a longer lasting effect than hard power methods,⁷ such as military intervention, that seek to impose one state’s will on another. Soft power seeks to shape other states’ preferences primarily through the use of culture, ideology, language, and institutions. While a newer concept than hard power, soft power has been used throughout the 20th Century, particularly prior to World War II and during the Cold War, by the U.S. In the 1930s, under Franklin Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Policy,” the U.S.’s Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) conducted a propaganda film campaign to counteract the imperialist image of the U.S. in Latin America and to create “hemispheric solidarity” to prevent the region from allying with the Axis powers.⁸ Additionally, in the 1980s the American media system produced 6-7% of all films worldwide but occupied around 50% of the global screen time.⁹ While this is not necessarily an intentional propaganda effort, American films transmit American culture and ideology by producing films that illustrate distinctly “American” beliefs such as democracy, capitalism, and “freedom.” For example, the 1985 classic, *Rocky IV*, portrayed boxer Rocky Balboa as a hardworking, honest American underdog seeking to avenge the death of his friend while the Soviet antagonist, Drago, was shown as a conniving and untrustworthy “bad guy.”¹⁰ This led to American culture and an idealistic picture of the U.S. reaching wide global audiences, encouraging populations to view the U.S. and its culture in a favorable light while simultaneously discrediting the Soviets. Additionally, English language programs, such as the global nonprofit organization the Education Development Center (EDC), seek to spread the English language but also build cultural ties to local foreign communities. The EDC seeks to accomplish this through fostering “lasting solutions to improve education, promote health, and expand economic opportunity” in communities with “vulnerable and underserved populations” in over 80 countries across the world.¹¹ This then perpetuates a positive and humanitarian image of the U.S., in addition to creating generations of English speakers that will be better able to consume American media and culture and to engage with the U.S. economically and diplomatically.

Chinese Confucius Institutes

The Confucius Institute initiative was started in 2004 by the Chinese Ministry of Education, which is also known as Hanban.¹² It establishes institutes for language and cultural development on the campuses of partner universities all across the world, with the most recent tally estimating that there are 548 insti-

⁶ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. “Soft Power.” *Foreign Policy*, Autumn 1990, No. 80, p. 166.

⁷ Nye, p. 167.

⁸ “‘Good Neighbor’ Films: Productions of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs.” *Indiana University Libraries: Inter-American Films*. <https://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/IULMIA/exhibits/show/world-war-ii-propaganda-films/ociaa>

⁹ Nye, p. 169.

¹⁰ Stallone, Sylvester. *Rocky IV*, 1985.

¹¹ Education Development Center, <https://www.edc.org/about>.

¹² Horsley, Jamie P. “It’s time for a new policy on Confucius institutes.” *Brookings Institute*, April 1, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/its-time-for-a-new-policy-on-confucius-institutes/>

tutes across the globe.¹³ The United States branch of this program, the Confucius Institute U.S. Center, is a nonprofit organization that, in its own words, supports the “teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture in the United States and enable people-to-people exchanges, deepening cross-cultural understanding and language development.”¹⁴ In the friendliest light, the CIs are true to this stated mission and have no ulterior motives. In fact, they are actually welcomed by many universities because Hanban shares in the start-up and operating costs, provides the language teaching material, pays the salaries and travel expenses of the language instructors, and provides funding for research grants and study abroad trips to China.¹⁵ This is extremely helpful for poorer, less well funded universities that do not have the financial ability to provide the language, research, and cultural opportunities that the Confucius Institutes bring. This is even more true in less developed countries in which the federal governments do not have the funds to support the basic necessities for these universities, let alone provide the enriching opportunities that CIs do. Thus, in this sense, CIs truly are a legitimate and beneficial “network of institutes around the world that provide resources for Chinese language instruction and cultural outreach” to universities that would not normally be able to afford them.¹⁶

However, there are numerous complaints and concerns about the institutes’ ties to the Chinese government and potential service as a propaganda tool. These apprehensions generally stem from the CIs’ official sponsorship by the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) Ministry of Education and its ties to the CCP’s United Front Work Department which seeks to “quell dissent within China through clamping down on political ideals and social philosophies that might threaten CCP control and international efforts to improve China’s public image.”¹⁷ The CI program is suspected of being a part of the United Front Work Department because the current chair of the “Confucius Institutes Headquarters council”, Liu Yandong, was the chair of the United Front Work Department from 2002 – 2007.¹⁸ These ties to the CCP and the Chinese bureaucratic state apparatus have generated skeptics, particularly within the U.S., who distrust the program and have accused it of being a shameless program of CCP propaganda and espionage and a way for the Chinese state to monitor Chinese students.¹⁹ These more conspiratorial concerns are held by American politicians and government leaders, who warn of the institutes’ usage as “a platform for China’s intelligence collection and political agenda”²⁰ and has led to the U.S. Senate unanimously passing a bill that would restrict federal funding to universities with CIs unless the university could ensure it had full control over the program.²¹

¹³ Jakhar, Pratik, 2019.

¹⁴ Confucius Institute U.S. Center, link: <https://www.ciuscenter.org/about-cius-center/our-organization/>

¹⁵ Horsley. “It’s time for a new policy on Confucius institutes.”

¹⁶ Kluver, Randy. “Chinese Culture in a Global Context: The Confucius Institute as a Geo-Cultural Force.” *China’s Global Engagement*, *Brookings Institution Press*, p. 393.

¹⁷ Hubbert, Jennifer. *China in the World: An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, and Globalization*, 12.

¹⁸ Hubbert, p. 12.

¹⁹ Peterson, Rachele, “China is Rebranding its Confucius Institutes.” *Real Clear Education*, July 22, 2020.

²⁰ Redden. “Closing a Confucius Institute, at Congressmen’s Request.” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 9, 2018. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/09/texas-am-cuts-ties-confucius-institutes-response-congressmens-concerns>

²¹ Reuters Staff. “U.S. Senate backs bill to clamp down on China-funded Confucius Institutes.” *Reuters*, March 5, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-confucius/u-s-senate-backs-bill-to-clamp-down-on-china-funded-confucius-institutes-idUSKBN2AX20L>



Photo title: Leftist governments in Latin America have been particularly amenable to opening Confucius Institutes in their countries. In this photo, former Bolivian President Evo Morales and Chinese President Xi Jinping participate in a signing ceremony in Beijing.

