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The Network of Democracy Research Institutes (NDRI) is a global network of think tanks that conduct research and analysis on democracy, democratization, and related topics in comparative government and international affairs. The NDRI is coordinated by the NED's International Forum for Democratic Studies and is a key network of the World Movement for Democracy. A unique global network, its mission is to foster interaction among international think tanks that may not otherwise come into contact with one another, and to connect them with other democracy scholars and activists. The collaborative space created by the NDRI allows think tanks from diverse parts of the world to initiate joint projects. The NDRI also encourages member institutes to reach out in solidarity to one another and to share knowledge and experiences.

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From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power'

Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World

Over the past decade, China and Russia have spent billions of dollars to shape public opinion and perceptions around the world, employing a diverse toolkit that includes thousands of people-to-people exchanges, wide-ranging cultural activities, educational programs, and the development of media enterprises and information initiatives with global reach. As memory of the Cold War era receded, analysts, journalists, and policymakers in the democracies came to see authoritarian influence efforts through the familiar lens of “soft power.” But some of the most visible authoritarian influence techniques used by countries such as **China and Russia, while not “hard” in the openly coercive sense, are not really “soft” either.**

Contrary to some prevailing analysis, the attempt by Beijing and Moscow to wield influence through initiatives in the spheres of media, culture, think tanks, and academia is neither a “charm offensive” nor an effort to “win hearts and minds,” the common frame of reference for “soft power” efforts. **This authoritarian influence is not principally about attraction or even persuasion; instead, it centers on distraction and manipulation.** These ambitious authoritarian regimes, which systematically suppress political pluralism and free expression at home, are increasingly seeking to apply similar principles internationally to secure their interests.

We are in need of a new vocabulary for this phenomenon. **What we have to date understood as authoritarian “soft power” is better categorized as “sharp power” that pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries.** In the new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states, the repressive regimes’ “sharp power” techniques should be seen as the tip of their dagger—or indeed as their syringe.

Key Context

Exploiting a Glaring Asymmetry: Critical to the headway made by authoritarian regimes has been their exploitation of a glaring asymmetry: In an era of hyperglobalization, Russia and China have raised barriers to external political and cultural influence at home while simultaneously taking advantage of the openness of democratic systems abroad.

A Widening Scope of Authoritarian Influence: This study examined four countries (Argentina, Peru, Poland, and Slovakia) in two regions (Latin America and Central Europe), but similar forms of Russian and Chinese “sharp power” are visible in a growing number of democracies around the world.

A Particular Threat to Vulnerable Democracies: While the leading authoritarian regimes’ ambitions have gone global, a subset of countries where democratic roots remain shallow are especially vulnerable to their influence efforts. Those in Latin America and Central Europe make attractive targets due to their proximity and strategic value to the established democracies of North America and Western Europe.

The Implications of Authoritarian “Sharp Power”

Taken separately, authoritarian influence efforts in particular countries may seem fairly harmless or ineffectual. However, when the seemingly disparate activities of Russia and China around the world are added together, a far more disturbing picture emerges.

This report suggests that even exchange-related activities backed by authoritarian governments should be approached with greater skepticism. Although some of these initiatives may appear to advance admirable goals, many are designed to promote a particular political narrative, which in turn creates favorable conditions for authoritarian regimes.

While there are differences in the shape and tone of the Chinese and Russian approaches, both stem from an ideological model that privileges state power over individual liberty and is fundamentally hostile to free expression, open debate, and independent thought. At the same time, both Beijing and Moscow clearly take advantage of the openness of democratic systems.

The following are key steps that can be taken to address the malign efforts by Russia and China to influence and manipulate democracies:

Address the shortage of information on China and Russia. In the four democracies examined, information concerning the Chinese political system and its foreign policy strategies tends to be extremely limited. There are few journalists, editors, and policy professionals who possess a deep understanding of China and can share their knowledge with the rest of their societies. The same holds true for Russia in places such as Latin America, though knowledge of today’s Russia is stronger in Central Europe.

Unmask authoritarian influence. Chinese and Russian sharp power efforts rely in large part on camouflage—disguising state-directed projects as the work of commercial media or grassroots associations, for example, or using local actors as conduits for foreign propaganda and tools of foreign manipulation. To counteract these efforts at misdirection, observers in democracies should put them under the spotlight and analyze them in a comprehensive manner.

Inoculate democratic societies against malign authoritarian influence. Once the nature and techniques of authoritarian influence efforts are exposed, democracies should build up their internal defenses. Authoritarian initiatives are directed at cultivating relationships with the political elites, thought leaders, and other information gatekeepers of democratic societies. Moscow and Beijing aim to get inside democratic systems in order to win supporters and to neutralize criticism of their authoritarian regimes.

Reaffirm support for democratic values and ideals. If one goal of authoritarian sharp power is to legitimize illiberal forms of government, then it is effective only to the extent that democracies and their citizens lose sight of their own principles. Top leaders in the democracies must speak out clearly and consistently on behalf of democratic ideals and put down clear markers regarding acceptable standards of democratic behavior.

Reconceptualize ‘soft power.’ Finally, journalists, think tank analysts, and other policy elites need to recognize authoritarian influence efforts in the realm of ideas for what they are: corrosive and subversive “sharp power” instruments that do real damage to the targeted democratic societies. The conceptual vocabulary that has been used since the Cold War’s end no longer seems adequate to the contemporary situation.



From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power'

By Christopher Walker
and Jessica Ludwig

Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World

'Soft Power' in Contemporary Perspective

In his report to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2007, then president Hu Jintao laid down a marker that would propel to new heights his country's investment in what is commonly referred to as "soft power." Hu said at the time:

We must keep to the orientation of [an] advanced socialist culture, bring about a new upsurge in socialist cultural development, stimulate the cultural creativity of the whole nation, and enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests, enrich the cultural life in Chinese society and inspire the enthusiasm of the people for progress.¹

In the decade since Hu's exhortation, China has spent tens of billions of dollars to shape public opinion and perceptions around the world, employing a diverse toolkit that includes, but is not limited to, thousands of people-to-people exchanges, wide-ranging cultural activities, educational programs (most notably the ever-expanding network of controversial Confucius Institutes), and the development of media enterprises with global reach.

During roughly the same period, the Russian government accelerated its own efforts in this sphere. In the mid-2000s, the Kremlin launched the global television network Russia Today (since rebranded as the more unassuming "RT"), built up its capacity to manipulate content online, increased its support for state-affiliated policy institutes, and more generally cultivated a web of influence activities—both on and offline—designed to alter international views to its advantage.

At the outset, many observers in major democracies breezily dismissed Russian and Chinese government efforts to build more modern and sophisticated tools of international influence. The authoritarians' television and online initiatives, whose programming and editorial lines were at first stilted or disjointed, were seen as autocratic vanity projects or otherwise not worthy of serious consideration. To one degree or another, these governments struggled to “tell their story” in ways that would appeal to the world. It would require extraordinary editorial gymnastics and creativity to overcome the evident features of their systems: entrenched kleptocracy, massive environmental problems, institutionalized censorship, deepening economic inequality, and harsh political repression that remains fundamental to governance in both settings.

Exploiting a Glaring Asymmetry

But the dismissiveness of skeptics in the democracies led to a dangerous complacency, allowing the authoritarians, through trial and error, to refine their existing efforts and develop a much more powerful array of influence techniques suitable for a modern environment. Critical to their success has been their exploitation of a glaring asymmetry: In an era of hyperglobalization, the regimes in Russia and China have raised barriers to external political and cultural influence at home while simultaneously preying upon the openness of democratic systems abroad.

The adjustments made by the authorities in Moscow and Beijing have been gradual but systematic in nature. Russian officials, for their part, determined that they did not need to convince the world that their autocratic system was appealing in its own right. Instead, they realized that they could achieve their objectives by making democracy appear to be relatively less attractive. Russian disinformation efforts have since constituted a relentless, multidimensional attack on the prestige of democracies—the United States and leading European Union countries especially—and on the ideas underlying democratic systems.²

Meanwhile, as China has dramatically expanded its economic interests and business footprint around the globe, its government has focused its influence initiatives on masking its policies and suppressing, to the extent possible, any voices beyond China's borders that are critical of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³ Its techniques include both co-optation and manipulation, and they are applied to targets in the media, academia, and the policy community. They seek to permeate institutions in democratic states that might draw attention or raise obstacles to CCP interests, creating disincentives for any such resistance.

While there are differences in the shape and tone of the Chinese and Russian approaches, both stem from an ideological model that privileges state power over individual liberty and is fundamentally hostile to free expression, open debate, and independent thought.

The decision makers in Beijing and Moscow clearly have the political will and the resources to build up and implement their influence efforts. By comparison, the United States and other leading democracies seem to have withdrawn from competition in the ideas sphere. They have been slow to shake off the long-standing assumption—in vogue from the end of the Cold War until the mid-2000s—that unbridled integration with repressive regimes would inevitably change them for the better, without any harmful effects on the democracies themselves. But as globalization accelerated and integration deepened over the past decade, the authoritarians survived, and their ability to penetrate the political and media space of democracies has become progressively stronger.⁴ The authoritarian initiatives themselves are truly global in scope, turning up in democratic countries on every continent.

The Particular Threat to Vulnerable Democracies

While the leading authoritarian regimes' ambitions have gone global, a subset of countries where democratic roots remain shallow are especially vulnerable to their influence efforts. Those in Latin America and Central Europe also make attractive targets due to their proximity and strategic value to the established democracies of North America and Western Europe.

Given the troubling implications of the Chinese and Russian projects, the International Forum for Democratic Studies, in cooperation with several leading think tanks, undertook an initiative to closely examine and inventory the instruments of authoritarian influence in vulnerable democracies. The think tanks carried out on-the-ground research and analysis in Slovakia (Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava), Poland (Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw), and Argentina and Peru (The Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America, Buenos Aires).

These powerful and determined authoritarian regimes, which systematically suppress political pluralism and free expression in order to maintain power at home, are increasingly applying the same principles internationally to secure their interests.

This initiative focused on the dimensions of Chinese and Russian authoritarian influence that in recent years have become especially visible, but have been understudied in the context of democratic societies: cultural and education-related activities; think tank and policy-relevant engagement; and the development of media platforms that can disseminate information globally. Such efforts are typically understood in the familiar context of "soft power." They represent, however, only a portion of a far larger iceberg of influence activity undertaken by the Russian and Chinese governments.

The findings of the think tanks are the focus of this report, which describes how Russia and China alike are investing resources in the media, think tank, cultural, and university sectors, through either overt programmatic support or less transparent means. The authoritarians' efforts in these areas are of a piece with their broader influence initiatives, and more established democracies would be wise to draw lessons from the four countries assessed here, as the same antidemocratic techniques are now being applied around the world.

The think tanks' research raises serious questions concerning the democratic community's understanding of the threat to date. Contrary to some prevailing analysis, the influence wielded by Russia and China through initiatives in the spheres of media, academia, culture, and think tanks is not a "charm offensive," nor is it an effort to "share alternative ideas" or "broaden the debate." It is not principally about attraction or even persuasion; instead, it centers on manipulation and distraction. These powerful and determined authoritarian regimes, which systematically suppress political pluralism and free expression in order to maintain power at home, are increasingly applying the same principles internationally to secure their interests.

Nevertheless, the underlying logic of the authoritarians' wide-ranging engagement in the democracies' public spheres remains murky to many. Why do the world's leading antidemocratic regimes devote vast material resources and political energy to participating in the ideas space of the democratic world? This report seeks to shed light on that question.

Methodology

This report represents a collaborative effort undertaken by the National Endowment for Democracy's International Forum for Democratic Studies and three think tank partners based in Poland, Slovakia, and Argentina to document and analyze the influence activities of two trendsetting authoritarian states—Russia and China—in young democracies. The Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (Argentina), the Institute of Public Affairs (Poland), and the Institute for Public Affairs (Slovakia) are members of the Forum's global think tank network, the Network of Democracy Research Institutes.

In order to understand how authoritarian regimes are leveraging and repurposing traditional tools of “soft power” for what we believe is more appropriately understood as corrosive “sharp power,” the three think tanks and their lead researchers conducted a comprehensive on-the-ground inventory of activities carried out by the Chinese and Russian governments or their surrogates in four specific spheres: (1) media, (2) academia, (3) culture, and (4) the think tank and policy communities. These sectors were selected for analysis due to their critical role in shaping perceptions and public opinion in democratic societies. The researchers employed four principal methods to conduct their inventories:

- Aggregating and analyzing prior research done by local scholars, journalists, and think tanks
- Qualitative interviews with country-based analysts, journalists, academics, students, university administrators, and counterparts in the policy community
- Surveying themes covered in print and online media, as well as in social media
- Examining the topics of events and projects organized by cultural institutions, universities, and research institutions based in each country

By undertaking a cross-regional comparative approach, this report seeks to explain how the Chinese and Russian regimes project and exert influence across varied democratic settings. Latin America and Central Europe were identified as regions in which both China and Russia have sought to develop a presence and invested significant resources. The four case countries—Peru, Argentina, Poland, and Slovakia—were selected in light of their status as young democracies that are classified as “Free” according to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* rating system (receiving a rating of 1 to 2.5 on a scale of 1 to 7).

The International Forum convened two meetings with the lead researchers in Washington, DC, in May 2016 and January 2017 to discuss the scope of the think tanks' inventory efforts, share interim findings and analysis, and solicit input from Latin American and Central European regional experts, as well as analysts familiar with Chinese and Russian foreign policy interests in those two regions. In addition, several think tank researchers who study Chinese and Russian influence strategies in other democratic states participated in the January 2017 gathering to provide further comparative perspectives on how these efforts may impact democratic societies.

The Unanticipated Threat from Authoritarian Regimes

Analysts, journalists, and policymakers in the democracies have tended to view authoritarian influence efforts through the familiar lens of “soft power.” According to Joseph Nye's original definition,⁵ a country's “hard power” is based on coercion, largely a function of its military or

economic might, whereas “soft power” is based on attraction, arising from the positive appeal of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. The regimes in Moscow and Beijing surely are seeking to shape public perceptions, sentiments, and opinions overseas to an extent that simply would not have been possible a decade or more ago. With the explosive growth of the internet and social media, and the integration of authoritarian information outlets into the media spaces of democracies, the opportunities for exerting influence are far greater today than at any time in the recent past.

But those who interpret these efforts as a way for Moscow and Beijing to boost their countries’ “soft power” appeal may be missing the mark, and risk perpetuating a false sense of security. After all, if the aim of the authoritarians’ efforts is to improve their international image, and Russia and China do not in fact enjoy an improved image in the democracies,⁶ then it stands to reason that their elaborate initiatives must not be working.⁷ And even if they were, there would be no obvious or direct harm to democratic states.

Unfortunately, authoritarian regimes view the use of such power overseas and the notion of success in world politics in an entirely different way, one that cannot be divorced from the political values by which they govern at home. As the essays in this report point out, they are not engaged in “public diplomacy” as democracies would understand it. Instead, they appear to be pursuing more malign objectives, often associated with new forms of outwardly directed censorship and information control, which are directly at odds with the benign conception of “soft power.”

A clearer picture of these regimes’ intent can be gleaned from their domestic political and media landscapes. Beijing and Moscow have methodically suppressed genuine dissent, smeared or silenced political opponents, inundated their citizens with propagandistic content, and deftly co-opted independent voices and institutions—all while seeking to maintain a deceptive appearance of pluralism, openness, and modernity. In fact, in recent years the realm of ideas in the two authoritarian behemoths has been steadily monopolized by the state and its surrogates.

Both regimes have redefined censorship for a twenty-first century context. Their systems allow a considerable volume and diversity of information, but precious little objectivity or pluralism when it comes to news coverage and political ideas. The dazzling variety of content available to consumers helps disguise the reality that the paramount authorities in these countries brook no dissent. In China’s case, a sophisticated system of online manipulation—which includes a vast, multilayered censorship system and “online content monitors” in government departments and private companies who number in the millions⁸—is designed to suppress and neutralize political speech and collective action, even while encouraging many ordinary people to feel as though they can express themselves on a range of issues they care about.

It is with a similar approach that the authoritarian trendsetters have plunged into the open societies of the democratic world. For example, just as Beijing has compelled its domestic internet companies and news outlets to police their own content for violations of the regime’s redlines, it hopes to school its international interlocutors on the boundaries of permissible expression and encourage them to self-censor in a manner that limits candid scrutiny of what China views as sensitive topics.

The nature of the regimes in Russia and China must be taken squarely into account when considering the implications of their vigorous international influence efforts. They have not come simply to attract or win over. They have come to manipulate, confuse, divide, and repress.

'Sharp Power': A New Conceptual Vocabulary

In common parlance, “soft power” has become a catch-all term for forms of influence that are not “hard” in the sense of military force. But the authoritarian influence techniques that have gained pace and traction in recent years, while not hard in the openly coercive sense, are not really soft, either.

Although Russia and China undertake some activities that can credibly fall into the category of normal public diplomacy, the nature of these countries’ political systems invariably and fundamentally color their efforts. In the case of China, for example, educational and cultural initiatives are accompanied by an authoritarian determination to monopolize ideas, suppress alternative narratives, and exploit partner institutions. The rulers of Russia, a less wealthy and powerful state, sometimes seem content to propagate the idea that their kleptocratic regime—whose paramount leader is rapidly approaching two decades in office—is a “normal” member of the international community, and that its actions and statements are no less valid than those of democracies. But they can only generate this false sense of equality by sowing doubt and disorder among their rivals.

We are in need of a new vocabulary to describe this phenomenon. What we have to date understood as “soft power” when speaking of authoritarian regimes might be more properly labeled as “sharp power.”

Authoritarian influence efforts are “sharp” in the sense that they pierce, penetrate, or perforate the information environments in the targeted countries. In the ruthless new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states, the repressive regimes’ “sharp power” techniques should be seen as the tip of their dagger—or indeed their syringe. These regimes are not necessarily seeking to “win hearts and minds,” the common frame of reference for “soft power” efforts, but they are surely seeking to manage their target audiences by manipulating or poisoning the information that reaches them.⁹

“Sharp power” likewise enables the authoritarians to cut, razor-like, into the fabric of a society, stoking and amplifying existing divisions. Russia has been especially adept at exploiting rifts within democratic nations.¹⁰ And unlike the blunt impact of hard power, “sharp power” entails a degree of stealth. Taking advantage of the open information environment of democracies, the authoritarians’ “sharp power” efforts are typically difficult to detect, meaning they benefit from a lag time before the targeted democracies realize there is a problem.

Above all, the term “sharp power” captures the malign and aggressive nature of the authoritarian projects, which bear little resemblance to the benign attraction of soft power. Through sharp power, the generally unattractive values of authoritarian systems—which encourage a monopoly on power, top-down control, censorship, and coerced or purchased loyalty—are projected outward, and those affected are not so much audiences as victims.

The authoritarian ideal for the media is plain to see in China. On the ninetieth anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Liberation Army, four separate state-owned newspapers had identical covers. In February 2016, President Xi Jinping visited the headquarters of the three

Through sharp power, the generally unattractive values of authoritarian systems—which encourage a monopoly on power, top-down control, censorship, and coerced or purchased loyalty—are projected outward.



main state media organizations, which pledged their loyalty to the Communist Party.¹¹ When such total control is not possible or desirable, authoritarian regimes often resort to strategic distraction. Among other examples, this can be observed in the Russian national broadcast media, which are by turns disorienting and entertaining, or in Beijing's large-scale fabrication of social media posts designed to disrupt discussion of controversial topics.¹²

Chinese universities, meanwhile, have come under increasing ideological control. Party committees oversee the running of the schools and monitor the ideological and political thinking of undergraduate and graduate students.¹³ In the run-up to the CCP's 19th Party Congress in October 2017, China's leading anticorruption agency, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), stepped up efforts to assess the effectiveness of these party committees at a number of China's top universities—including several that host joint academic initiatives with foreign universities.¹⁴

There is clearly nothing “soft” about these regimes' treatment of the media, education, and the realm of ideas more generally in their domestic environments. Why should we view their outward-facing activities so differently?

In order to fully appreciate the qualitative distinctions between authoritarian sharp power and soft power as it is customarily understood, it is essential to review the array of influence techniques developed by leading authoritarian regimes, and how they are deployed.

The Authoritarian Inventory of Influence

China's emergence on the world stage is a relatively recent phenomenon that the regime is able to play to its own advantage. Its first major contact with many countries occurred under the auspices of Beijing's “going out” strategy, which positioned China as an alternative source of investment for developing nations. The global financial crisis in 2008 provided China with an opportunity to expand this role. That year, the government released its first foreign policy “white paper” on Latin America and the Caribbean, articulating principles for a new framework to guide China's relations with the region.

Beijing published a second policy paper in 2016, during President Xi's visit to Lima, Peru, for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Among updates to the first paper were new sections that heavily emphasized people-to-people exchanges, culture, and media cooperation.¹⁵ Many of these concepts are echoed in China's first policy paper for Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁶

In the media sphere, Juan Pablo Cardenal's survey of Chinese government-sponsored activities identifies "a triple approach" for formal engagement with the local media and individual news consumers: (1) developing the local presence of Chinese state media in Latin American countries; (2) establishing partnerships, content exchanges, and cooperation agreements between Chinese state media and local public media, as well as with some independent media outlets; and (3) offering exchange opportunities and trainings for individual journalists.

On paper, such exchange-based activities between media outlets appear to be conducted in the spirit of openly sharing information and perspectives. However, the projects that Cardenal documents—such as the insertion of elaborate media supplements like *China Daily's China Watch* into several local private newspapers in Argentina, and the prime-time airing of China Global Television Network (CGTN) documentaries on the public station TV Peru Channel 7 during the 2016 APEC Summit—reveal a more ambitious plan to use local media as a "borrowed boat" for the dissemination of Chinese state propaganda. Likewise, interviews with journalists who participate in trainings paid for by Chinese state media outlets reveal how such trips are shaping the way that Latin American journalists, who often possess little prior knowledge of China, ultimately view and report on the country and its policies toward their own countries and region.

In all four of the countries examined, the think tank researchers noted that there are few experts in the media, academic, and analytical communities who follow China closely, and the tendency among the few who do is to focus on the economic aspects of China's relationship with their own country. Given China's size, complexity, and growing presence in the international arena, the researchers were surprised to find that commentators rarely discuss other aspects of the country that might be of interest to citizens living in a democracy, such as China's political system and human rights record. The researchers suggest that this is likely due to a combination of factors, such as the public's general lack of interest (as in Slovakia), or a fascination with China's rapid economic development as an "alternative model" (as in Poland). But the result is a vacuum in the information environment of the democracies that China is able to exploit.

In this context, Cardenal's review of the academic sectors in Argentina and Peru shows how China, through partnerships between Latin American universities and its own tightly controlled state universities, can have an outsized impact on the frame and tone of China-focused scholarship in the region. One example is the establishment of the Joint International Research Center (CIMI in Spanish) in April 2017 as a partnership between the prominent Buenos Aires-based National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET in Spanish) and Shanghai University. Cardenal notes that the new center's research aims "to clarify the way in which China is perceived in Argentina's public opinion" using new methodologies for studying the social sciences and globalization.

China has also sponsored the establishment of Confucius Institutes at local universities in all four case countries examined in this report: four in Peru, two in Argentina, five in Poland, and two in Slovakia. In Poland, Jacek Kucharczyk notes that plans are currently in the works to open a sixth Confucius Institute at Warsaw University, despite protests by the university's students, who have voiced concerns about the potential impact the institute might have on academic freedom.

Although the researchers note that many Confucius Institute activities seem innocuous, emphasizing Chinese language instruction and cultural events such as film exhibitions, other elements of their activities are out of place in a university context. Chinese government control over staffing and curriculum ensures that both will subtly promote CCP positions on issues like territorial disputes or religious minorities in China. In Slovakia, Grigorij Mesežnikov and Gabriela Pleschová describe how shortly after Slovak president Andrej Kiska's 2016 meeting with the Dalai Lama—which was highly criticized by the Chinese government—the Confucius Institute based at the Slovak University of Technology joined the Chinese embassy in cosponsoring an exhibition that emphasized China's territorial claims over the Tibetan region, titled “A Chinese Story: Chinese Tibet.”

In Latin America, a unique Confucius Institute Regional Center for Latin America—located in Santiago, Chile, and operated by Hanban, an Education Ministry office responsible for teaching the Chinese language abroad—provides methodology trainings for Confucius Institute instructors based throughout the region. At the individual institutes, Hanban supplies teachers and staff from China—some of whom lack sufficient Spanish skills to communicate effectively with local students. Yet local universities are typically expected to cover some of the costs for hosting the institutes. In Argentina, the two universities that host Confucius Institutes each provide funding for 50 percent of the operating expenses; the same is also true for at least one of the universities hosting a Confucius Institute in Peru. Since in all three instances the universities are public, this essentially means Argentine and Peruvian taxpayers are footing the bill for Chinese state-run institutes that can be employed as vehicles for promoting Beijing's views and narratives. Similar local subsidization of Confucius Institutes occurs in other democracies.¹⁷

For Beijing, culture has become an important avenue for advancing sharp power, precisely because its potential in this regard is often underestimated. Kucharczyk describes how China presents itself as an “ancient, anodyne culture” that poses no threat and can provide opportunities for “win-win cooperation.” Yet cultural events like Chinese New Year celebrations—which have proliferated around the world and become increasingly prominent in recent years¹⁸—can afford the Chinese authorities a prime opportunity to exert influence over how the country is represented abroad. In Argentina, Cardenal tells the story of how the Chinese embassy has used behind-the-scenes influence to transform what was once a grassroots cultural occasion organized by Buenos Aires' predominantly Taiwanese Chinatown community into a high-profile public event centered on the People's Republic of China.

Because Russia has far fewer financial and human resources at its disposal, as well as more complicated historical relationships with many countries, it has adopted a different approach to exerting influence in young democracies.

Perhaps the most highly visible Russian tool of influence—and one that has received the most attention from analysts—is the international expansion of its state media. In their inventory efforts, the researchers found that direct audience consumption of Russian television and print content is in all likelihood quite low in Central Europe. However, Jacek Kucharczyk points out that Russian state media still serve as an important channel for introducing disinformation into Poland. Their stories are often picked up by third-party websites—some run by Polish individuals or entities with their own reasons for supporting such narratives. The information, once filtered through a local source, becomes more palatable to a local population that would likely be skeptical of a Russian source.

All of Russia's influence efforts in the media, academia, culture, and the policy community tend to promote specific political narratives that advance the Kremlin's interests. In Poland and Slovakia, a general goal is to stoke and amplify any domestic opposition to the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). To achieve this in each country, however, the Russian regime adopts a tailored approach. In Slovakia, it draws on the population's Slavic identity in an attempt to argue that Russia and Slovakia share the same values, and that those associated with Western Europe and the United States are alien to Slavic history and culture.

In Poland, where the notion of fraternal ties with Russia carry far less weight, the Kremlin supports initiatives that emphasize the need to defend the Poles' own "traditional values" from the liberal ideas embraced by the rest of Europe. Perhaps most troubling, however, have been Russian-sponsored initiatives intended to undermine Poland's support for the new democratic government in Ukraine by reviving narratives about historical tensions between the two countries. In both Poland and Slovakia, the Russian government seeks to weaken a sense of belonging to the European and transatlantic communities, in which democratic governance and a commitment to shared liberal values have been defining and unifying features.

In both Poland and Slovakia, the Russian government seeks to weaken a sense of belonging to the European and transatlantic communities, in which democratic governance and a commitment to shared liberal values have been defining and unifying features.

For Russia, collaboration with academic and educational institutions in young democracies is important because their local reputations lend an air of credibility to the narratives that the regime wants to promote. In Slovakia, Mesežnikov and Pleschová detail a number of efforts, such as lecture tours by political scientists and historians aligned with Russia's government. They are funded by the Russian embassy, but Slovakian universities and high schools are sought out as event hosts and cosponsors. In both the Russian and Chinese cases, partnerships with local institutions are integral to accomplishing the authoritarian regimes' sharp power aims.

One additional realm in which the researchers noted increasing activity by the Russian and Chinese regimes is their own overseas communities. They appear to be expanding the definition of who is "Russian" or "Chinese" and are attempting to bring the relevant populations into their sphere of influence. In Slovakia, these efforts include initiatives to co-opt all Russian speakers through Russian expatriate associations. In Peru, Cardenal describes how China's efforts to engage the country's Tusan community—Peruvian citizens with ethnic Chinese heritage whose ancestors emigrated from China in a number of waves since the 19th century—have succeeded to such an extent that some Tusan are beginning to self-identify as "overseas Chinese" in tandem with their identity as Peruvian citizens.

The Goals and Impact of Authoritarian Influence Campaigns

By underwriting initiatives that borrow many of the traditional vehicles for transmitting soft power, China's one-party regime attempts to make itself more relatable to democratic societies. State-funded research centers, media outlets, Confucius Institutes, and people-to-people exchange programs essentially mimic the various outgrowths of independent civil society that exist in a democracy. Local actors in young democracies are often unaware of the extent to which civil society is tightly controlled inside China. The Russian authorities have also imposed growing restrictions on their own civil society sector,¹⁹ a point that is similarly not well understood by observers in Latin America.

An analysis of Beijing's various sharp power initiatives suggest that they seek to reduce, neutralize, or preempt any challenges to the regime's presentation of itself. In this sense, they are instruments of manipulation and censorship, not simple attraction.

According to the researchers' inventory, the Chinese government often aims to portray the country as either a benign foreign influence or a successful example of economic development without democratic political institutions. Beijing does not necessarily expect other countries to follow its supposed alternative model (although in certain circumstances it does promote this notion), and it is willing to find ways to engage with governing elites regardless of their political ideology or regime type. However, embedded within China's campaign to defend and promote its own one-party system is a tacit criticism of democracy as inefficient, chaotic, and a poor catalyst for economic development. And Beijing does not hesitate to use its local allies and influence to silence opposition to its projects.

Russia, meanwhile, tends to focus its sharp power more directly on undermining the health and credibility of democratic regimes. The promotion of narratives that tap into the existing frustrations and cynicism of local populations is effective even in environments where popular opinion of Russia is not favorable. Whereas Beijing attempts to raise its profile and expand its power mainly through aggressive investment, co-optation, and dishonest salesmanship, Moscow hopes to level the playing field largely by dragging down its democratic adversaries, either in appearance or in reality.

One key challenge of measuring the impact or culpability of Russian and Chinese influence efforts is that they cannot be assessed in isolation from the genuinely domestic dynamics of democratic societies. In his report, Jacek Kucharczyk recognizes Poland's recent democratic backsliding first and foremost as a product of local factors and political trends. But as he also points out, "the research detailed in this essay reveals many dangerous liaisons between specific political narratives employed by homegrown populists and Russian propaganda, as well as calculated efforts by China to portray itself as an ultramodern, benevolent power featuring an authoritarian political system that offers a better incubator for economic growth than liberal democracy."