Photo credit: Dialogo Magazine

While these heavier allegations are potentially overblown, there is also a well-founded concern that CIs' presence in universities can compromise the intellectual and academic integrity of these organizations. This concern stems from the CIs control of recruiting, hiring, and training the academic staff for the institutes, without input from the local host universities,²² and their control over the curriculum.²³ For example, when the Hanban first attempted to open a CI at Stanford University it offered the university \$4 million to create the CI and fund a fully endowed professorship; however, the professor would be prohibited from engaging in topics that the Chinese state deemed sensitive, such as Taiwan, Tibet, or Tiananmen Square.²⁴ Stanford did not accept this offer, but did eventually accept a nearly identical offer whose only alteration was that the funded professorship would be on Chinese classical poetry because it was unlikely to facilitate discussion of sensitive topics.²⁵ While this is only one deal whose details happen to have been made public, many of the contracts between universities and Hanban possess confidentiality clauses that shroud the details of the deals in mystery and call in to question what stipulations the Chinese government attach to the contracts. In fact, of 90 CI agreements that the U.S. Government

²² Hubbert, p. 18.

²³ Redden, Elizabeth. "Closing a Confucius Institute, at Congressmen's Request." *Inside Higher Ed*, April 9, 2018. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/09/texas-am-cuts-ties-confucius-institutes-response-congressmens-concerns>

²⁴ Hubbert, p. 15.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 15.

Accountability Office analyzed, 46% of them possessed confidentiality agreements that obscured the specifications of the deals leaving many to wonder if and what strings were attached to them. The controversy surrounding CIs in the U.S. has culminated in the closure of over half of the CIs in the U.S.²⁶

Furthermore, even if CIs do not actively detract from the academic integrity of universities or serve as espionage centers for the CCP, they are admittedly key facets of the Chinese state's soft power campaign. Language used by Chinese state officials, such as Xi Jinping's 2013 articulation that China should "disseminate Chinese culture in a popular way" and "popularize our cultural spirit across countries as well as across time and space"²⁷ has clearly indicated that the CCP wishes to export its culture throughout the global community. Additionally, Li Changchun, chair of the Ideology and Propaganda Small Group of the Central Committee, has openly stated that the CI project "plays an important role in the enhancement of China's soft power"²⁸ and subsequently serve as a primary driver for the export of Chinese culture. This soft power strategy seeks to augment the state's "creativity, influence, and public trust" in the long term throughout the globe,²⁹ creating a world in which Chinese goals are supported by other states, not because of Chinese power, but because these states genuinely want the same ends as China. This is the true aim and potential of the CI program. By targeting the impressionable young educational class of today's world, it seeks to create a generation of future leaders who not only view China in a favorable light,³⁰ but that actively views the world in a way that aligns with Chinese interests and ultimately supports Chinese foreign policy aims. It is this aim that warrants U.S. attention and a response, particularly as many CIs programs in Latin America approach their 10-year anniversary and new ones continue to open.

Chinese-Latin American Ties

Prior to the opening of CIs in Latin America, the region and China experienced years of increased economic engagement that was driven primarily by a shift in U.S. foreign policy, Chinese strategic needs, and the region's need for economic investment. Historically, Latin America has been under U.S. influence and firmly situated in its sphere of influence. Throughout the Cold War, this relationship was driven by the U.S.'s attempts to curb the spread of communism. Widespread cultural aversion to communism in Latin America, as a result of its predominately Catholic population, which is antithetical to communism's atheistic ideology, led the region to fall in line with the U.S.'s anti-communism strategy, especially in "anticommunist national security states" like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.³¹ Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. and Latin America increased their economic engagement, resource rich Latin America depending on exports to the U.S. to power its economies and the economi-

²⁶ Horsley.

²⁷ Kluver, p. 398.

²⁸ Kluver, p. 399.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 399.

³⁰ Hubbert, p. 13.

³¹ Watson, Cynthia. "Concentrated Interests: China's Involvement with Latin American Economies." *China's Global Engagement*, Brookings Institution Press, pp 127.

cally expanding U.S. seeking resources and free trade to continue its growth. This was characterized by Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton's efforts to establish the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)³² and the "Washington Consensus" policy of international trade, free market economic theory, and democratic principles.³³ However, despite the initial promise of economic engagement and investment from the U.S., the tragic events on September 11, 2001 drew the U.S. focus away from the region and to the Middle East instead, leaving Latin America in search of a new economic partner.³⁴

This set back in U.S.-Latin American relations coincided with China's increasing economic strength and desire to begin investing abroad.³⁵ China, led by President Hu Jintao, increasingly saw Latin America as an area for potential economic investment because of the region's ability to meet China's growing demands for foodstuffs and natural resources.³⁶ This would become and remains the primary impetus for Chinese interest in Latin America as it seeks to gain access to and trade with industries producing energy and minerals that will power the continued growth of the Chinese economy, import foodstuffs to feed its enormous population, and invest in infrastructure that will facilitate Latin American exports more easily reaching China.³⁷ The Asian power believes that through bilateral trade agreements with the region, it can achieve energy self-sufficiency and establish a long lasting and fruitful relationship with Latin America.

Latin America welcomes Chinese investment and engagement because it seeks to finally have an economic breakthrough of sustained development. It plans to achieve this through the continued export of natural resources, a sector in which it has a comparative advantage, seeking to become a key global exporter through utilization of the investment and trade opportunities China offers.³⁸ Latin American nations, like Argentina for example, have had difficulties securing investment or loans from the U.S. or western financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank because of its history of defaulting and failed previous investment ventures. China, however, has been more willing to extend loans and investment opportunities to these states, especially for infrastructure projects. This is an area in which Latin American nations need to improve significantly in order to achieve long term economic growth and China is willing to facilitate these advancements. However, Chinese interest in these projects is not altruistic as "the aim of development was to get exports to ports that would then ship them to China rather than projects decided upon through negotiations between Chinese

³² Weintraub, Sidney. "U.S.-Latin American Economic Relations." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 1, Special Issue: US-Latin American Relations (Spring, 1997), pp. 59.

³³ Watson, p. 128.

³⁴ Watson, p. 133.

³⁵ Gioffreda, Camilo. "La estación especial china y su incidencia en la defensa nacional argentina." *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad*, Vol 14 (2), July-December 2019, pp 189.

³⁶ Watson, p. 132.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 124.

³⁸ Phillips, Nicola. "Re-ordering the Region: China, Latin America, and the Western Hemisphere." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, April 2011, No. 90 (April 2011), p. 92.

companies and the Latin American host governments or communities.”³⁹ This cuts out the government’s ability to offer the projects to local companies, and while on the surface these projects appear to create significant job opportunities for the host communities, they in fact often exclusively employ Chinese workers from abroad, as has been the case in BRI projects in other parts of the world.⁴⁰ Additionally, many of the loans China grants countries are considered predatory and have led to Chinese companies or the state itself possessing ownership of the infrastructure and surrounding lands when partner governments are unable to repay the loans, as is what happened in Sri Lanka.⁴¹

In summary, it is clear that China and Latin America have increased their economic engagement and plan to continue growing their relationship moving forward. Yet, there should be concerns surrounding the actual benefits this relationship brings Latin America, because it is not one founded on mutual benefit as was hoped for,⁴² but instead a “center-periphery” economic model that borders on mercantilism.⁴³ In this relationship China seeks to utilize the infrastructure it helps construct, like transportation, electricity, telecommunication and finance “to facilitate favorable flows of commerce and transfers of wealth from the global periphery to the Chinese center.”⁴⁴ This ironically mirrors and is more pronounced than the unequal relationship that Latin America had/has with the U.S. and from which it tried to distance itself. Therefore, as the region grows tired of the nature of its relationship with China and starts to experience some of the exploitative tactics that have been witnessed in other regions that have participated in the BRI, while the benefits of the relationship more heavily favor China, the partners might disengage. Thus, the potential divergence of the region from China, fueled by local animosity, bitterness, and resistance to the Chinese presence in the region, will increase the importance of China’s attempts to create deeper cultural ties in the region. This heightens the importance of China’s CI program as the current flagship project of its soft power and cultural influence strategy that seeks to bridge the gap between the two cultures and ensure a relationship for generations to come. In order for the U.S. to better gauge just how deep these ties are, in which countries they are the strongest, and what might be next for them, we must look at the CI program and analyze the impetus for institutes’ founding in each state by looking at the greater context surrounding their opening.

Hypothesis and Observable Implications

After having discussed the existing literature on soft power, Confucius Institutes, and the Chinese-Latin American relationship, this paper will now attempt to contextualize the environment surrounding the opening of CIs in Latin America through three primary lenses: 1) the political affiliation of the host

³⁹ Watson, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Chandran, Nyshka. “China can make its Belt and Road project more successful if it taps locals, experts say.” *CNBC*, September 14, 2018. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/14/china-must-do-more-to-tap-locals-in-belt-and-road-initiative-panel.html>

⁴¹ Abi-Habib, Maria. “In Hock to China, Sri Lanka Gave Up Territory.” *New York Times*, June 26, 2018.

⁴² Watson, p. 145.

⁴³ Ellis, Evan. “Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

country's leader and his/her history of bad governance; 2) an economic comparison of bilateral trade the year of a CI's opening and the next year; and 3) the geostrategic importance of the city in which the institute is opened. My findings suggest that rather than one individual factor being a primary indicator of institutes' openings, it is a culmination of these factors that leads to the founding of a CI. Therefore, for the U.S. to monitor and predict the future opening of institutes, it should focus on locations that are a nexus of these points. Furthermore, as stated previously, I opine that in the long term, the Chinese state hopes to create a generation of future leaders that will support its international ascent and foreign policy aims, with the primary one being the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan. Additionally, I will state why it is relevant to U.S. foreign policy ambitions.

Research Methodology

To begin looking at the implications of CIs in Latin America, I first created a list of all of the CIs in Latin America and the Caribbean, of which there are 43,⁴⁵ and their founding date. I then researched the political leaders of each administration during the opening of the CIs and their political affiliations. By doing this, I hoped to see if political ideology was a determining factor in a state's desire to have a CI and if this was an equally important factor for China to reciprocate interest in opening a CI in this state. Additionally, I researched the economic relationships between states with CI's and China to see if there was a marked change in trade after the CI's founding that would indicate that the CI was a reward for an improved economic relationship or a prerequisite to having a closer relationship. Lastly, I looked at cities in which CIs opened to observe if there was a specific type of city in which China preferred to open its CIs. This paper does not claim to be exhaustive as there were seven institutes to which I was unable to find their founding date. Instead, this is intended to be a broad overview of three trends that are potential indicators of why certain countries and universities receive CIs and others do not. Additionally, this study does not claim that its results are indicative causes of anything but that the factors are closely correlated and warrant further study.

Results

Table 1 tracks the founding date and state leader during the CIs opening. Image 2 is a data sheet tracking the trade relationship between the host country and China during the year of the CI opening and the year following it. Images 3A and 3B illustrate the physical location of each CI in Latin America.

Analysis - Political Leaders

Of the 36 CIs for which I could find an opening date 26, or 72%, of them opened when a "leftist" leader was in power. If we modify this number to include Mexico, whose president at the time, Felipe Calderon, was not a leftist but did have a somewhat tense relationship with the U.S. because of the immigra-

⁴⁵ "Confucius Institutes Around the World – 2021." Dig Mandarin, February 22, 2021. <https://www.digmandarin.com/confucius-institutes-around-the-world.html>