Democracy is more often than not an untidy process in which ideological and policy debates take place out in the open. Moscow in particular exploits such conflicts to increase polarization and break down democratic comity and consensus. Illiberal narratives generated abroad and local populist themes can feed off each other in a vicious circle, further complicating the task of separating one from the other. As Kucharczyk puts it, "This narrative overlap makes it difficult to distinguish propaganda contents originating in and propagated by Russia from material produced by domestic actors. At the same time, the proliferation of populist narratives creates an opportunity for Russian propaganda, as these narratives can be amplified with different propaganda tools, such as online trolling."

Another finding that emerges from the researchers' inventories is that authoritarian states such as China and Russia employ economic activity as leverage to advance political goals in the realm of ideas. China is especially adroit in this regard, applying pressure with varying intensity and through indirect channels that are not always apparent unless one examines Chinese business activities in conjunction with Beijing's other influence efforts.²⁰

The cultivation of personal relationships is also a key facet of the authoritarians' sharp power influence. Many of the initiatives documented in this report, such as the authoritarians' people-to-people exchanges, are directed at the political elites, thought leaders, and other information gatekeepers of democratic societies. For politicians, journalists, academics, and think tank researchers in young democracies, such new connections offer the prospect of greater prestige and access to resources. For the authoritarians, currying goodwill and shaping the perspectives of key individuals can be a particularly cost-effective way to alter policy, while also gaining indirect access to wider audiences. These efforts are part of the larger aim of Moscow and Beijing to get inside democratic systems in order to incentivize cooperation and neutralize criticism of their authoritarian regimes.

A Widening Scope of Influence

This study examined four countries in two regions, but similar forms of Russian and Chinese sharp power influence are visible in a growing number of democracies around the world.

In Central Europe, the Czech Republic and Hungary have both been courted and manipulated by the two leading authoritarian states. In the Balkans, Russia still has a higher profile: A 2016 report estimated that 109 registered nongovernmental organizations, associations, and media outlets could be linked to pro-Russian lobbying efforts.²¹ Russian media have been especially active. According to one analyst, Russia's strategy for Serbia has been to use the pro-Kremlin outlets to "destabilize the region and discredit the EU and Serbia's membership ambitions."²² However, China also seems to be focusing more and more attention on Southeastern Europe. Under the auspices of its Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has made significant infrastructure investments in Serbia and elsewhere in the Balkans, which could provide the Chinese authorities with new allies and leverage within the EU as such countries enter the bloc.²³

The potential results can already be seen in Greece, a longtime EU member that has recently become a hub of Chinese investment in Europe. As the two countries' economic and other ties have deepened, observers have raised concerns that Beijing is buying Greece's silence or even cooperation on human rights issues. In June 2017, for example, Greece prevented the EU from condemning China's human rights record.²⁴



The nature of China's growing influence in sub-Saharan Africa, a region rife with young democracies, is also an urgent concern. An analysis of Afrobarometer's 2014–15 opinion polling data found that nearly one out of every four Africans surveyed indicated a preference for China as a model for their own country's development.²⁵ China has stepped up its engagement especially in Africa's media sphere, expanding the presence of its state media outlets, hosting exchange programs and trainings for journalists, and acting as a supplier for Africa's telecommunication infrastructure.²⁶ Far more study is required to understand the impact of Chinese sharp power on the prospects of democracy on the continent.

In New Zealand, China's web of influence has reached deep into democratic institutions, partly by attempting to assert political control over the country's diverse ethnic Chinese population, and by offering attractive incentives to former New Zealand politicians who maintain close ties to the current government and can promote Beijing's interests.²⁷

Democracies have assumed that engagement with authoritarian countries would lead to changes in their repressive systems, but there is little parity in an exchange between an open society and a deliberately closed one.

In Australia, another established democracy that has strong economic ties with China, Beijing has applied sharp power in an intensive way across a number of important sectors, including the media, business, politics, and culture. For example, Chinese entities are suspected of funneling donations to political parties and individual politicians, Chinese state-run media outlets buy space in Australian newspapers to promote official views, and government representatives exert influence over Chinese students at Australian universities—detering open debate and promoting the official line on sensitive issues.²⁸

A key aim of Chinese influence efforts in Australia is to weaken the country's alliance with the United States.²⁹ But regardless of its intended goals in terms of Australian government policy, Beijing's activities are damaging the underpinnings of Australian democracy. This threat to a long-standing bastion of freedom in the world should serve as a wake-up call for democracies everywhere.

Understanding Authoritarian Influence in an Era of Globalization

Taken individually, authoritarian influence efforts in particular countries may seem fairly harmless or ineffectual. However, when the seemingly disparate activities of Russia and China around the world are added together, a far more disturbing picture emerges.

The evidence presented by the report authors suggests that even exchange-related activities backed by authoritarian governments should be approached with greater skepticism. Although some of these initiatives may be genuine and advance admirable goals, many are designed to promote a particular political narrative, which in turn creates favorable conditions for authoritarian regimes.

While Russia and China may take somewhat different approaches to the application of sharp power, they both clearly take advantage of the openness of democratic systems. Democracies have assumed that engagement with authoritarian countries would lead to changes in their repressive systems, but there is little parity in an exchange between an open society and a deliberately closed one. In the marketplace of ideas, authoritarian regimes simply do not respect the rules: They protect their own controlled environments while attempting to tip the

scales abroad. This lack of reciprocity is evident with respect to media, nongovernmental organizations, and academia as well.

In many local contexts, there is a general lack of knowledge and expertise regarding the foreign policy objectives of China and Russia and the full extent of repression within their borders. The initiatives documented in this report demonstrate a serious effort by the Chinese and Russian regimes to exploit the situation and ensure that thought leaders and sociopolitical elites in democratic societies are willing to help advance their strategic interests.

China especially is making long-term investments in this sphere. Many of its exchange and educational initiatives focus specifically on youth, such as the exchange program for young think tank leaders from Central and Eastern Europe cited by Kucharczyk, and the Bridges to the Future exchange program for young Latin American leaders described by Cardenal.

To some extent, the increased but fundamentally unbalanced interconnectedness associated with globalization has already borne fruit for authoritarian regimes. Many experts, policymakers, and journalists consulted for this report were reluctant to be cited by name. Offering an educated opinion that may be critical of the Chinese government can jeopardize an expert's access to China.

It is worth noting the similarities between the skewed exchanges of information and ideas described here and the prevailing pattern of economic engagement between democracies and the authoritarian powers. With the passage of time, it has become increasingly clear that the autocrats have managed to maintain tight control over their national economies while expanding the reach of their standard-bearing companies abroad. In China's case, the authorities have deftly put up barrier after barrier to foreign companies seeking access to the domestic market, requiring them to give up intellectual property, partner with approved Chinese firms, and comply with censorship and other demands. Meanwhile, Chinese firms have profited from their access to democratic markets; among countless other investments, China is pumping billions of dollars into U.S. companies that are working on cutting-edge technologies with potential military applications. While policymakers have recently become more attuned to the national security dimension of China's economic activities in democracies, they have been terribly slow to react to the dangers posed by China's influence activities in the media, academic, or cultural spheres. The same can be said with respect to Russia.

The regimes in Moscow and Beijing are essentially exploiting the opportunities of globalization while rejecting its underlying principle of free and open exchange. This basic hostility to universal liberal norms is most clear in their propaganda narratives, which typically frame democratic values as "Western values" that have no place in other parts of the world. As an alternative, the two governments promote nationalist, "traditional" cultural constructs and revisionist histories that seem to justify authoritarian rule and the violation of basic human rights.

As Joseph Nye and Wang Jisi have argued, "soft power is not a zero sum game in which one country's gain is necessarily another country's loss."³⁰ Yet the leaders of China and Russia apparently see themselves as engaged in a zero-sum competition with democratic nations, which runs counter to the conventional understanding of soft power. Until policymakers in the democracies recognize and properly define what they are facing, they will continue to fall prey to authoritarian influence efforts.



Implications for the Democracies

Even the strongest and most well-established democracies are far from immune to authoritarian influence. The United States and Western European powers have been targeted with an onslaught of Russian and Chinese initiatives in the arenas of media, culture, and politics. Among other problems they are grappling with is the pollution of the information space by a widening array of state-sponsored media campaigns, as well as the challenges to free expression and academic integrity presented by Confucius Institutes and university partnerships.

But it is the authoritarians' emphasis on young or institutionally fragile democracies that poses a particularly serious problem. In countries like Argentina, Peru, Poland, and Slovakia, democratic standards and values are not as well entrenched, and the system is not as well equipped to resist outside manipulation. Resources to support and sustain independent knowledge building about China and Russia are also scarce. The leading authoritarian states have sought to exploit this vulnerability, dedicating formidable and growing resources to the countries in question.

The following are key steps that can be taken to address China and Russia's malign efforts to influence and manipulate democracies:

- **Address the shortage of information on China and Russia.** In the four democracies examined, information concerning the Chinese political system and its foreign policy strategies tends to be extremely limited. There are few journalists, editors, and policy professionals who possess a deep understanding of China and can share their knowledge with the rest of their societies. Given China's growing economic, media, and political footprint in these settings, there is an acute need to build capacity to disseminate independent information about the country and its regime. The same holds true for Russia in places such as Latin America, though knowledge of today's Russia in Central Europe is more robust.

Civil society organizations should develop strategies for communicating expert knowledge about China and Russia to broader audiences. This should include a conscious effort to break down ordinary academic and policy barriers to enable collaboration between experts

on China and Russia and regional specialists focused on Latin America or Central Europe. The challenge is global in scope, turning up in democratic countries on every continent, and the response must take this into account.

- **Unmask authoritarian influence.** Chinese and Russian sharp power efforts rely in large part on camouflage—disguising state-directed projects as commercial media or grassroots associations, for example, or using local actors as conduits for foreign propaganda and tools of foreign manipulation. To counteract these efforts at misdirection, observers in democracies should put them under the spotlight and analyze them in a comprehensive manner.

Given the dispersed, globalized nature of authoritarian influence activities, which are increasingly embedded within democratic societies, the formation of working alliances across professional fields and borders is critical. Researchers, journalists, and civil society leaders who are concerned about the ever more complex challenges posed by authoritarian sharp power should also analyze the discourse of illiberal elites in democratic societies, and highlight the ideological concepts that authoritarian regimes seek to propagate in order to advance their own interests.

- **Inoculate democratic societies against malign authoritarian influence.** Once the nature and techniques of authoritarian influence efforts are exposed, democracies should build up internal defenses. Authoritarian initiatives are directed at cultivating relationships with the political elites, thought leaders, and other information gatekeepers of democratic societies. Such efforts are part of the larger aim of Moscow and Beijing to get inside democratic systems in order to incentivize cooperation and neutralize criticism of their authoritarian regimes.

Support for a robust, independent civil society—including independent media—is essential to ensuring that the citizens of democracies are informed enough to critically evaluate the benefits and risks of closer engagement with authoritarian regimes. Where collaboration with Chinese and Russian state-backed entities has become widely accepted, civil society can develop and adopt their own voluntary standards of conduct for appropriate engagement with their “counterparts” in authoritarian regimes, mitigating the risk of co-optation and the export of censorship practices from autocratic to democratic settings.

- **Reaffirm support for democratic values and ideals.** If one goal of authoritarian sharp power is to legitimize illiberal forms of government, then it is only effective to the extent that democracies and their citizens lose sight of their own principles. Russia’s efforts to exploit pre-existing cleavages in democratic societies and China’s attempts to neutralize criticism of its own regime place an emphasis on fueling citizens’ doubts about democracy as a successful form of government. Top leaders in the democracies must speak out clearly and consistently on behalf of democratic ideals and put down clear markers regarding acceptable standards of democratic behavior. Otherwise, the authoritarians will fill the void.
- **Reconceptualize “soft power.”** Finally, journalists, think tank analysts, and other policy elites need to recognize authoritarian influence efforts in the realm of ideas for what they are: corrosive and subversive “sharp power” instruments that do real damage to the targeted democratic societies. The conceptual vocabulary that has been used since the Cold War’s end no longer seems adequate to describe what is afoot. The growing inventory of tools used by repressive regimes are not “soft” in the sense that they seek merely to attract support.

They are not principally aimed at “charming” or “winning hearts and minds.” Such tactics should be seen instead as instruments of manipulation, distortion, and distraction that reflect the antidemocratic political systems of the authoritarian states that wield them.

The regimes in China and Russia are deeply engaged in an international struggle over information, influence, and ideas. If the United States and other powerful democracies do not rise to the challenge, they will be abdicating their leadership roles, abandoning their allies, and neglecting their own long-term security. Should these and other well-resourced autocratic regimes maintain their current momentum for the foreseeable future, their efforts could do grievous damage to the integrity of young democracies. This in turn would deliver a devastating blow to the rules-based international order that has underpinned global security and prosperity.

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NOTES

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China in Latin America

By Juan Pablo Cardenal

Understanding the Inventory of Influence

INTRODUCTION In late 2016, during a visit to Peru by Chinese President Xi Jinping, China released a new policy paper on Latin America and the Caribbean. It was a timely moment to do so, given the political changes across the continent: political instability and economic recession in Brazil, turmoil in Venezuela, prospects of change regarding the region's relationship with Cuba, and political alternation in both Peru and Argentina, among other events. However, new motivations had surfaced, too. While China is becoming increasingly active in the region, the operating environment for the Chinese government seems to be more challenging than in the past.

Despite regional elites' calls for further economic engagement with China, a few critical voices in Latin America have begun to raise concerns about asymmetric trade relationships, the terms of Chinese loans, and the labor conditions and environmental impact of Chinese projects. Although these voices remain in the minority and often do not receive much visibility, it is perhaps for this reason that the policy paper emphasizes the series of initiatives that Beijing has put forward since 2013 to strengthen China's relations and cooperation with the region. More plainly, it lays out a comprehensive strategy of cooperation across multiple sectors and themes, including high-level exchanges in the political arena, media, academia, and other fields.¹

According to the policy document, China aims to "promote the construction of a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation at the core." To achieve this goal, money and economic enticement are no longer China's only tools. Beijing has now officially established its own version of soft power,² which emanates from its undemocratic system and rests on its ability to shape the viewpoints of others through co-optation and persuasion. In the minds of China's top political leadership, this subtle approach not only aims to correct the negative

perceptions that stem from the country's meteoric, global rise. It is also designed to counteract what the Chinese leaders would argue is a Western hegemonic discourse of values intended to promote the West's interests and project a negative image of China.³

One of China's most powerful soft power tools in Latin America is people-to-people exchange, a kind of public diplomacy that plays a central role in China's regional objectives.

One of China's most powerful soft power tools in Latin America is people-to-people exchange, a kind of public diplomacy that plays a central role in China's regional objectives. This approach is essentially based on two actions: cooperation between institutions and personal exchanges. Such engagement reaches almost anyone deemed influential in local societies: from journalists, scholars, diplomats, and students to entrepreneurs, politicians, and future leaders in all fields. Xi reinforced this strategy in late 2016 when he declared, after being awarded the Grand-Cross Medal of Honor of the Peruvian Congress, that China would expand the number of training opportunities of various kinds to 10,000 Latin Americans in the coming three years.⁴

Together with Beijing's attempts to project an image of itself as an accommodating power that shares similar development and modernization goals with the developing world, this soft power approach has enabled China to earn the sympathies of political elites across Latin America.⁵ The perception among these enthusiastic political elites that China would make an attractive partner rests primarily on its economic development over the past four decades, its ability to weather the global financial crisis virtually untouched, and its ever-growing influence in the international arena. The prospect that China can provide economic opportunities that other international partners cannot offer, along with the United States' diminishing presence in the region, is also a decisive factor behind Beijing's new, fresh, and friendly image in Latin America.