Table 1: CI Founding Leader & Host Country Leader Index

Country	University Name	Est. Year	President / Prime Minister	Political Affiliation
Argentina	CI @ Univ. of Buenos Aires	2009	Cristina Fernández	Left
Argentina	CI @ Nat. Univ. of La Plata	2009	Cristina Fernández	Left
Argentina	CI @ Nat. Univ. of Cordoba	Oct-20	Cristina Fernández	Left
Bahamas	CI @ Univ. of Bahamas	2009	Hubert Ingraham	Center
Barbados	CI @ Univ. of West Indies, West Hill Campus	2015	Freundel Stuart	Left
Bolivia	CI @ Univ. of San Simon	2011	Evo Morales	Left
Brazil	CI @ Sao Paulo State Univ.	2008	Lula da Silva	Left
Brazil	Business CI @ FAAP	?		
Brazil	CI @ Fed Univ. of Minas Gerais	2013	Dilma Rousseff	Left
Brazil	CI @ Univ. of Pernambuco	?		
Brazil	CI @ Fed Univ. of Rio Grand Do Sul	?		
Brazil	CI @ Univ. of Brasilia	2010	Lula da Silva	Left
Brazil	CI @ Pontifical Catholic Univ. of Rio de Janeiro	2011	Lula da Silva	Left
Brazil	CI @ State Univ. of Campinas	2015	Dilma Rousseff	Left
Brazil	CI @ State Univ. of Pará	?		
Brazil	CI @ Fed. Univ. of Ceará	2019	Jair Bolsonaro	Center
Brazil	Confuc. Inst. Of Chinese Medicine at Fed Univ. of Goiás	?		
Chile	CI @ Univ. of St. Thomas	2008	Michelle Bachelet	Left
Chile	CI @ Catholic Univ.	2009	Michelle Bachelet	Left
Chile	CI @ Univ. of La Frontera	2020	Sebastion Piñera	Left
Colombia	CI in Medellin	2010	Juan Manuel Santos	Center
Colombia	CI @ Univ. of Los Andes	2007	Alvaro Uribe	Right
Colombia	CI @ Jorge Tadeo Lozano Univ.	2013	Juan Manuel Santos	Center
Costa Rica	CI @ Univ. of Costa Rica	2008	Oscar Arias	Left
Cuba	CI @ Univ. of Havana	2009	Raul Castro	Left
Ecuador	CI @ San Fran Univ. of Quito	2010	Rafael Correa	Left
El Salvador	CI @ Univ. of El Salv	2019	Salvador Cerén	Left
Guyana	CI @ Univ. of Guyana	2014	Donald Ramotar	Left
Jamaica	CI @ Univ. of West Indies, Mona Campus	2010	Bruce Golding	Center
Mexico	CI in at Mexico City Huaxia	?		
Mexico	CI @ Autonomous Univ. of New Leon	2006	Felipe Calderon	Center
Mexico	CI @ Autonomous Univ. of Yucatan	2008	Felipe Calderon	Center
Mexico	CI @ Nat. Auton. Univ. of MX	2006	Felipe Calderon	Center
Mexico	CI @ Autonomous Univ. of Chihuahua	?		
Panama	CI @ Univ. of Panama	2017	Juan Carlos Varela	Left
Peru	CI @ Catholic Univ. of Santa Maria	2008 / 2009	Alan García	Left
Peru	CI @ Univ. of Piura	2009	Alan García	Left
Peru	CI @ Cath Univ. of Peru	2009	Alan García	Left
Peru	CI @ Ricardo Palma Univ.	2010	Alan García	Left
Suriname	CI @ Anton de Kom Univ. of Suriname	2017	Desi Bouterse	Left
Trinidad & Tobago	CI @ Univ. of West Indies, St. Augustine Campus	2013	Richards or Carmona, unclear	Independent
Uruguay	CI @ Univ. de la Repub, Uruguay	2018	Tabaré Vázquez	Left
Venezuela	CI @ Univ. Bolivariana de Venez	2016	Nicolás Maduro	Left

Blue = Conservative / Independent / US-aligned leader

Red = Leftist / Anti-US leaders

Gray = Unable to find opening date of Confucius Institute

* Name of each CI found at <https://www.digmandarin.com/confucius-institutes-around-the-world.html>