With this favorable context, Beijing's people-to-people diplomacy is proving effective at building strong, personal relationships with mostly young, influential individuals across Latin America, including in Peru and Argentina. Beijing's success stems largely from repeatedly inviting these people on free-of-charge trips to China for a variety of purposes: to take part in trainings, to participate in events and academic or exchange programs, and to meet counterparts. If the motivation behind this approach is to draw such prominent people to Beijing's cause, it appears to be working.

The Chinese-style warm welcome, the carefully selected tours that include visits to sites with symbolic historical and cultural significance, and ad hoc friendly discourse delivered by the Chinese hosts can have hypnotic effects on their foreign guests. The aim of such efforts is for these visitors to return home with a fundamentally benign idea of the nature of the Chinese regime. For those with limited prior knowledge of China, this flattery and over-the-top hospitality can cloud their perception of the complexity of China's political system. One attendee on several of these trips interviewed by the author described being given extra pocket money for personal spending on the otherwise all-expenses-paid trip.⁶ Enticing participants to promote a positive message about China at home underlies Beijing's extensive investments.

Not all such initiatives involve bringing foreigners to China. The Chinese government's strategy is to actively push its influence in Latin America, exporting programs and activities that broadly target culture and education, on the one hand, and focus on individuals in institutions, academia, and the media on the other. Some of China's most relevant soft power initiatives take place at

the regional level, which may be a matter of simple efficiency. This trend has become increasingly evident since 2013, just after Xi assumed office, but it really gained speed in early 2015 with the first ministerial meeting of the China–CELAC Forum,⁷ held in Beijing. Through this annual gathering of high-level Chinese and Latin American officials, Beijing can leverage more agenda-setting power with regard to the region than it has been able to achieve within the more traditional inter-American institutions, where China’s participation is more marginal.

With China playing a lead organizing role, the Forum adopted a cooperation plan for 2015–19 that outlines China’s anticipated public diplomacy activities in Latin America. In addition to initiatives in up to 13 other fields, it conceives of action in three areas linked to the shaping of public perceptions. In media, it calls for broad coverage agreements in radio, television, and cinema, as well as active cooperation to promote exchanges, trainings, and joint journalistic work. In academia and education, China has pledged to intensify cooperation, trainings and exchanges, investigative projects, and the development of human resources with national educational institutions and think tanks, as well as to increase the number of scholarships available for Latin American students to study in China. As a result of this plan, bilateral cultural cooperation and exchange have gone from being sporadic to institutionalized.

Culture

Under the framework of the China–CELAC Forum, 2016 was designated the “China–Latin America Year of Cultural Exchange.” Chinese official rhetoric labeled this initiative as “the biggest event ever to be organized between China and Latin America since the foundation of the People’s Republic.” More than one hundred activities were planned between March and November across the region and in China: These included an opening ceremony with more than one hundred artists in Beijing, a Latin American music festival in China, the publication in Latin America of 32 novels and poetry books by contemporary Chinese authors, a closing ceremony in Lima, Peru, and a number of smaller art, cinema, and music exhibitions in several countries. Chinese pianist Lang Lang, who was named the initiative’s ambassador, toured Argentina and Chile—perhaps the most high-profile activity in the whole program.

Despite what looks like a two-way cultural exchange, a closer examination of the extensive agenda and its implementation suggest that it was primarily organized and carried out by the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Many of the programmed events took place in China, and their coverage in the Latin American media was for the most part scarce. Activities that were announced with great fanfare in fact sometimes lacked substance or failed to attract a significant audience. As a result, the Year of Cultural Exchange had less impact than expected in Latin America—if that was ever the intention of the Chinese organizers. On the contrary, the event appears to have served the Chinese regime’s purposes by reframing the bilateral relationship with a benign, cultural façade that goes beyond trade and the economy.

From this author’s analysis of Chinese media narratives about the initiative and its calendar of events, the Year of Cultural Exchange and its agenda seem designed to emphasize and promote China’s overall regional agenda. Media reports were full of allusions to the importance of friendship and continuously referred to the role of culture for “mutual understanding” as a means to “reduce the distance between the two [regions]” and “consolidate a base for development.” In this sense, the China–Latin America Year of Cultural Exchange was highlighted as an example of brotherhood between millennia-old civilizations, as well as “an example of harmonious coexistence between cultures.”

What the nature of this program suggests is that the year-long event was primarily designed to reach Latin American political elites, rather than the general public. The initiative represented a significant effort by Beijing to go beyond offering the region's leadership more than just access to investment and economic resources, but reflected an effort to deepen friendship between the region and China.

Education

With regard to education, Confucius Institutes play an increasing role in China's soft power efforts in Latin America. There are currently 39 institutes and 19 Confucius classrooms in 20 countries across the region. Globally, there are a total of 512 institutes and 1,074 classrooms located around the world. Demand in the Latin American centers appears to be growing steadily: According to administrators who oversee China's Confucius programs around the region, there are currently more than 100,000 students enrolled in the different language programs across Latin America, while more than one million people participate in the institutes' cultural activities and workshops each year.⁸

The University of Buenos Aires' Confucius Institute in Argentina illustrates this trend. It was created in 2008, but it was not until 2013 that the number of students picked up significantly. The number of Chinese-language students has doubled to 2,000, not including another 600 who attend courses on Chinese culture. The Argentine institute, which teaches 5,500 hours of Chinese language every year, claims to be one of the more successful Confucius Institutes in the world in terms of the number of students. In the institute's view, this achievement is related to three factors: growing interest in China, the strengthening of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and a high-flying local communications campaign on social networks.⁹

The Confucius Institutes' growing relevance in Latin America is also connected to the founding of a regional headquarters in Santiago, Chile in 2014—one of only three regional centers that China has established overseas.

The Confucius Institutes' growing relevance in Latin America is also connected to the founding of a regional headquarters in Santiago, Chile in 2014—one of only three regional centers that China has established overseas. Whereas the regional center in Washington, D.C. is said to focus on public relations and lobbying and the London center coordinates the publication of materials, the Confucius Institute Regional Center for Latin America (CRICAL, in Spanish) is assigned the task of organizing and implementing joint cultural activities in cooperation with the national institutes.¹⁰ Run by only three people, it also organizes trainings for teachers and, more generally, “plays a strategic role in the process of deepening the relationship between China and Latin America.”

During the two-and-a-half years since CRICAL's establishment, it has been active on two fronts. It coordinates methodology trainings for teachers throughout the year, in which some 30 regional attendees typically take part. With the approval of the Confucius Institute headquarters in Beijing, known as Hanban, CRICAL also arranges and finances visits to the region by well-known Chinese economists, writers, filmmakers, and other artists

including dance, opera, theatre, and martial arts groups. Thanks to this initiative, Chinese writers of all genres whose work has been translated into Spanish are able to tour Latin America periodically. With CRICAL support, they introduce their work in the region, participate in roundtables with local writers, and give lectures to students and the public. The writers have gone from having a minor audience in the region to becoming visible in the local media.



China has also significantly increased public funding for international scholarships, particularly for students of developing nations. Chinese official figures estimate that 377,000 foreigners studied in China in 2014, up from 84,000 a decade earlier. Furthermore, the Chinese government plans to raise that figure to 500,000 by 2020.¹¹ In addition, under the China–CELAC 2015–19 cooperation plan, Beijing is investing heavily in people-to-people educational exchanges. Through this framework, China has officially offered to Latin American youth 6,000 government scholarships, 6,000 internships, and 400 on-the-job opportunities in China for that period.¹² Scholarships are generally offered by the Chinese government, Confucius Institutes, or a large number of Chinese universities, typically in five academic categories: Chinese-language studies, research projects, and graduate, master’s, or postgraduate studies.

Concurrently with China’s growing presence in Latin America, interest in Spanish language and Hispanic culture in China has also skyrocketed during recent years. Spanish language departments in Chinese universities have jumped from 12 in 2000 to more than 80 in 2015, while the number of Hispanic-studies students has increased from 500 to 15,000 in that same time span.¹³

Media

In 2016, China reinforced the importance of media cooperation in the China–Latin America relationship. During the China–Latin America Media Leaders’ Summit, which was held at the Santiago, Chile headquarters of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Xi confirmed China’s intention to bring regional media exchanges and cooperation to a new level. The declared aim was to “show the world a more authentic and vibrant China” where Latin American counterparts “jointly voice opinions on world peace and development and other major issues.”

The Chinese president was unambiguous during his speech about Beijing’s interest in cultivating closer ties with Latin American media. Since the number of Latin American journalists based in China is still minimal, he encouraged regional media to open bureaus in the country, offering “better conditions for their work” as an incentive. More importantly, to influence perceptions about China among regional reporters and opinion leaders, Xi also announced China’s commitment to train 500 Latin American journalists in the next five years.

“Training” is a word that can be easily misinterpreted. In the Western world, it would typically mean bringing someone to a certain standard of proficiency, and would probably be academic in nature. However, in China, media trainings are in actuality free public-relations trips to China that follow a conveniently pro-government agenda. As mentioned above, Beijing is clearly active with people-to-people diplomacy, and such efforts in the media sector are central to the Chinese soft power strategy. Therefore, China’s intent to “train” hundreds of Latin American journalists in the years to come is probably best understood as a way of exposing influential opinion makers to Beijing’s propaganda.

The event in Santiago represented the public, official unveiling of such efforts. The Chinese government paid for the travel expenses of more than 80 Latin American media representatives, including high-ranking news editors. Among them were journalists from *El Comercio*, Peru’s most influential newspaper; the Peruvian news agency Andina; and Peru’s official state newspaper, *Diario Oficial El Peruano*. At least two top executives from Argentine public television also attended the event. Representing two dozen Chinese media counterparts, Cai Mingzhao, head of the Xinhua news agency, announced that Xinhua was “ready to invite a number of journalists and media publishers every year to cooperate with us and to conduct interviews and exchanges in China.”¹⁴

China’s proposal was well-received all around. Speeches made by Latin American media executives and other high-level participants during the event were generally accommodating to the Chinese regime, despite the fact that China ranked 176th out of 180 countries in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. According to the account of a journalist who attended the event, “behind the applause was the certainty that some media want to be financed by China.” In effect, the event turned out to be a marketplace for Chinese-produced media content: “The Chinese offered everything. It was like a bazaar because, at the end of the day, what they want is to become partners so that they can place their [reporting] materials [in the Latin American media market]. Content is the key for them.”¹⁵

Academia and Think Tanks

Under the China–CELAC Forum’s cooperation plan, Beijing committed to train 1,000 young Latin American leaders by 2024. The core idea behind this ten-year Bridge to the Future exchange program is to engage with the region’s future leaders, inviting them to take part in two-week trainings and workshops in China at a rate of approximately 100 individuals per year. The program is designed to engage with young emerging leaders who will belong to the elites of the fields in which they are involved—primarily academia, politics, business, media, and the cultural and social fields. The program’s foremost objective is to build a network of young leaders who might eventually emerge as “friendship envoys” between China and Latin America.¹⁶

According to interviews with Bridge to the Future participants, the training is organized by the All-China Youth Federation, which represents 52 youth organizations that are headed by the Communist Youth League of China. The program in China is typically divided into three parts. A theoretical section consists of lectures and discussions about China’s politics, economy, culture, history, foreign relations, as well as the Chinese Communist Party’s history and organization. The practical part includes visits to historical sites, government headquarters, and Chinese companies and entities that do business in or cooperate with Latin America. Such visits involve meetings with high-ranking officials as far up as China’s vice president—which demonstrates Beijing’s commitment to these exchange programs. And third, after the trainings,

attendees are encouraged to maintain their network by joining a virtual community, as well as through unscheduled offline activities.

Bridge to the Future has held four trainings since 2015 with the attendance of roughly 200 young Latin Americans, including a number from Central American countries that do not enjoy formal diplomatic relations with Beijing (and therefore recognize Taiwan). Simultaneously, a less formal platform for dialogue made up of young scholars, researchers, and students of both regions has also been active since 2015 through academic exchange initiatives such as the Academic Dialogue between China and Latin America. The Community of Chinese and Latin American Studies (CECLA, in Spanish), which sponsors this project, claims that over 500 Chinese and Latin American members have joined CECLA since its foundation, many of them through WeChat, a popular Chinese social networking platform.¹⁷

In 2017, Bridge to the Future merged with the Academic Dialogue initiative. Chinese and Latin American professionals under forty working in international relations research, media, social development, or economic exchanges, among other fields, were invited to apply. Twenty-five candidates each from Latin America and China were chosen after submitting papers on Chinese–Latin American cooperation and integration. The Latin American participants were first invited to participate in the Academic Dialogue, and later to join the two-week Bridge to the Future training—where all expenses were covered. According to the initiative, the papers will be published in the *Latin American Studies* journal, *China Today*, and *Global Finance* magazine.

China also aims to strengthen the exchange of experiences and knowledge between research institutes through the China–Latin America Think Tanks Forum, which was created in 2010 and was later integrated into the China–CELAC Forum in 2015. Three forums have been held so far, with attendance between 100–160 participants, including senior academics, former Latin American political leaders, ambassadors and senior diplomats, journalists, and businessmen. The Forum was organized by the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs and the China Institute of International Studies.¹⁸

Since 2012, China has also organized a regional China–Latin America High-Level Academic Forum. With the sponsorship of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Institute of Latin American Studies, and the participation of several other institutions including Confucius Institutes, there have been five forums held to date, the most recent being in Argentina in November 2016. The Forum is typically a three-day meeting between scholars of Chinese studies or international relations from regional universities and institutions. The Chinese ambassador to Argentina was invited to speak during the fifth forum.

People-to-people diplomacy reflects a far-reaching strategy in which different state entities and government agencies, together with the Chinese Communist Party, are jointly involved.

People-to-People Diplomacy Initiatives

In China’s strategy of people-to-people diplomacy, there is a very significant factor to bear in mind: the Chinese actors that undertake such initiatives to connect with elites abroad are not independent from the state, even when they appear to be part of civil society. Nor are these activities merely the types of programs that might be typically organized as the sole initiative of any particular government agency or entity within the Chinese bureaucracy. Instead, people-to-people diplomacy reflects a far-reaching strategy in which different state

entities and government agencies, together with the Chinese Communist Party, are jointly involved. This is a good indication of the variety of efforts that the Chinese regime puts behind this strategy.

This factor is even more relevant when one considers how Latin American elites perceive the Chinese actors that are behind such efforts. Given that in most democratic countries, friendship associations, media outlets, universities, think tanks, and other research institutions have a certain degree of independence, many Latin Americans assume there is no association between Chinese organizations and the state. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Chinese universities, and the overseas Chinese friendship associations are all good examples. Even the official Xinhua news agency, or the national or provincial legislative exchange delegations that actively engage with their Latin American peers, are sometimes thought to operate independently from the state—if they are not equated with their institutional counterparts in democracies.

This is a misconception that needs to be clarified. Most, if not all, of the Chinese entities that engage with their peers abroad unequivocally serve national party goals—either by following official or unofficial guidelines, or by avoiding taking positions that might violate Chinese Communist Party (CCP) guidelines or jeopardize the regime’s goals. In practice, this means that elites in Latin America may mistakenly perceive Chinese friendship associations as merely a part of civil society. They may be also tempted to think that the Chinese official media are fairly independent and simply offer an alternative version of events. Or, they may consider that Chinese academic institutions are comparable to any other from abroad. If that were the case, why are sensitive issues like China’s human rights crackdown, the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, or the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities never debated?

The answer is clear. No matter how independent, persuasive, or flattering a Chinese counterpart may be, how innocuous the Chinese entities may seem (in the forms of friendship associations, universities, think tanks, and overseas exchange associations), or how peripheral these entities are in relation to the party-state structure (ie: Confucius Institutes, students associations): In one way or another, they all row in the same direction. As is the case with Beijing’s *qiaowu* strategy to manage the overseas Chinese, which is further explained in the Peru section of this report, they are all part of the same influence efforts.¹⁹ Given that this aspect of the Chinese regime’s strategy appears to escape the notice of most elites in Latin America, people-to-people diplomacy with Chinese characteristics appears to be working very well in China’s favor.

An example of such ostensibly benign engagement is the China–Latin America People-to-People Friendship Forum, which held biennial meetings since it was established in 2007 before it was integrated into the China–CELAC Forum. Simultaneously, the first China–Latin America local governments cooperation forum, which focuses on local level engagement, was held in November 2016. The main organizer is the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, a national organization “engaged in people-to-people diplomacy” that aims to “make friends and deepen friendship in the international community on behalf of the Chinese people.”²⁰

If Chinese state and government agencies happen to be very active in people-to-people diplomacy, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is even more so. Evidence of the importance that Beijing gives to the party’s leading role in engaging both on an institution-to-institution and

people-to-people basis with Latin America is the fact that two of eight sub-forums within the China–CELAC Forum framework are devoted to exchange among political parties and young political leaders. Guided by the CCP and the Communist Youth League of China, Latin American regional party cadres and representatives of dozens of regional political parties of all ideologies are regularly invited on free-of-charge training trips and party-to-party exchanges in China.

This has contributed to the building up of a “large friendship and cooperation network,” as it is commonly framed by Chinese official rhetoric. In 2015, the International Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee received 250 participants in 16 different groups. For the period from 2016 to 2020, this department has committed to inviting another 1,200 regional cadres to visit China.²¹ In such a political climate of consensus, a 2016 joint declaration between the Chinese and Latin American political parties noted the need to avoid “interference” and emphasized the “need to respect the autonomous choice of each nation to decide its development path.”²² Such a statement provides a subtle legitimization of the CCP-led Chinese regime.

Conclusion

Latin America is increasingly becoming an important region for Beijing, and not only in economic terms. At the beginning of the 21st century, China’s presence in Latin America was mostly limited to trade, investments, loans, and infrastructure building—but not anymore. Since the 2008 global crisis, the Chinese regime has capitalized on its economic strength to enhance its political influence across the region. One of the most visible outcomes of China’s new prominence in Latin America was the foundation of the China–CELAC Forum, a regional platform of engagement that notably excludes the United States and Canada.

The forum and its cooperation plan for 2015–19 provides China with a convenient policy framework to introduce and promote its soft power agenda. In this sense, Beijing’s strategy clearly targets Latin American elites. Prominent regional leaders from multiple fields—including politicians, academics, journalists, former diplomats, current government officials, and students, among others—are subtly being enticed by the Chinese government through personal interaction, with the ultimate purpose of gaining their support for China. As a result, many of these renowned and influential people have already become *de facto* ambassadors of the Chinese cause.

In China’s people-to-people engagement, money is key. Free-of-charge trainings, exchange programs, and scholarships in China have proven to be effective tools to engage Latin America’s regional elites, an idea supported in late 2016 by Xi Jinping’s announcement that China will train 10,000 Latin Americans by 2020. The media and academia are two areas of priority attention for Beijing’s efforts. Consequently, China is determined to promote cooperation of different kinds between media companies, universities, and think tanks—both at the regional and country level. Education and culture are increasingly important in Beijing’s toolkit as well.

Given that the majority of Latin American countries are predominantly Spanish-speaking and share similar cultural roots, China can more efficiently introduce its range of efforts through regional initiatives. CRICAL, the Confucius Institute’s headquarters in Latin America, assists the regional institutes academically and organizes a top-down cultural agenda in coordination with

Hanban. In addition, Beijing put forward a comprehensive program in Beijing and throughout Latin America to commemorate the “China-Latin America Year of Cultural Exchange.” These soft power-like initiatives merge with and are further illustrated by similar efforts in individual countries, as are described in the chapters that follow on Argentina and Peru.

The views expressed in this paper represent the opinions and analysis of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

NOTES

- ¹ Ted Piccone, *The Geopolitics of China's Rise in Latin America*, Geo-economics and Global Issues, Paper 2, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, November 2016).
- ² Editor's note: Although the overview essay to this report uses the term “sharp power” to characterize the more malign and manipulative aspects of authoritarian influence, the authors of the individual country reports instead generally use the broader term “soft power.” In the country studies, the authors were asked to inventory and analyze the methods of authoritarian influence applied by China and Russia in democratic settings. The concept of “sharp power” introduced in the overview essay is an outgrowth of their comparative findings.
- ³ Parama Sinha Palit, “China's Cultural Diplomacy: Historical Origin, Modern Methods and Strategic Outcomes,” *China Currents* 12, no. 2 (2013).
- ⁴ “Xi Jinping Pronuncia Discurso ante Congreso de Perú,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 22 November 2016, www.fmprc.gov.cn/esp/zxxx/t1417904.shtml.
- ⁵ Sergio Cesarín and Gonzalo Tordini, “Poder blando en influencia. China en la cooperación Sur-Sur: objetivos y fines de los programas y proyectos de cooperación internacional,” *Revista Asia América Latina* 1, no. 2 (December 2016).
- ⁶ Author's interview with anonymous source. Buenos Aires, 1 December 2016.
- ⁷ The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, or CELAC, is a regional organization of 33 member states founded in 2011 with the aims of strengthening the political, social, and cultural integration of the region and stimulating its economic growth. All countries in the Americas are members except the United States and Canada. The China–CELAC Forum was established in 2014 and held its first meeting in 2015. Four of its eight sub-forums are devoted to fields that might fall within the soft power realm: think-tanks forum; young political leaders' forum; people-to-people friendship forum; and political parties' forum.
- ⁸ Author's interview with CRICAL executives in Santiago, Chile. Statistics as of November 2016.
- ⁹ Author's interview with staff of the Confucius Institute at the University of Buenos Aires.
- ¹⁰ CRICAL was founded in May 2014 after the Hanban's approval of an initiative of the Confucius Institutes of Medellín (Colombia), Yucatán (Mexico), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Viña del Mar (Chile), and Valencia (Spain). In 2015, authorities in Chile granted CRICAL legal recognition as a foundation, which gives it access to tax benefits.
- ¹¹ “China Scholarship Council Organized the First CSC Scholarship Student Conference,” China Scholarship Council, 27 June 2013, <http://en.csc.edu.cn/News/db88603b8da54f89a574f863b6a1863b.shtml>.
- ¹² A breakdown of the total Chinese scholarships available by country is challenging to ascertain because information is fragmented and statistics are not consistently available. The different varieties of scholarships for international students add an additional layer of complexity, since Latin American candidates can also apply for other types of specific scholarships, such as scholarships for developing countries or opportunities that fall within the framework of bilateral education programs.
- ¹³ Cesarín and Tordini, 2016.
- ¹⁴ “Xinhua dispuesta a profundizar intercambios con medios de comunicación de América Latina,” Xinhua, November 2016, http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2016-11/26/c_135859663.htm.
- ¹⁵ Author's interview with one attendee of the event.
- ¹⁶ “Perfiles del programa ‘Puente al Futuro.’ Formación de mil dirigentes jóvenes China-América Latina,” China Radio International Online, 21 July 2015, <http://espanol.cri.cn/1161/2015/07/21/1s356380.htm>.
- ¹⁷ Beijing-based CECLA aims to promote mutual understanding and provide conditions for academic and cultural exchange. By August 2017 it had about 500 members who contributed their academic work, including three books, three reports, 26 academic articles in *Global Finance* magazine, and 22 commentaries in *www.thepaper.cn*.

CECLA's “Academic Dialogue between China and Latin America” is organized with the All-China Youth Federation. The dialogue's format includes the introduction to two topics proposed by two keynote speakers, combined with an open discussion. Topics of the 2016 edition were the challenges and opportunities for Latin America in China's “new economic normality,” and China's national image in Latin America.

- ¹⁸ According to its website, the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs aims to "engage in studies of the world's situation, international issues, and foreign policies, and to carry out exchanges with statesmen, scholars, noted personages, relevant research institutions and social organizations of various countries, with a view to enhancing mutual understanding and friendship between the Chinese people and the people of all other countries." The China Institute of International Studies is a professional research institute directly administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.
- ¹⁹ *Qiaowu* is a CCP strategy to manage ethnic-Chinese communities abroad. Scholar James Jiann Hua To describes *qiaowu* as "a comprehensive effort that seeks to maintain, protect, and enhance the rights and interests of the overseas Chinese," which in practice works "to legitimize and protect the CCP's hold on power, uphold China's international image, and retain influence over important channels of access to social, economic and political resources." James To, "Beijing's Policies for Managing Han and Ethnic-Minority Chinese Communities Abroad," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 41, no. 4 (2012): 183–221.
- ²⁰ According to its website, the goal of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries is "to enhance friendship between peoples, further international cooperation, safeguard world peace and promote common development. Since its founding, it has set up "46 China-regional or China-national friendship organizations and established relationships of friendly cooperation with nearly 500 nongovernment organizations and institutions in 157 countries." The regional China–Latin America and the Caribbean Friendship Association was created in 1960, and its main task is "to receive visiting groups from various sectors of Latin America and the Caribbean and send delegations to visit the region in order to promote friendly exchanges and cooperation between both sides."
- ²¹ *The ABC of the China–CELAC Forum* (Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Relations of China, Department of Latin America and the Caribbean, April 2016).
- ²² "PCCh y partidos latinoamericanos aprueban declaración conjunta de cooperación," Agencia EFE, 9 December 2015.



Navigating Political Change in Argentina

By Juan Pablo Cardenal¹

CHINA

INTRODUCTION China's inroads in Argentina have been truly remarkable during the last five years. In that time, China has established a presence in almost every sphere of life in the Latin American country. The economy is the most obvious one: Bilateral trade reached US\$14.8 billion in 2016, while a combination of Chinese loans and investments is behind some of the most vital national projects of the coming years. Politically, ties between Buenos Aires and Beijing are experiencing a golden age, even after elections at the end of 2015 swung power from one end of the political spectrum to the other.

An informal indicator of the growing relationship between China and Argentina is the Chinese community of roughly 180,000,² which began to migrate in significant numbers to Argentina less than three decades ago and has already become Argentina's fourth-largest immigrant community, and the largest from a non-bordering country. Notably, the second generation of Chinese-Argentines is taking on a more prominent role in Argentine society.

Having developed strong economic and political ties with Argentina, the Chinese government is now more active in areas where it traditionally has been less likely to be involved. "To consolidate their position in the country, they cannot look scary," explains one China analyst in Buenos Aires. Thanks to its own form of soft power,³ China is more visible than ever before: It holds greater sway over the local media; it has built up strong links with the academic community, including a network of devoted scholars; and it monopolizes almost every aspect of Chinese culture in Argentina.

More concretely, Beijing closed deals with some of the main media groups in the country, particularly under former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and is taking the first steps toward gaining visibility on Argentine television. In the academic sphere, more than 25 Argentine

universities and academic institutions have cooperation and exchange programs in place with Chinese counterparts, while eighteen others offer studies on contemporary China. Culturally, the Chinese embassy has taken control over Chinese New Year celebrations in Buenos Aires, an event that reaches out to the general public and attracts several hundred thousand people every year.

In addition to all of the above, China's steady penetration of Argentina is also linked to Beijing's effective people-to-people diplomacy. Influential elites of all fields now have connections with Chinese peers and are regularly invited to visit China, too. Another good indication of China's efforts in Argentina is how active the Chinese ambassador has been in personally pushing China's soft power agenda.

Since presenting his diplomatic credentials in September 2014, Ambassador Yang Wanming has visited local newsrooms eight times, authored fourteen op-eds, and granted ten interviews to local media. He met with executives and participated in events organized by foundations and think tanks 21 times, and engaged personally with universities at least five times. Yang held meetings with representatives of political parties eight times and also paid no less than fourteen visits to members of Congress. He also hosted official receptions in China's embassy in Buenos Aires, attended a number of seminars, and met with representatives of different business chambers.⁴

In this context, the development of closer ties with China is generally well-accepted and faces little resistance in Argentina. Domestic politics are key in understanding why this is happening. General elections at the end of 2015 resulted in a major shift of power. Up to that moment, president Cristina Kirchner and, previously, her husband Nestor Kirchner, had cumulatively been in power for twelve years, a time during which the society became increasingly polarized. The Kirchners' populist and protectionist economic policies ended up severely hurting the country's economy and finances. This coincided with Argentina's disputes with the West over repayment of its debt, which further isolated the country internationally when its access to international financing was cut off.

This was a crucial factor that spurred Argentina to break away from the Western orbit, moving closer to China and other authoritarian countries such as Russia, Iran, and Venezuela. Diplomatic ties between Argentina and China intensified at the same rate that Argentina's relationship with the United States and Europe deteriorated. This was consistent with Beijing's decision to upgrade the bilateral relationship in 2014, when Argentina became one of only five Latin American countries to enjoy a comprehensive strategic partnership with China.⁵ In the final months of Cristina Kirchner's mandate, more than thirty agreements and memorandums of understanding were signed between the two nations. Some of these deals were highly controversial, including a fifty-year concession to build and run a space facility in the country's remote West, China's first such facility in the Southern Hemisphere.⁶

At that time, Beijing had already provided US\$20 billion in loans to finance a handful of large-scale infrastructure projects.⁷ In the eyes of Buenos Aires, China was not only a key economic ally, but was also perceived as an ideological alternative to the West. However, critics cautioned that the Kirchner administration had become utterly dependent on China financially and that the country could end up paying a high price for such dependency. Argentina's trade deficit with China soared too, and in the months ahead of the 2015 presidential election, China was caught in the crossfire of the nation's political fight. The controversy reached a high point when the winner of the election, Mauricio Macri, issued a clear warning to Beijing: the late deals

signed between Argentina and China under the Kirchner administration would be reviewed as soon as he took office.⁸

Just after Macri's victory, it was in fact expected that Argentina would put some distance between itself and China, while it moved closer again to its traditional American and European allies. However, the Kirchner government had agreed to a cross-default clause in the contract signed with China's Development Bank to secure funding for the Kirchner and Cepernic hydro-power dams that significantly limited Macri's room to manoeuvre.⁹ Now, almost two years into his presidency, Macri has re-established normalcy in Argentina's relationship with the West, but there have not been any significant reversals on most of the major agreements adopted during the previous Kirchner administrations. As a result, the Macri administration benefits from now having more international partners and can be freer in how it frames the country's relationship with Beijing. During Macri's official visit to Beijing in May 2017, both presidents signed a number of new deals, and a few older ones were ratified. As far as Buenos Aires is concerned, China remains a key player for its future development and well-being. The bilateral relationship is now cruising nicely.

With very few exceptions, the political class in Buenos Aires seems to agree that a closer relationship with China is necessary for Argentina's economic development.

With very few exceptions, the political class in Buenos Aires seems to agree that a closer relationship with China is necessary for Argentina's economic development. They argue that there is no bigger export market than China for the country's commodities, particularly soybeans and other agricultural products. They refer to the fact that Beijing is ready to provide loans and investments, unlike traditional investors that regard Argentina as overly risky. They also perceive China as the only partner that can potentially finance and build the key infrastructure that is needed for the country, including railway networks, hydropower dams, or nuclear plants. Very few Argentine experts interviewed by this author mentioned potential risks—for example, economic dependency or weakened democratic principles—that Argentina might face in developing a closer relationship with China. Likewise, the author did not observe any significant public debate taking place on these themes in the mainstream local media.