* Founding year found by googling the name of each CI University affiliation

Table 2: CI Founding Year Economic Growth Comparison to Year After

Country	University Name	Est. Year	Imports yr of Opening	Imports yr after	Growth	Exports yr of Opening	Exports yr after	Growth
Argentina	CI @ Univ. of Buenos Aires	2009	4.39 bill	7.15 bil	2.79 bil	3.69 bill	5.83 b	2.14 B
Argentina	CI @ Nat. Univ. of La Plata	2009	lbid	lbid	lbid	lbid	lbid	2.14 B
Argentina	CI @ Nat. Univ. of Cordoba	Oct-20						
Bahamas	CI @ Univ. of Bahamas	2009	423m	628m	205 m	2.75m	4.96m	2.21
Barbados	CI @ Univ. of West Indies, West Hill Campus	2015	103 M	121 M	18M	14 M	23.2 M	9.2 M
Bolivia	CI @ Univ. of San Simon	2011	872 M	890 M	18 M	340 M	325 M	-15 M
Brazil	CI @ Sao Paulo State Univ.	2008	19.2 bil	15.2 bil	- 4 Billion	16.6 bil	21 bil	4.4 B
Brazil	Business CI @ FAAP	?						
Brazil	CI @ Fed Univ. of Minas Gerais	2013	36.5 B	36.3 B	-0.2 bi	46.1 B	40.7. B	-5.4 B
Brazil	CI @ Univ. of Pernambuco	?						
Brazil	CI @ Fed Univ. of Rio Grand Do Sul	?						
Brazil	CI @ Univ. of Brasilia	2010	25.2 B	32.3 B	7.1 b	30.8 B	44.4 B	13.6 B
Brazil	CI @ Pontifical Catholic Univ. of Rio de Janeiro	2011	32.3 B	34.1 B	1.8b	44.4 B	41.1 B	-3.3 B
Brazil	CI @ State Univ. of Campinas	2015	29.4 B	23.1 B	-6.3 b	35.7 B	36.4 B	0.7
Brazil	CI @ State Univ. of Pará	?						
Brazil	CI @ Fed. Univ. of Ceará	2019	36.3 B			63.5B		
Brazil	Confuc. Inst. Of Chinese Medicine at Fed Univ. of Goias	?						
Chile	CI @ Univ. of St. Thomas	2008	5.51 B	5.75 B	.24. b	10.5 B	13 B	2.5 B
Chile	CI @ Catholic Univ.	2009	5.75 B	9.29 B	3.54b	13 B	17.4 B	4.4 B
Chile	CI @ Univ. of La Frontera	2020						
Colombia	CI in Medellin	2010	4.79 B	7.2 B	2.41	2.06 B	2.03 B	-.03 B
Colombia	CI @ Univ. of Los Andes	2007	2.91 B	3.92 B	1.01 B	499M	447 M	-52 M
Colombia	CI @ Jorge Tadeo Lozano Univ.	2013	8.86 B	10.2 B	1.34	5.1 B	5.76. B	0.66
Costa Rica	CI @ Univ. of Costa Rica	2008	865M	699 M	-166 M	612M	765 M	153 M
Costa Rica	CI @ Univ. of Havana	2009	972 M	*1.04 B	.068. M	550 M	*871 M	321 M
Ecuador	CI @ San Fran Univ. of Quito	2010	1.6 B	3.01 B	1.41 B	331 M	517 M	186 M
El Salvador	CI @ Univ. of El Salvador	2019	1.5 B					
Guyana	CI @ Univ. of Guyana	2014	174 M	156 M	-18 M	24.7. M	17.7. M	-7 M
Jamaica	CI @ Univ. of West Indies, Mona Campus	2010	264 M	368 M	104 M	3.01 M	23.4 M	20.39
Mexico	CI in at Mexico City Huaxia	?						
Mexico	CI @ Autonomous Univ. of New Leon	2006	14.1 B	17 B	2.9 B	1.84 B	2.1. B	.26 B
Mexico	CI @ Autonomous Univ. of Yucatan	2008	20.9 B	19.1 B	-1.8 B	2.25 B	2.43 B	0.18 B
Mexico	CI @ Nat. Auton. Univ. of MX	2006	14. 1	17 B	2.9 B	1.84 B	2.1 B	0.26 B
Mexico	CI @ Auton. Univ. of Chihuahua	?						
Panama	CI @ Univ. of Panama	2017	6.67 B	6.95 B	.28 B	52.6 M	74.2 M	21.6 M
Peru	CI @ Catholic Univ. of Santa Maria	2008 / 2009	2.88 B	4.61 B	1.73 B	4.12 B	5.47. B	1.35 B
Peru	CI @ Univ. of Piura	2009	lbid	lbid	1.73 B	lbid	lbid	1.35 B
Peru	CI @ Cath Univ. of Peru	2009	lbid	lbid	1.73 B	lbid	lbid	1.35 B
Peru	CI @ Ricardo Palma Univ.	2010	4.61 B	5.78 B	1.17 B	5.57 B	6.99 B	1.42 B
Suriname	CI @ Anton de Kom Univ. of Suriname	2017	157 M	198 M	41M	31 M	55.1 M	24.1 M
Trinidad & Tobago	CI @ Univ. of West Indies, St. Augustine Campus	2013	461 M	556 M	95M	113 M	60.3 M	-52.7 M
Uruguay	CI @ Univ. de la Repub, Uruguay	2018	1.77 B	1.46 B	-.31 B	2.06 B	2.63 B	.57 B
Venezuela	CI @ Univ. Bolivariana de Venez	2016	2.52 B	1.75 B	-.77 B	4.9 B	6.32 B	1.42 B

*Data for Cuba from 2009 and 2011 data; 2010 data was unavailable.

Blue = Conservative / Independent / US-aligned leader

Red = Leftist / Anti-US leaders

Gray = Unable to find opening date of Confucius Institute

Green = Increase from year of opening to year after

Yellow = only able to find data for year of but not year after

*Cuba: used 2009 and 2011 data instead of 2010 because 2010 data was unavailable

* All Economic Data was retrieved from the Observatory of Economic Complexity Data Base

tion and drug trafficking crises, then the percentage of CI openings that occurred during leftist leaders' tenures or those with a strained U.S. relationship rises to 80%. This indicates that leftist leaders who are ideologically sympathetic to China or at the very least adhere to a more anti-US / anti-imperialist school of thought are more likely to welcome and seek out a cultural relationship with China than states who have more conservative leaders.

It is also worth noting that some of these leaders have been embroiled in corruption scandals, suspected of drug trafficking, or accused of committing human rights violations. Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was impeached for breaking budget laws and her predecessor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, was

found guilty on money laundering and corruption charges.⁴⁶ Alan García of Peru was accused of accepting bribes related to the Odebrecht scandal.⁴⁷ Cristina Kirchner of Argentina was accused of having accepted bribes from construction companies in exchange for awarding them public contracts.⁴⁸ Furthermore, leaders such as Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela and Desi Bouterse of Suriname have been accused of running narco-states,⁴⁹ the outright personal smuggling of drugs across international borders,⁵⁰ in addition to perpetuating human rights abuses.⁵¹ In fairness, right-leaning governments in Guatemala and Honduras have also been embroiled in scandals involving alleged wide-spread corruption and financing of political campaigns with proceeds from the illicit drugs trade. This also suggests that states with worse governance as a result of its leaders' incompetence or outright corrupt practices are also more likely to welcome Chinese CIs. I opine that this correlation is caused at least in part because these leaders are not opposed to China's corrupt and shady practice since they themselves adhere to similar practices. Thus, they seek out the partnership of another state, i.e., China, that is interested in investing in a nation or engaging in a closer relationship without attempting to clean up their governance practices.

This represents one of the potential dangers of CIs: the reinforcement and encouragement of corrupt government practices. By opening institutes during the tenures of corrupt leaders, China has shown that it will work with questionable leaders without any reservations. It is essentially offering an alternative sphere of ideological and moral influence that tolerates all practices, as long as they do not harm CCP goals, and with which states can partner instead of the U.S. Additionally, while there is little evidence that China is actively spreading CCP propaganda in its CIs, it is spreading "Chinese" cultural values, to generations of Latin Americans. Chinese here is in quotes because the state affiliated Hanban determines the content for all textbooks, audio-visuals, and multimedia materials of CIs, meaning they have control over what "Chinese culture" is shared.⁵² And, Xi Jinping has made it clear that he wishes to share the "new achievements of modern Chinese culture."⁵³ What Xi defines as Chinese culture is unclear; however, this appears to be a culture that in addition to its beautiful heritage, is characterized by prioritization of economic growth and political stability above all else, including human rights