Asked if China's corruption or human rights record should be taken into account in the bilateral relationship, Argentina's political class has commonly taken refuge in pragmatism: "It would be stupidity and suicide for Argentina," one congressman said.¹⁰ This sentiment among Argentina's ruling class is significant because it influences opinion in other areas of society. But it is also relevant to acknowledge that this frame is not unconnected to Beijing's people-to-people diplomacy, which finds fertile ground across Argentina's political spectrum. During the last few years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in particular has been extremely active, and successful, in engaging with top representatives of Argentina's main political parties, without ideological distinction.

The CCP has not only cultivated close ties with the *kirchneristas* and other left-wing parties, but has an equally warm relationship with the center-right Republican Proposal (PRO) party that it had developed before Macri's election. Even if a shared political ideology is less important to such relationships than it was in the past, it is still striking to see how far PRO's comradeship with the CCP has gone, given that the two parties' political ideologies reflect opposing ends of the political spectrum. Senior representatives of both parties met on four occasions in 2016, and twice more in the first half of 2017. The same Argentine politicians who were the

most vocal critics of Cristina Kirchner's close alliance with the Chinese government now take advantage of every opportunity to fly to Beijing or to meet with their Chinese counterparts.¹¹

It is evident that the development of closer ties between Argentina and China's political parties is a CCP-led initiative, but one that also reflects a pragmatic way of engagement. "It is part of China's cultural diplomacy. These meetings consist of pompous statements, a picture, and little more," says one Argentine academic. Many point out the innocuous nature of these meetings, since they are very formal, lack substance, and usually touch on generic issues. However, this begs the question of why both sides are interested in meeting so often if there is really no hard agenda, as well as why Beijing would invest so much effort and resources to engage with Argentina's ruling class. Not many people in Buenos Aires appear to be doing this kind of questioning. Others even criticize those who enquire about the nature of the relationship between Argentina and China's ruling party: "There is no such contradiction [in PRO meeting with the CCP]. In the modern world this type of speech...arises from prejudice," PRO's president wrote in an op-ed in the *Clarín* newspaper.¹²

China's own forms of soft-power efforts to build bridges with Argentina's political elites involve other Chinese players, too. For example, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, an organization that aims to "make friends in the international community on behalf of the Chinese people," has met with Argentine entrepreneurs, members of the Senate, and even with representatives of the Leo Messi Foundation in Spain. In addition, delegations of Chinese national or provincial legislatures pay periodic visits to their counterparts in Buenos Aires, while members of the Parliamentary Group of Friendship with China take part in all sorts of China-related activities. The different China-Argentina chambers of commerce have a fluid relationship with the embassy, and its executives also join the China trips. In addition, more than thirty Chinese and Argentine cities are now twinned. Most of all, the Chinese ambassador is particularly active. "I am certain that he personally knows all of the party leaders in Argentina. It is reinforcing, although it is probably not central," says a local scholar.¹³

What makes China's people-to-people strategy powerful is that not a single flank is left uncovered. For example, it has seen value in engaging with two Buenos Aires-based foundations whose mission is to train Argentina's next generation of political leaders. Representatives of one such group—the Contemporary Foundation, linked informally to center-right parties—participate on average two to four times a year in ten- to twenty-day-long trainings in China hosted by the Communist Youth League of China. These efforts have an obvious side effect: The legitimation of the Chinese system. Such legitimation is justified with a familiar narrative: China's singularity, history, identity, and scale. Sensitive issues are left out.

The other group of young leaders, the Latin American Center for Political and Economic Chinese Studies (CLEPEC, in Spanish), has close links to left-wing parties.¹⁴ Despite being a regional foundation, most of its China-related activity is done in Argentina. Like the Contemporary Foundation, its members also receive training in China. They are mostly young researchers or post-graduate students that China awards with scholarships. But the real importance of their mission is when they return home, where the students offer courses and trainings on China across Argentina to audiences that include members of provincial governments and academic institutions. "China's relationship with Latin America is very asymmetric. We cannot change this, but we can negotiate better. To do so, our future leaders need to have a better knowledge of what China is," explains one CLEPEC executive.¹⁵



Put in these terms, the concept is impeccable. The lack of awareness about China in Argentina has to be addressed somehow. But the key issue is the kind of narrative that CLEPEC's researchers are passing along. The foundation has a reputation for having an ideology that sympathizes with China's state-managed system. In addition, CLEPEC's Chinese peer, the Communist Youth League of China, is not an independent player but an intrinsic part of the party-state structure of the People's Republic. Moreover, the researchers who travel to China on scholarships are only exposed to the official Chinese government perspective. A fundamental question then emerges: What is the narrative presented during these trips regarding topics such as China's democratization, human rights abuses, the situation in Tibet and Xinjiang, Internet censorship and freedom of expression, Falun Gong's persecution, or civil society's forced retreat? The answer is not unexpected: The narrative is party-line propaganda. By the end of 2016, CLEPEC had taught around 20 courses in Argentina to some 2,200 students and public servants, according to the foundation.

Argentina's general lack of awareness about China, the conflicting interests and power struggles of Argentine political elites, and China's people-to-people diplomacy are a powerful mix—one that is illustrated by the curious tale of Jian Ping. A Chinese-born businessman, Jian was elected out of nowhere in 2015 to the Buenos Aires city legislature under the PRO party list, becoming the first PRC citizen to do so. The local press linked his nomination to the donation of US\$1.2 million by Chinese businessmen to Macri's party. Treated initially as a colorful example of the country's sometimes entertaining politics, the media quickly lost interest in him. Very few people in Buenos Aires thought that Jian's enigmatic election deserved explanation. The media and the politicians fell mostly silent on this topic.¹⁶

Known in Argentina as Fernando Yuan, Jian was new to politics and speaks little Spanish after living in Argentina for three decades. He does not give interviews either, except to Chinese media. No one the author spoke with in the course of conducting interviews with the local policy community knew much about his background, and an analysis of local Argentine media coverage found that only his business achievements were discussed. Scholars have documented China's long-term efforts to amplify its influence abroad through the political mobilization of the overseas Chinese. In fact, Beijing's support for ethnic-Chinese candidates abroad is not new and was referred to as an area "for further development" in internal Chinese official documents more than a decade ago.¹⁷

Media

During the last few years, China has taken every available opportunity to exert influence in the Argentine media. These efforts are part of a comprehensive media strategy, which the Chinese have tried to implement through a variety of means. At the regional level, China has invited Latin American journalists to participate in trainings in China. In Argentina, the Chinese are pushing partnerships with national television networks that would be potentially willing to broadcast Chinese-produced content. They have also been successful in inserting the *China Watch* supplement regularly into several local media outlets. This supplement is nothing more than paid content produced by the official Chinese state media.

In addition, China's Xinhua news agency and other official Chinese media have signed deals with several Argentine media groups. Xinhua has its own sponsored supplement, *China*, but is generally inclined to make its news content freely available to as many Argentine media outlets as possible. The Chinese embassy is also active, circulating its own news bulletin twice a year across government agencies,¹⁸ supporting two television programs that emphasize Chinese culture, and having the ambassador publish op-eds or be interviewed in leading local newspapers.¹⁹ It could be argued that the impact of such a media strategy is uneven, but it is also true that China's efforts have been remarkable.

One such opportunity for making inroads in the Argentine media scene was during Cristina Kirchner's administration, particularly in her last two years when the political environment became more contentious. At the time, most media groups actively participated in Argentina's political dogfight by taking sides for and against the former president. Some of the groups were at war against Kirchner's government, for the most part led by *Clarín* and *La Nación*, the two most influential newspapers in Argentina. Political scandals would reach the front pages on an almost daily basis, and in such context China could not escape criticism in relation to the most controversial aspects of the bilateral relationship: asymmetric trade, the space facility, the hydropower dams, and the lack of transparency behind the bilateral deals.

Nevertheless, China was able to gain ground even in this turbulent environment. Starting in 2015, shortly after Beijing upgraded the diplomatic status of its relationship with Argentina to a comprehensive strategic partnership, the *China Watch* supplement was inserted in a number of media outlets owned by media groups that vigorously supported Kirchner's government. Some of these groups emerged during the Kirchner era and were able to survive financially, or even make good profits, allegedly thanks to institutional advertising and other political favors. After the change of power, many of those media groups went bankrupt.

One of them was Grupo Veintitrés, whose *Tiempo Argentino* newspaper had Xinhua's four-page supplement inserted every other week from March 2015 until the year's end. The deal was part of a larger cooperation agreement between the Chinese news agency and the Argentine media group. At the time, it was made public that Xinhua would provide graphic materials and news content under the signed deal. The group's television channel CN23 would also broadcast a daily news segment about China, along with Xinhua-produced documentaries and feature stories on weekends. Similarly, the group's Infonews website would have a special China section to click on for instant access to "all the Chinese breaking news." The Chinese ambassador referred to the importance of having "complete and direct information about China." However, the arrangement did not last long: Grupo Veintitrés and its various subsidiaries were almost completely dismantled as soon as Kirchner left office.

The final period of Kirchner’s presidency was quite rewarding for Xinhua in terms of extending agreements of intention to Argentine media outlets. Grupo Indalo, another media group linked to the former government, agreed to use the agency’s content “to raise awareness on economic, political and social current issues of one of the world’s big powers.” Previously, Argentina’s official news agency Télam had signed several cooperation agreements with Xinhua too, including one to exchange news content.²⁰ Xinhua also succeeded in having its banner posted on the Argentine–Chinese Chamber’s website. While some of Xinhua’s deals are rather vague and have little practical significance, the more important agreements took form after Cristina Kirchner’s administration entered into a strategic alliance with Beijing in 2015.

Beijing scored some media achievements even after Macri assumed the presidency. Grupo América, Argentina’s second-largest media corporation, closed an agreement with *China Daily* to insert the four-page *China Watch* supplement twice a month in five of the group’s newspapers, including *El Cronista*, the country’s top business daily.²¹ Grupo América’s main shareholders also run businesses in the oil, energy, construction, telecommunications, and wine industries that are strategically pointing to China with the purpose of having the Chinese as partners in Argentina and elsewhere. Observers in Buenos Aires express little doubt that the shareholders’ lobbying efforts, rather than a pure media deal, are behind the *China Watch* insertion. Unsurprisingly, the deal was saluted with great fanfare in a presentation in Beijing.²²

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China has a tradition of adapting and making the most of the opportunities presented to it. This is clearly the case with Grupo América, which accorded the Chinese an opportunity to take its media penetration to a new level in the area of television. The affinity and coordination between the two was key to the airing of the Chinese program “Milenarios” on Channel A24, one of the group’s television cable networks. The show is now said to have a weekly audience of 100,000 viewers.²³ Furthermore, in mid-2017 Grupo América and China Global Television Network (CGTN, formerly known as China Central Television, CCTV), co-produced the first of a series of thirty-minute documentaries that commemorate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Argentina and China.

At the time of writing this report, the film “Cerca y Lejos” (“Near and Far”) had been aired in China but not yet in Argentina. The film, which can be viewed on the Internet, presents a positive telling of the two countries’ bilateral relationship, touching on the cultural, historical, and political ties between China and Argentina and highlighting China’s impressive development during the last decades. The film emphasizes both countries’ “mutual trust,” “friendship,” and “cooperation to build a relationship of mutual benefit and a future of common prosperity.”²⁴

CGTN’s efforts to be visible and influential in Argentina do not seem to stop with documentaries. In a regional forum held in Lima in late 2016, the director of CGTN en Español announced a cooperation agreement with Grupo América to screen CGTN’s programs once a month on Channel A24. She said both networks would “jointly produce the programming and would screen it on their respective channels,” and she also predicted that CGTN could be aired in Argentina through Grupo América’s cable network.²⁵ In this regard, sources in Buenos Aires

consulted by this author speculate that Grupo América might become another avenue for China to express its soft power in a seemingly innocent way in Argentina.

While this initiative was being discussed, China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) was also in conversations with another player to explore joint cooperation opportunities: Argentina's Federal System of Public Media and Content (SFMCP, in Spanish), the country's public media body. In fact, when SAPPRFT met with its Argentine counterpart, they agreed to facilitate the screening of each other's television content and to co-produce documentaries and other products.²⁶ However, most important for China is Argentina's readiness to allow CGTN to broadcast "as soon as possible" in Argentina through the state television digital platform, in the same way that Russia's RT is currently doing. "There are no obstacles for CGTN to be aired in Argentina. It is in the agenda, so it will eventually happen," says a source familiar with the issue in Buenos Aires. Consequently, China's aim of having its own television channel in Argentina seems to be just a matter of time.

China not only puts eggs in different baskets, it also has the ability to weather unfavorable situations and, eventually, reverse them. Its relationship with *La Nación* is a case in point. This influential, privately owned national newspaper was journalistically confrontational toward the Cristina Kirchner government. Given this administration's close relationship with Beijing, that meant also being one of the most China-critical media outlets in Argentina at the time. In a polarized society, part of which was then deeply concerned about the country's future if Kirchner were to remain in office, many appreciated the paper's stance and, consequently, the newspaper's readership increased.

In mid-2015, when China was facing more criticism over a number of deals that the Kirchner administration was signing with Beijing, China's *People's Daily* and *La Nación* made public a deal to "jointly distribute news content."²⁷ Then, in September 2015, *La Nación* published a sixteen-page supplement, paid for by China, on the 66th anniversary of the PRC's founding. Newspaper sources say that "the opportunity of sharing experiences" arose in a meeting with the Chinese ambassador—at his suggestion.²⁸ However, apart from having the effect of breaking the ice, nothing substantial resulted from the deal except for the Argentine newspaper's participation in the One Belt One Road Media Collaboration Forum organized by *People's Daily*, another example of Beijing's people-to-people diplomacy. But the move ended up paying dividends in a different way when the winds changed in China's favor.

After Macri won the presidency, the political situation in Argentina calmed down, and gradually, *La Nación* lost a significant portion of its readership.²⁹ Later, the newspaper's bet on a television project did not produce the expected results either in terms of audience.³⁰ In a context of financial uncertainty, several heavyweight Chinese companies with interests in Argentina continued with or purchased significant advertising campaigns.³¹ Coincidence or not, criticism of China in *La Nación* seems less common than in the past, while soft news about China and Chinese corporations is more and more visible. More importantly, in *La Nación* China now has more opportunities to spread its message and narrative: The Chinese ambassador in Buenos Aires has authored at least six op-ed articles since he first met with the newspaper's executives in 2015, and he has been interviewed at least once.³² In *Clarín*, Argentina's main newspaper, the ambassador has authored four additional op-ed articles during the past 18 months.

This case highlights a fundamental risk: That Beijing is well-positioned to leverage varied tools in order to elicit friendly treatment or neutralize criticism in foreign independent media outlets. Considering the financial challenges that many media outlets face, even those that have a well-earned reputation for journalistic integrity may be at risk of having their editorial independence compromised. The Chinese regime has at its disposal the ability to engage personally with journalists and news editors in democratic media through people-to-people diplomacy, which includes economically promising “cooperation” deals with Chinese media. In addition, the ability to step in with advertisement campaigns, through both institutional paid insertions and Chinese corporations’ advertisement campaigns, is another point of leverage. As in the political arena, the combination of personal engagement and the lure of economic gain, at a time when traditional media are facing financial challenges, can potentially work to China’s advantage.