⁴⁶ Watts, Jonathan. "Dilma Rousseff impeachment: what you need to know – the Guardian briefing." *The Guardian*, August 31, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/aug/31/dilma-rousseff-impeachment-brazil-what-you-need-to-know>

⁴⁷ Alarcón, Daniel. "What Led Peru's Former President to Take His Own Life" *The New Yorker*, July 1, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/07/08/what-led-perus-former-president-to-take-his-own-life>

⁴⁸ Goñi, Uki. "Argentina: ex-president Cristina Fernández charged in bribery scandal." *The Guardian*, September 17, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/17/cristina-fernandez-indicted-argentina-president-corruption>

⁴⁹ "Venezuela As a Narco State." Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/podcasts/curated-conversations/venezuela-narco-state#:~:text=Even%20as%20the%20United%20States,drug%20production%20and%20drug%20transit.>

⁵⁰ "Suriname: Desi Bouterse, a convicted murderer, seeks another term." *Al Jazeera*, May 25, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/25/suriname-desi-bouterse-a-convicted-murderer-seeks-another-term>

⁵¹ "Venezuela: Events of 2020." *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/venezuela#>. "Suriname amnesty law threatens President's trial for human rights violations." *Amnesty International*, March 23, 2012. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2012/03/suriname-amnesty-law-threatens-presidents-trial-human-rights-violations/>

⁵² Peterson, Rachelle. "Outsourced to China." *National Association of Scholars*, April 06, 2007. <https://www.nas.org/reports/outsourced-to-china/full-report#Summary>

⁵³ Kluver, 398.

and democratic ideals.⁵⁴ This cultural preference has led to government repression of the citizenry's democratic rights, genocide of the Uighurs, exploitation of weaker powers, and corruption. For Latin America, a region that already struggles with maintaining transparency and the legitimacy of its governments' dealings, this poses a threat to its future as CIs potentially reinforce bad practices Latin America is seeking to eradicate.

Economic Relationship

However, not all countries that host CIs have a history of ideological similarities with the CCP. The outliers of Colombia, Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago, all had more conservative leaders in power during the opening of their CIs. This points to an additional trend that accompanies CI openings: economic engagement. Of the 31 CI founding dates I was able to find economic data, 24, or 77%, coincided with an increase in imports from China in the year following the institutes' opening and 25 (81%) coincided with an increase of exports from the host Latin American countries to China. This indicates that in a majority of instances, the opening of CIs in Latin American nations coincided with an improvement in economic engagement between the states and China in the following year. It appears that these institutes truly develop closer relations between China and their host countries, helping facilitate trade between them. This explains, in part, why even Latin American countries that do not possess ideological ties to China or corrupt leaders are still so receptive to CIs. Additionally, it could also be the case that these institutes are the mark of already improving relations between China and host states and that each party hopes opening an institute will help cement and further spur the relationship.

While the data suggests that the relationship between China and Latin American host nations is mutually beneficial, it does not mean that they are of equitable mutual benefit. In large part, Latin American nations exported cheap natural resources like foodstuffs, agriculture products, minerals, and energy resources, while they imported higher value finished goods from China. As mentioned earlier, this indicates the Chinese-Latin American economic trade relationship follows a "center-periphery" model "in which China is the rich and powerful 'core' nation that purchases raw materials and primary products from the periphery country while supplying it manufactured, higher value-added goods."⁵⁵ This also indicates that China is only interested in Latin America's further development, particularly its infrastructure, as a means of increasing the productivity of the region's trade with it. This brings us to the next noticeable trend explaining why Confucius Institutes open: the cities in which they are located.

Physical Location of CIs

Of the 43 CIs in Latin America and the Caribbean, 22, or 51%, are located along the coast of their respective nations. Other CIs, while not located in port cities or along the coast, are in resource rich re-

⁵⁴ I am not referring to Chinese culture as a whole or that of its citizenry, but rather the culture that the CCP has sought to create and has enforced.

⁵⁵ Luque, Javier. "Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* (2019), pp 610.



Photo title: Confucius Institutes in Central America and the Caribbean.

Photo credit: Google maps

regions such as the Andes Mountain region of Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador, the fertile Pampas region of Argentina, and the agricultural hub of Brazil. This allows China’s CIs to be keyed into vital centers of resource extraction and trade throughout the region. Furthermore, it provides CIs the opportunity to directly engage with business leaders, current and future, of these key sectors. For example, the CI at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil offers business classes, in addition to the traditional language and cultural programs.⁵⁶ These business classes are designed for the employees of Chinese companies in Rio and Brazilian companies that work with China and offer personalized curriculum for whatever the companies’ needs or goals are.⁵⁷ This illustrates just one example of China’s attempts to embed Chinese companies in local populations and spread Chinese business philosophy and culture throughout local companies.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, China is interested in improving the infrastructure of Latin America to augment the efficiency of its trade with the region; thus, logically, China is interested in creating better ties, culturally, linguistically, and economically to vital cities in the region that are the basis of infrastructure and that need improvements. This in part explains China’s interest in Panama and the creation of a CI in Panama City in 2017. China is the second most frequent user of the Panama Canal, behind only the U.S., and has begun developing ports in other parts of Panama.⁵⁸ Chinese companies

⁵⁶ “Cursos – Cursos nas Empresas.” Instituto Confucius – PUC Rio. <http://www.confucius.puc-rio.br/br/info/2/cursos#a33>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Panama Cuts Ties with Taiwan in favour of China.” *BBC*, June 13, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40256499>

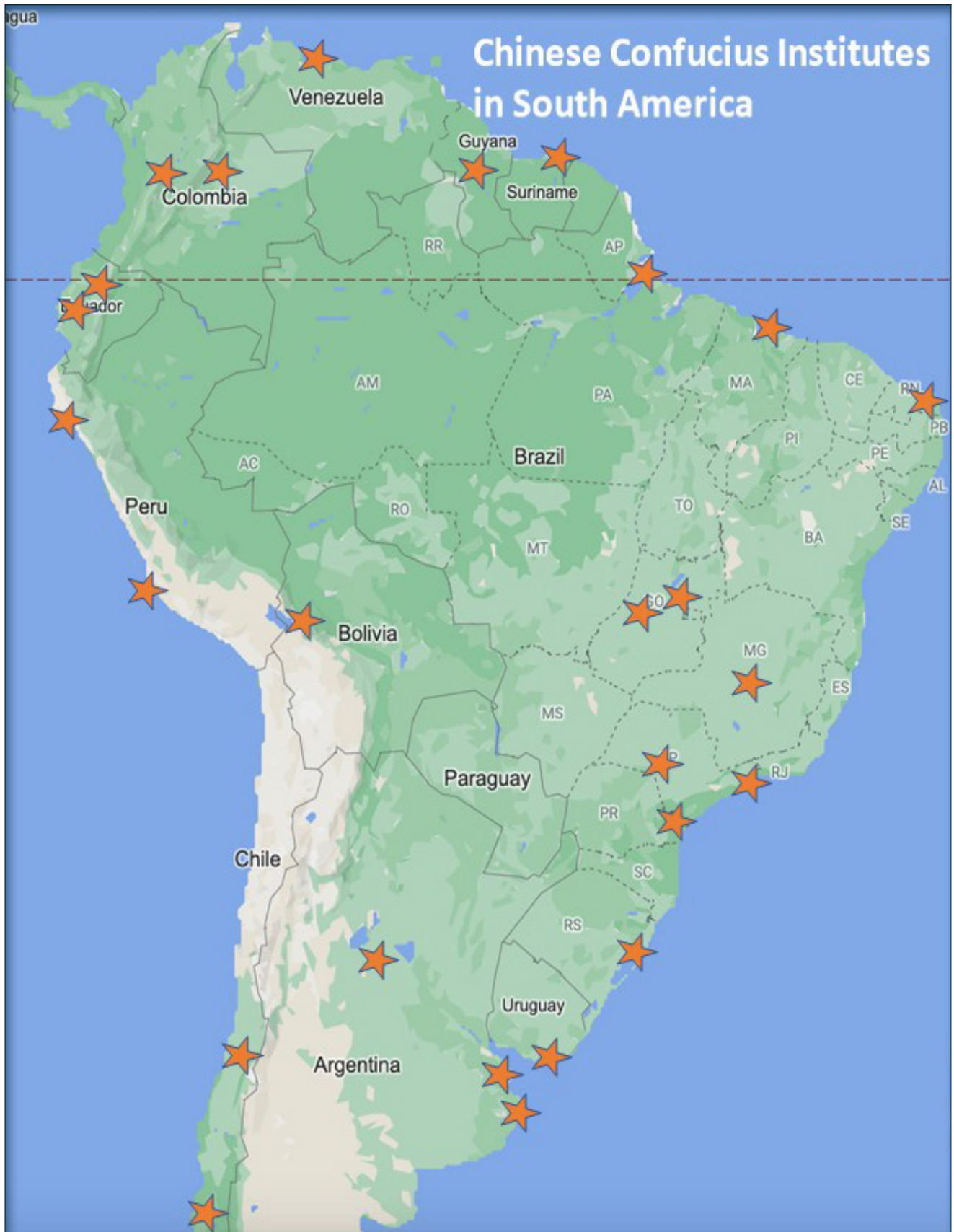


Photo title: Confucius Institutes in South America.
Photo credit: Google maps

have also expressed interest in developing the land around the Panama Canal.⁵⁹ The importance of the Panama Canal to China no doubt drew it to increase relations with Panama, and, amid these improved relations, Panama formally switched its recognition from Taiwan to Beijing in 2017.⁶⁰ Conveniently, just a few months later, Panama opened its first CI.

Additionally, nearly all of the host cities for China's CIs, including those not located in key resource areas or ports, are famous cities that serve as cultural hubs for their respective states. This too is no accident. China wishes to "insert Chinese language, cultural traditions, and resources into the main currents of global cultural evolution,"⁶¹ by establishing CIs in culturally important cities throughout the world. Through its establishment of CIs in well-known universities and cities across Latin America, China is able to tap into the natural cultural diffusion that occurs from big cities to the rest of the country. Just as fashion trends start in large "cultured" cities and filter out to the rest of the populace, so to do other elements of society like language, music, and political ideas. Thus, China's CIs are able to reach more people in a country by being located in cultural hubs than if they were established in small, little-known towns. The CI at the National University of Cordoba in Argentina is an example of one such CI that is located in both a cultural hub and a key agricultural region of the country. Cordoba, as a historical colonial city, enjoys a thriving tourism industry, and also has a key structure of highways and



Photo title: China contends that its Confucius Institutes are benign efforts to share Chinese cultures. Skeptics consider them "trojan horses" and soft power efforts to gain political leverage in the region.

Photo credit: Americas Quarterly and Eric Cenepa

⁵⁹ Sui, Cindy. "Political Isolation." *BBC*, June 13, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40256499>

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Kluver, 413.

railways that link the fertile Pampas to other regions of the country.⁶² Therefore, according to China's desire to predominately situate itself within the culture of a state, Cordoba is a perfect location to open a CI. Furthermore, as it has done in the U.S. and Europe, China seeks to tie its CIs to elite universities of their respective countries because it believes this increases the "prestige for the nation [China] and sanctions its political objectives."⁶³ This factor can also be used to explain the location of China's CIs in universities across Latin America, like the CI at the Universidad de los Andes, which is ranked the #1 university in Colombia,⁶⁴ and the CI at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, which is the top ranked university in Mexico.⁶⁵

Therefore, the data suggests that the physical location of CI host universities, including its access to natural resources, travel infrastructure, importance of the city, and the legacy of the host university, are relevant factors when analyzing why China opened a CI in a particular location and what it hopes to gain from it.

Overall, the findings in this paper do not claim to be statistically significant, since a statistical analysis was outside the scope of this paper, and therefore cannot in good faith claim to be causal. However, the research suggests three nearly ubiquitous and easily trackable trends that help explain why Confucius Institutes open in Latin America. These trends are, as stated above, the political ideology of a state's leader, and his/her propensity for corruption or undemocratic governance, the economic relationship of a host country and China, and the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of the city/university with which the CI partners. Further research should be done on this topic as academics seek to understand the nature of relationship China is developing with Latin America.

Conclusion: What Does this Mean for the U.S. and Latin America?