The way in which China can have an impact in the financially troubled media sector of many democracies is disturbing. Local societies clearly pay the price, since the media in democratic systems are supposed to play an independent watchdog role. What is sometimes less clear is that Chinese companies—whether state-run or privately owned—can potentially support, in one way or another, China’s initiatives and national interests. In this sense, the simple recommendation of a high-ranking official of the Chinese embassy to a Chinese state-owned company to economically support any given cause is expected to be followed. In addition, large, nominally private Chinese companies, which typically enjoy preferential treatment, are also generally willing to play a role in furthering CCP interests. Therefore, taking action through such various channels makes China’s influence efforts ever more successful.

Culture

The greatest expression of Chinese culture in Argentina and, at the same time, China’s most visible cultural achievement in Buenos Aires is the Chinese New Year celebrations. What was once a relatively small event celebrated locally by Argentina’s Chinese community in the capital city’s Chinatown has grown exponentially within the past few years into a two-day festival that attracts 600,000 people every year, according to official estimates.³³ The event brings together all the expected varieties of Chinese culture and folklore: from traditional dragon and lion dances to martial arts exhibitions; from tai-chi performances to Chinese cooking and calligraphy demonstrations; from ballet shows and traditional instrument recitals to spectacular fireworks displays.

Observers interviewed by the author attributed the event’s transformation to support from the “invisible hand” of the Chinese embassy in Buenos Aires. Before 2013, members of the Taiwanese community, who were among the original residents and shop owners of Buenos Aires’ Chinatown, organized the Chinese New Year celebrations. Back then, it was a truly grass-roots-organized cultural event based on authentic traditions practiced by the local ethnic Chinese community. Despite international tension between Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China, the event avoided political controversies by abstaining from making distinctions between Taiwanese or PRC nationals, and event organizers took great care not to exhibit Chinese or Taiwanese flags. However, all of that changed when Phoenix Dorada International Media Company, a cultural management company owned by Chinese nationals that has close links with the Chinese embassy, took over the event after 2013.³⁴

Moving the celebrations away from the city’s Chinatown to a larger area, seeking the involvement of the city authorities, and the need for additional funding for a more sophisticated and professional

event displaced the original local Taiwanese organizers. Phoenix Dorada denies receiving any direct funding from the Chinese embassy but admits that the embassy's support is key in convincing "important sponsors" to contribute.³⁵ According to Phoenix Dorada's website, fourteen Chinese companies, including Huawei, ZTE, Sinopec, and Sany, made a joint donation of 110 million pesos (US\$6.87 million) for the 2016 Chinese New Year alone.³⁶ The embassy's "invisible hand" that made this donation possible is another example of how effectively the Chinese government can encourage Chinese companies—both state-owned and private—to support the CCP's agenda.³⁷

While backed by generous support from high-profile Chinese companies, the Chinese New Year celebrations are presented as an official event. The local Argentine press commonly describes the festival as being "presented by the Chinese embassy," China's ambassador is directly involved in the planning and is typically the event's keynote speaker, and the PRC's red flags are now prominently on display around the celebration's premises. Only the masters of ceremonies remain of Taiwanese origin.³⁸



Phoenix Dorada also organizes or is involved in many other cultural activities and events that are in line with China's cultural soft power efforts. These include a photo exhibition about the "70th Anniversary of the Great Antifascist People's Victory" against Japan in World War II, a singing contest among Argentines of Chinese ethnicity that awarded the winner a visit to China, the commemoration of the PRC's founding, and the production of a TV program teaching Mandarin.³⁹

Phoenix Dorada says that it has managed more than 90 cultural projects in five years, reaching an audience of more than six million people.⁴⁰ It also describes its relationship with the embassy and its staff as being limited to little more than "having their moral support," or getting a few contacts from them, but says there are no formal links of any kind. However, many in Buenos Aires say they are certain that the Chinese embassy outsources its cultural agenda to Phoenix Dorada. "They are the embassy's soft guards in cultural matters," says a member of the Taiwanese community.

Although the embassy's cultural section does not have the human resources to handle a vast cultural agenda, there are most likely more than just operational reasons for doing this—

namely, being able to exert behind-the-scenes control of all overseas ethnic-Chinese matters. The embassy seeks to play the role of being the main cohesive force behind the overseas Chinese community. “The embassy simply could not allow the organization of the Chinese New Year to be in Taiwanese hands,” argues a local student in Chinese studies.

While it promotes and manages Chinese culture that show a benign face, the embassy has been very active in trying to stop independent Chinese cultural activities from taking place. Shen Yun Performing Arts, a Chinese artistic group forbidden in China, has performed in Argentina despite the Chinese embassy’s continuous interference and pressure on local Argentine cultural authorities.⁴¹ Shen Yun sources in Buenos Aires say that the Chinese embassy has tried to stop the show at least three times by warning Argentine authorities of the implicit “political message” of the show.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of a larger effort on the part of the Chinese embassy to intimidate the Falun Gong spiritual movement in Argentina, to which Shen Yun is affiliated.⁴² Falun Gong practitioners face constant harassment and sometimes violence from the local Chinese community when they demonstrate in front of the Chinese embassy or distribute Falun Gong materials in Buenos Aires’ Chinatown. Practitioners accuse the Chinese embassy of being behind such attacks.

But this turbulence is an exception, because the Chinese regime generally enjoys a more pleasant relationship with third parties in Argentina. For example, China has a reliable partner in the House of Chinese Culture, whose parent institution is the privately-owned University of Congress in Argentina’s Mendoza province. It was founded in 2015 at the Chinese embassy’s suggestion, given the fine personal connections between the diplomatic personnel and the individuals who currently run the cultural center. The previously mentioned main shareholders of Grupo América, who have China-related business interests and have fostered various deals with China’s official media, are also board members of the University of Congress and its foundation.

In its first two years, the House of Chinese Culture has organized a number of cultural activities in both its Buenos Aires headquarters and on the campus of the University of Congress, in Mendoza. These have ranged from the screening of Chinese films and documentaries to photography, painting, and calligraphy exhibitions; from seminars on Chinese cooking to conferences and roundtables with Argentine Sinologists, academics, and congressmen; from the launching of *China Watch* to book donation ceremonies. Some of these activities were organized on behalf of, or with the support of the Chinese embassy.

The center is entirely financed by the University of Congress, which aims to establish itself as one of the country’s top institutions for Chinese studies. In 2017, the university sealed an association agreement with *Dangdai*, a high quality local magazine that touches on Chinese culture. The partnership between academic (University of Congress), cultural (House of Chinese Culture), and media players (Grupo América, *Dangdai*) is likely to be viewed positively by the Chinese embassy. Official Chinese rhetoric would call it a win-win cooperation deal.

On the education front, Argentina’s two Confucius Institutes in Buenos Aires and La Plata also devote much attention to spreading Chinese culture. In addition to such standard cultural activities as painting, music, literature, or cinema, the University of Buenos Aires’ Confucius Institute offers 27 courses on Chinese culture every academic year.⁴³ These courses are currently attended by some 600 students per year, in addition to 2,000 Mandarin-language

students that the institute and its associated centers claim to have. Out of that figure, around 45 students every year continue their short- or long-term language education in China.⁴⁴

For its part, the University of La Plata, which hosts the second Confucius Institute in the country, has organized seminars in recent years that have an evident soft power angle: China's cultural diversity, the historical evolution of 21st century China, and contemporary China. Both Argentine Confucius Institutes are very active in promoting Chinese culture. However, since the public universities hosting them provide 50 percent of institutes' budgets, critics feel uneasy about the fact that Argentine taxpayers are partially supporting China's cultural diplomacy in Argentina.⁴⁵

The number of senior scholars who have studied contemporary China for more than twenty years is small, and possibly just a handful of them focus on politics, economics, and international relations.

Academia

In addition to the political ruling class, no other social sphere in Argentina has closer ties with China than academia. The number of senior scholars who have studied contemporary China for more than twenty years is small, and possibly just a handful of them focus on politics, economics, and international relations. This group of experts publishes China-related materials regularly, and they are perceived as authorities. A second group of academics has concentrated on China from a cultural, philosophic, religious, or artistic perspective; hence, their visibility is somewhat limited. There is, however, a much larger base of young intellectuals in their thirties who have shown an interest on China in recent years.

This growing base of younger Argentine scholars is no coincidence. Neither is the noticeable increase among major academic institutions in Argentina in establishing some sort of connection to China, which is plain evidence of growing academic interest in the country. More than two-dozen universities, academic, and scientific institutions have setup various kinds of agreements with Chinese counterpart institutions, primarily for scholarships, joint research and publications, and teacher exchange.⁴⁶ To reach this stage, many of these institutions have put together Chinese studies programs as part of their curriculums in recent years. This has not only spawned scores of seminars and extracurricular activities with an emphasis on China, but it has also stimulated academic visits across the Pacific like never before.

This academic and scientific network, which includes think tanks and other institutions, is only expected to grow in the future. Both countries have a common interest in expanding the bilateral relationship at all levels, and in this context academia believes it has a role to play to reduce the knowledge gap between the two. A good example of the potential that this cooperation may have is the recent agreement between Argentina's most important official research entity, the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET, in Spanish)⁴⁷ and Shanghai University (SHU). In April 2017, both institutions announced the creation of a Joint International Research Center (CIMI, in Spanish) with head offices in both Buenos Aires and Shanghai.⁴⁸ The idea is to produce joint academic research on globalization and social issues.

CONICET has a record of cooperating with other Chinese research institutions, including the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).⁴⁹ While some may argue that these types of international collaboration are not unusual for CONICET, given that the institute is publicly funded and has joint research agreements with counterparts in Argentina and other countries, the creation of

CIMI is a milestone achievement for China in terms of soft power. It is the first research center of its kind in Latin America. Moreover, the agreement has a clear goal and an explicit agenda: research on globalization issues through the lenses of history, culture, religion, and politics, rather than simply through the economy. It has also been endowed with funds and human resources, and it was forged only after several years of personal engagement and shared academic work.

It is indisputable that exploring the effects of globalization is academically relevant—especially with China at center stage. But, the new research center’s most significant aspect is its potential to boost China’s soft power narrative across academia and beyond. CIMI has made transparent that it expects “to clarify” the way in which China is perceived in Argentina’s public opinion. For this, focusing on social sciences may prove more rewarding since it is a discipline in which boundaries are more difficult to define. In fact, it is difficult not to connect this initiative to the CCP’s pledge to strengthen what it calls “a system of social sciences with Chinese characteristics,” which the Chinese leadership perceives as crucial to building their own guiding ideology.⁵⁰

Furthermore, if the new research center’s ideological position was to be made too obvious, then expectations of becoming a leading institution on globalization issues would probably need to be downgraded. In this sense, two of the new institution’s main driving principles are for Argentines to “strongly understand China” and to “break the Western vision,” or lens, through which many Argentines currently view China.⁵¹ The center’s promoters have committed to being open to new methodologies and to distance themselves from the way in which the social sciences are approached in “hegemonic or imperialistic countries that have oppressed us, and that have not yet incorporated Chinese language in their publications.”⁵²

During the same time period when CIMI was established, CASS, the Latin American Council of Social Sciences, and the University of Buenos Aires’ Gino Germani Research Institute signed a letter of intent to open a joint research center in Argentina that should become the counterpart of the newly created Center for Argentine Studies in Beijing. The fact that the latter needed an exceptional approval by CASS reveals the importance that Beijing gives to building academic bridges with Argentina in the area of social sciences.⁵³

More broadly, Beijing has seen value in engaging in so-called think tank diplomacy as a way to broadcast Chinese views of the world,⁵⁴ since Chinese academic institutions of all kinds are perceived as important carriers of national soft power. There can be no better place for this than Argentina, given that there are some 120 universities and 138 think tanks in the country. The Chinese embassy in Buenos Aires and its ambassador are committed to engaging with these institutions: they pay personal visits, support their activities, and frequently take part in seminars, thus serving as a bridge to achieve cooperation between institutions of both countries.

The Argentine Council for International Relations (CARI, in Spanish) and the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC, in Spanish)—which ranked fifth and sixth in Latin America in the University of Pennsylvania’s 2016 Global Go To Think Tanks Index Report—are two of many with which the embassy has warm relations. CARI organizes 250 activities per year, 10 percent of them related to Asia-Pacific issues. For the embassy, even minor forms of collaboration with such well-established institutions, such as a small contribution of US\$5,700 it made to support a CIPPEC seminar in Buenos Aires in 2016, represent a symbolic achievement by allowing the embassy to become a more important player in Argentina’s policy debates and discussions.

In this context in which academia is fully engaged with China, Beijing's people-to-people diplomacy fits perfectly. An example of how well this strategy works in China's favor was the conference given by two local scholars of one of Argentina's most prestigious think tanks, after returning from a Beijing-sponsored trip to Tibet.⁵⁵ Their narrative matched that of CCP official propaganda, stressing the alleged economic achievements, public health, schooling rate, environmental sensitivity, and even the conservation of Tibet's cultural heritage. Not a single word was said on such sensitive topics as the 2008 riots in Lhasa, the dam construction scheme on all major Tibetan rivers, religious pressure, or the self-immolations of 140 Tibetans since 2009. No one in the audience referred to any of this either.⁵⁶



Analysis

The success that China may have achieved with its soft power strategy in Argentina has a recognizable starting point in Argentines' lack of awareness about China. As in many other places, only a small number of people in the Latin American country have a solid knowledge and a deep understanding of China, its history, its political and economic system, or its puzzling characteristics. Cultural difference, geographical distance, and the fact that the ties between the two countries are relatively recent are all elements of this unfamiliarity. This explains, to a large extent, why views of China in Argentina are basic for the most part—if not stereotyped.

Different assumptions and impressions commonly held by many Argentines shape China's image in the country. One powerful icon is China's traditional culture, which tends to be perceived as mysterious and unique. Contemporary China is generally associated with luxury and money, based on China's "economic model" that has successfully lifted millions out of poverty, the proliferation of products "Made in China," the prospects provided by China's domestic market as a huge potential source of buyers of Argentine goods, and powerful transnational companies. Many Argentines still appreciate China's recent financial assistance during the period when the country was isolated from other sources of international credit. Commercial exchanges that have grown over the last two decades are also viewed positively. At a micro level, Chinese migrants' image improved when the approximately 10,000 Chinese supermarkets were recognized for helping to keep food prices down during the worst periods of Argentina's economic crisis in recent years.⁵⁷

These factors, as well as the absence of historical quarrels or territorial disputes between the two countries, explains why China is largely perceived in Argentine society as a benevolent power. Even in circles of society where one might expect debate to be more sophisticated, such as in the political class or in journalism, knowledge about China also lacks insight—even beyond ideology. In such circumstances, academia’s aspiration to play an active role in reducing the knowledge gap is nothing but noteworthy. This is ever more necessary in the country’s current context of unbridled enthusiasm about China, but scholars should be poised and equipped to evaluate what kind of knowledge and narrative are being passed along.

It is here that China’s soft power efforts make a difference. Not only is the CCP active in inviting representatives of Argentine political parties from across the spectrum to China, but more concerning is the impact that these trips may have on them. Here is one example: More revealing than public statements made by PRO members to justify the sudden comradeship with an ideologically antagonistic party are the party leaders’ private reflections after a trip to China in July 2016: “More than fifteen [party members] travelled, including congressmen. Fourteen days, all expenses paid by China. They returned hypnotized: the five-star hotels, the feasts, the luxury, the different visits. No mention of ideology; they instead referred to their ‘Chinese friends.’ They are all crazy about China. One even said: ‘Now we are all Chinese.’ This shows that the strategy is working,” says a colleague of those politicians who participated in the trip.⁵⁸

If experienced politicians are so easily convinced, what can then be expected from more junior representatives who are also targeted by China’s people-to-people diplomacy? This is the case with foundations, such as CLEPEC, that are linked to political parties and whose aim is to train Argentina’s next generation of leaders. Their representatives are regularly invited to China for ad hoc trainings. Upon returning, they spread the one-sided perspective that they have acquired to audiences of students and civil servants across Argentina. In this way, the party-line narrative shared through China’s people-to-people diplomacy has a multiplier effect. Consequently, not only is the Beijing regime successful in putting forth its own version of events—one of its soft power priorities—it also shows a great ability to lobby politically.