The current U.S. discourse on Confucius Institutes is too centered on the program's potential use as blatant propaganda, espionage, or other more nefarious acts. By myopically viewing CIs as typical tools of Chinese state interference, politicians and academics are missing the big picture. China's primary motivation for establishing CIs across the world is not centered on immediate gain, but instead is a part of the state's broader, forward-looking strategy. Simply put, CIs are "the most extensive and most future-oriented" components of China's "massive international soft power campaign" and they have "the greatest long-term potential impact."⁶⁶ This campaign seeks to counter the Western narrative that paints China's ascent as threat to the global community by revealing its "true nature" to the world.⁶⁷ It believes it can achieve this by sharing its culture, philosophies, and language with the international

⁶² Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Córdoba." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cordoba-Argentina>

⁶³ Hubbert, 15.

⁶⁴ "Ranking and Accreditation." Universidad de los Andes. <https://uniandes.edu.co/en/university/ranking-and-accreditation>

⁶⁵ "National Autonomous University of Mexico Ranking – CWUR World University Rankings 2018 – 2019." <https://cwur.org/2018-19/National-Autonomous-University-of-Mexico.php>

⁶⁶ Hubbert, 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 10-11.

community.⁶⁸ All of this is true, however this does not mean that these efforts are completely benign or without an ulterior motive.

Through its CI project, it is my analysis that China seeks to create a generation of future political and business leaders that will support its ascent and serve as its diplomatic allies in the international order. By increasing Mandarin language abilities and cultural influence in Latin America, China hopes to establish long lasting ties that will lead to individuals in the region wanting what China wants, becoming valuable allies. These allies will then support China's foreign policy efforts, the primary aim of which is the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan and its eventual reincorporation into the mainland.⁶⁹ Latin America and the Caribbean will play a vital role in China's pursuit of this goal because of the 14 countries that still recognize Taiwan, 10 are in this hemisphere.⁷⁰ In fact, China has already demonstrated an ability to use its economic power and the promise of CIs to convince Latin American states to switch their allegiance from Taiwan to Beijing, as Panama and El Salvador both did in 2017 and 2018, respectively.⁷¹ Less than a year after this allegiance switch, both states then received their first CIs.⁷²

The potential reunification of China and Taiwan is something of great concern for the U.S. While it has not formally promised to defend the territory, nor does it officially recognize the territory, the U.S. nonetheless views the island as an indispensable ally in the Pacific and one to which it provides political



Photo title: Brazil has eleven Confucius Institutes, more than any other Latin American or Caribbean nation.

Photo credit: Wang Zhengrun and USA-China Daily

⁶⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁹ Phillips, 94.

⁷⁰ O'Connor, Tom. "Which Countries Still Recognize Taiwan? Two More Nations Switch to China in Less Than a Week." *Newsweek*, September 20, 2019. <https://www.newsweek.com/who-recognizes-taiwan-two-change-china-1460559>

⁷¹ Horton, Chris. "El Salvador Recognizes China in Blow to Taiwan." *The New York Times*, August 21, 2018.

⁷² Ellis, Evan. "China and El Salvador: An Update." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 22, 2021.

and military support.⁷³ Thus, should China make a kinetic move to take over the island, the U.S. would be faced with either engaging in a costly and bloody war with China or leaving Taiwan to fend for itself, significantly damaging the U.S.'s public reputation and effectively abdicating its role as a power in the Pacific. To prevent this scenario, the U.S. should do everything in its power to prevent China from becoming confident that it could initiate this move without significant backlash from the international community. Thus, the U.S. must reengage with the global community, specifically Latin America, after 4 years of turning inward and nearly 20 years of taking its relationship with Latin America for granted.

Moreover, the potential for Latin American nations to become international allies with China threatens democratic principles throughout the region and globally. As mentioned earlier, through its dissemination of government approved culture, there is a concern that China will export its government's authoritarian principles to the current and future generations of Latin American leaders. This is a region that already struggles with democratic institutions and transparency, and as a consequence of China's potential authoritarian export, could be engulfed by even more corrupt and repressive leaders in the future. Therefore, it is imperative for the U.S. to re-pivot its focus to the region and continue fostering liberal democratic ideals, free market economics, and strong, transparent institutions.

Additionally, a continued Sino-Latin American relationship could be a potential problem for the United States. China's willingness to offer risky loans for projects that other lenders and engineers have deemed "economically unfeasible," is troubling.⁷⁴ Latin American economies are already fragile, and after the devastation of the COVID pandemic, there is no telling just how weak the region will be. This vulnerability coupled with desperation for development and growth might lead countries to accept and seek out exploitative loans and investment opportunities from China. As we have seen in Sri Lanka, failure to repay these loans can lead to Chinese companies purchasing the land surrounding infrastructure projects from the host countries for years to come in order to alleviate their debt. The potential Chinese control of key infrastructure in Latin America or the Caribbean, coupled with official alliances would put the U.S. in an extremely strategically vulnerable position.⁷⁵ The Chinese could use these infrastructure points to stage their offensive against the U.S., in a kinetic conflict, affording it the opportunity to disrupt U.S. trade patterns, intercept the U.S. Navy before it gets to the Pacific, or threaten the U.S. homeland. China, if it were unable to receive tangible support from Latin American partner nations, could at least convince them to remain neutral in the conflict and refrain from assisting the U.S. as well.⁷⁶

While these are hypothetical scenarios of a seemingly far off future, they are quite possible should China's soft power campaign in Latin America yield its potential benefits for the Asian power. The U.S., in order to ensure these hypothetical scenarios remain hypothetical, must turn to Latin America. It must seek to repair its brand in the region through mutually beneficial economic engagement, defense coop-

⁷³ Crowley, Michael. "Biden Backs Taiwan, but Some Call for a Clearer Warning to China." *The New York Times*, April 08, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/08/us/politics/biden-china-taiwan.html>

⁷⁴ Horton. "El Salvador Recognizes China in Blow to Taiwan."

⁷⁵ Ellis. "Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America," 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

eration that is not paternalistic or selfishly concerned with the U.S. interests, assisting states with their immigration crises, and helping them defeat the COVID pandemic. Additionally, the U.S. should look for potential areas of cooperation with China in the region. This might go a long way to prove to Latin America that they are more than a prize to be fought over, but a true partner and ally.

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