While the media are focused on covering domestic issues as well as ensuring their own economic sustainability, in academia, dozens of scholars appear devoted to the Chinese cause. Of those invited to China, some take the opportunity to collect first-hand information and are not easily influenced, because they have a solid academic training on Chinese issues. “Others that do not have the proper training might be influenced,” admits one academic. In Argentina, like in most other countries, there is probably a considerable amount of self-censorship, particularly among China specialists who have not yet built a reputation or advanced far in their own careers. By being openly critical, or by crossing so-called red lines, they may be risking their own future access to China or contact with academic peers.

Scholars who are perceived as critical of China have little visibility, and are commonly not invited to conferences and events. Consequently, the accounts that tend to be put forth by part of Argentina’s scholarly community are incomplete, if not sometimes completely biased. There are hardly ever any references to the most controversial aspects of the Chinese regime: its dictatorial nature, the human rights abuses, the crackdown on dissent, the situation in Tibet, the Tiananmen massacre, and others. Whether this is self-censorship, sincere intellectual belief, ideological activism, academic self-interest, or a combination is difficult to tell. But some go as far as saying, without the blink of an eye, that “the Chinese system cannot be described as

authoritarian” and that its political regime “is profoundly legitimate.” This was declared by one respected Argentine analyst who frequently authors op-eds and analysis in Argentina’s most influential media.⁵⁹

With few exceptions, academia’s standpoint with respect to China is deeply troubling, mainly because academia is an area of society where divergence is not only accepted but should be welcomed and even encouraged. But while critical perspectives on China are scarce, some voices are starting to surface. One academic makes an accurate diagnosis of the situation: “There are topics that we never talk about out of fear of hurting the feelings of the Chinese. China is wonderful; its leaders are converted democrats and only want our well-being. Instead, you hear there is a complete absence of alternative critical thought about China. Unfortunately, we are in a process in which intellectuals are giving up [on their duties].” To some extent, sections of Argentine academia now play a role that is similar to the Confucius Institutes: promoting a favorable image of China to gain support and sympathy for their country.

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In a recent book, Argentine scholars Carlos Moneta and Sergio Cesarín identified that “a critical, internal debate in Argentina that is broad and clarifying about the influence of the ‘China factor’ is an unresolved matter.”⁶⁰ The only criticism that is very slowly making its way to the surface—including the referenced book, rare opinion articles, or occasional debates—relates to Argentina’s “new dependency” or the asymmetric bilateral relationship.⁶¹ This is important, given the general belief that China is strategic for Argentina’s future and, even more so, that there are already tangible examples that Argentina is largely benefiting from China’s investments. However, some argue that such a perception does not necessarily reconcile with reality, since many announced deals have yet to materialize, and a number of proclaimed investments are in fact loans. Unlike Brazil or Chile, Argentina has a trade deficit with China despite being an exporter of natural resources and food.

Interestingly, this asymmetry issue cannot be completely unconnected from China’s recent efforts to introduce Confucian dialectic into the debate. In 2014, the Confucius Institute established Confucius Institute Day worldwide, an event that the Argentine institutes have responded to with a number of related activities. It is now also more common for academic institutions in the country to include dialogues, courses, and debates about Confucianism in their activities. The new joint Sino-Argentine research center CIMI announced for the end of 2017 an international meeting that will touch on social sciences and religion. This Chinese philosophy provides the Beijing regime a friendly ideological façade.

The first International Forum on Confucianism, organized in late 2016 in Lima, Peru, with the participation of Chinese and Latin American scholars, revealed how Confucian doctrine may be manipulated in favor of China’s soft power purposes. “It was all pure, smartly distilled propaganda. Confucianism was presented as the essence of China’s awakening and success, and it was said that the rest of the world needs to learn how the Chinese think” for the sake of the world, says Isabelle Lausent-Herrera, a Lima-based scholar who attended the event.⁶² It is probably no coincidence that this kind of narrative is being spread across academic circles at this moment, given the asymmetry in China’s economic relationships with many Latin American

countries, including Argentina. Critics argue that it is a way of moving away from the tricky asymmetry debate.

Here is why: China presents Confucianism as a model of virtues that inherently competes with those ideas it labels as Western. “When this debate is inspired, the negative aspects of the Chinese model are more easily hidden. The friendly face of Confucianism is therefore very useful for legitimizing the authoritarian Chinese model,” argues Lausent-Hererra. Her words inevitably echo the fact that the Beijing-based International Confucian Association is behind many of these related activities and exchanges, whose aim is to boost “the popularization of Confucianism in the international community” and push for “freedom and equality of mankind and the peaceful development” of the world.⁶³

However, despite all its soft power efforts and the country’s incredible achievements, China still faces challenges in Argentina and elsewhere in terms of efficiency. To start with, continuous appeals to friendship, which are dressed up with the oft-repeated rhetoric emphasizing win-win cooperation and China’s peaceful rise, are not very convincing to all audiences. China’s soft power strategy and narrative encounter a fundamental downside: the fact that it is made very obvious that its strategy is hierarchical and state-driven. This handicap is clear in the media, where Chinese visibility and impact in Argentina is limited. Xinhua’s aim to spread its Spanish news service in Argentina does not seem to have been very successful.

The Chinese state media operating in the country have been upgraded in recent years without clear, tangible results, proving that they still have a long way to go to become credible players in the realm of international news.⁶⁴ Even though China’s official communication efforts are intense, the Chinese embassy in Buenos Aires does not have a press attaché on its staff—despite having attachés in many other areas. This suggests that transparency is not precisely in the regime’s nature. Together with the absence of independent Chinese nongovernmental organizations, China faces in this regard an insuperable burden. Contrary to democratic systems, authoritarian regimes bear the fundamental problem of their own lack of credibility.

But being occasionally and inherently ineffective does not mean that China is not trying to make an impact in Argentina. China’s huge efforts in different areas of society—mostly in the media, academic, and cultural spheres—is indisputable and have the sole purpose of influencing, if not manipulating, Argentine society in Beijing’s favor. Very few are really in a position to critically analyze this trend, and therefore the Chinese regime’s narrative is slowly but steadily soaking in as an alternative point of view. Despite the apparent weaknesses of China’s soft power strategy if measured in terms of attracting larger audiences and participants to its activities, the Chinese regime’s activities should not be perceived as harmless. On the contrary, they need to be further researched, examined, and understood.



RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION Much like its effect on Argentina's relationship with China, Macri's arrival in power resulted in an adjustment of the country's bilateral ties with Russia—rather than a complete change. Argentina's diplomatic re-orientation to North America and Europe, which implied taking a greater political distance from Moscow, has been balanced by Macri's pragmatic economic policies. Russia is perceived as an attractive export market for Argentina's agricultural production, as well as being potentially important in areas such as hydropower dam construction or nuclear plant development in Argentina. Russia is also appealing as a source of military equipment and technology.

When Argentina had trouble securing loans in the international capital markets during the Kirchner era, Moscow was recognized as an alternative financial source. In fact, Buenos Aires chose to cultivate and establish close economic ties with strong state-driven regimes like China and Russia, rather than with transnational companies whose strategic investment decisions are based on profit expectations. However, while several large-scale Russian investment projects have been announced in the last few years, very little has actually materialized.⁶⁵ Likewise, the majority of the roughly 180 bilateral agreements signed during the last decades between the two countries has yet to be implemented.

Bilateral trade between Argentina and Russia experienced a golden age in 2013 and 2014, exceeding US\$2 billion in both years, but it halved in 2015 due to Russia's economic crisis and Argentina's increased protectionism. While economic relations between Argentina and Russia have varied from highs to lows, their political relationship has been more solid, particularly under Kirchner. Both countries shared a common understanding of international affairs, opposed Washington's policies and views, and advocated for a multipolar world. Moscow backed Buenos Aires in its long fight with American hedge fund creditors and supported Argentina's long-term claims to the Falkland Islands.

Moscow established close links, including the sale of military equipment, with non-aligned Latin American countries that were ideologically opposed to the United States. Argentina is a case in point, going from one of the most enthusiastic regional supporters of globalization during the 1990s to openly questioning the Western-style liberal democratic model after the

depression that followed. The bilateral relationship reached its peak in 2015, when Kirchner and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a comprehensive strategic association. Despite publicly backing Russia's intervention in Crimea, Argentina abstained from voting on a U.N. resolution condemning the annexation—a decision that did not please any of the parties involved. The main Argentine media did not support Moscow's annexation either.⁶⁶

Moscow's soft power efforts in Argentina and the region are consistent with its determination to repair the damage done to its image by its involvement in Crimea and the rest of Ukraine, as well as a way out of its international strategic isolation after being kicked out of the G-8 club of the world's largest economies.⁶⁷ Argentine analysts also connect Russia's increasing presence in Argentina and the region to what they call Moscow's "repair policy"—a way for Russia to balance its relationship with the West as a result of what Moscow perceived as a Western policy to encircle and humiliate Russia. Despite the change of power in Argentina, Russia has not surrendered its soft power strategy there.

Russia is slowly but surely building its soft power capabilities in Argentina. Its main achievement has been to have RT (formerly known as Russia Today), a network funded by the Russian government, aired on Argentine public television. Media cooperation further increased in 2017 with announcements to co-produce television programs, share content, exchange journalists, and cooperate in areas such as Internet and social networks. While these agreements have not been fully implemented yet, they are important because they show that both governments are on the same wavelength in the media field. The Argentine government's magic word to justify the collaboration with an authoritarian regime's state media is "plurality." Ironically, authorities in Moscow seek to prevent such pluralism in their own country.

Also at an early stage but ongoing are the cooperation agreements signed since 2016 between universities of both countries, while the number of scholarships granted by the Russian government reached 47 in 2017. Rossotrudnichestvo, the government agency operating under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is in charge of Russia's public diplomacy, invites young Latin American leaders of different fields who are between twenty and forty years old to Russia under the "New Generation" program. "They want us to see Russia with our own eyes, and not through what we've been told by others," says one attendee. Trips last one week and participants are lectured in Spanish on Russian politics, economy, and diplomacy. The Russian Center of Science and Culture, a branch of the Russian Embassy in Buenos Aires, also promotes an agenda of Russian cultural activities.

Media

In October 2014, just three months after Putin's visit to Argentina and when the diplomatic relationship between Buenos Aires and Moscow was at its peak, the television network RT en Español began to broadcast on Argentina's public television platform, known as Open Digital Television (TDA, in Spanish). This was a landmark agreement. It was only the second time that a foreign television network (after Venezuela's Telesur) was aired on the Argentine public network, which at the time was made available to 82 percent of the country's population. In other words, an audience of between 33 million and 35 million people could potentially access the Russian channel—24 hours a day, in Spanish, for free.

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The deal was celebrated politically, as evidenced by Putin and Cristina Kirchner's twenty-minute televised linkup from Moscow and Buenos Aires during the channel's debut. Kirchner referred to the deal as "serious multilateralism," and welcomed that both countries could communicate from that moment "without intermediaries" to "transmit our own values." Putin cautioned against media that can manipulate social awareness, and therefore saluted "alternative sources of information" that oppose international players' attempts "to establish their monopoly of truth."⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the deal stumbled in mid-2016 following Macri's presidential victory, when it was made public by the new administration that it would be suspended. Although technical reasons were officially cited, Macri's actual purpose was to end the politically motivated deals signed by his predecessor. The new government first terminated the cooperation between the Argentine public news agency Télam and the official Cuban agency Prensa Latina. The Venezuelan-backed television Telesur was next. In fact, it would have been contradictory for the Argentine state to maintain its shares in Telesur, since the channel's editorial line was openly critical of the Macri government, as well as of its Western allies.⁶⁹

When Argentina then announced that it was putting an end to the deal with RT, which meant that the Russian channel would have to cease broadcasting on the TDA platform, the decision sparked an immediate reaction from the Russian community. The Coordinating Council of the Organizations of Russian Compatriots (CCOCR, in Spanish), which unites different organizations of Russians living in Argentina, called on Macri to reverse the decision. A petition campaign was launched on social networks, and some voices rose against closing down a channel that they argued offered "plurality" and "alternative views" in the midst of the Western media's dominant viewpoints.



But it was Moscow that reacted most ferociously. Russia's official media described the move as being "against freedom of expression," and accused the Macri government of trying to impose a media dictatorship in Argentina: "Now we will have a single, U.S.-friendly viewpoint about current affairs." Authorities in Moscow blamed the United States and suggested reprisals against Buenos Aires. The Russian ambassador allegedly had a vitriolic reaction, too. "He was very

upset and protested officially. He mentioned how important it was for Russia that RT continue to be aired on Argentina's public television platform," said an Argentine government source.⁷⁰

It did not take long for the Russian pressure to pay off. Within a few weeks, the government's decision was reversed and RT was allowed to keep its place on TDA's platform. It is unclear what exactly triggered the Macri government's 180-degree turn, but government sources in Buenos Aires mentioned Moscow's threat to halt imports of Argentine beef and to withdraw a multibillion-dollar loan for a major infrastructure project in Argentina. Another source, who is familiar with the negotiations, summed up the situation in these terms: "We can tell Venezuela that we'll end the deal with Telesur, but we cannot tell Russia that we want to do the same with RT."⁷¹

Whatever the motivation was, it worked well, because the deal between the two went from being almost killed to being renewed and then upgraded in a matter of weeks. The scope of the extended deal was announced in late 2016 at a re-launching event in Buenos Aires.⁷² It included cooperation in a number of new areas: joint production in films and television cultural content, exchange of information and journalists, Internet cooperation, and development of new technologies and social networks. Argentina's Federal System of Public Media and Content (SFMCP, in Spanish) and RT were even planning a joint live program on political affairs that would be broadcast simultaneously in both countries.⁷³

Russia's objectives go well beyond having RT on the air in Argentina. They point toward a future information society "which will be ruled by personal content, smartphones, and other technological advances."⁷⁴ For its part, the Argentine government places importance on offering audiences "a diversity of content," as well as having Argentine-produced cultural content aired on Russia's television—such as a documentary on tango, considered the first example of cooperation in the new era between both institutions. The importance of what the Russians have accomplished with this deal is summarized in the words of one Argentine government official: "RT is an absolutely biased channel. No commercial platform would ever broadcast them."⁷⁵

Russia's efforts to impact Argentina's media landscape go beyond television agreements. Along with RT, the Russian news agency Sputnik is Moscow's other main bet in the medium term, even if it currently has just one correspondent in Buenos Aires who depends on the agency's regional desk in Montevideo, Uruguay.⁷⁶ In Argentina, Sputnik has granted free access to its service and content to a number of media outlets, including the news agency Télam; online news websites Infobae, Infonews, and Tiempo Argentino; the *Página 12* newspaper; and *Perfil* magazine. Although this has had very little discernible impact so far, the agency's efforts suggest Sputnik's aspiration of becoming a well-known agency in the country.

All of this was happening at the same time when *Russia Beyond the Headlines (RBTH)*, Russia's official supplement published in different languages and intended for foreign audiences, discontinued its print edition and became an online news website available in Spanish. In the past, *RBTH* was successful in having its paid supplement inserted in Argentina's two most influential newspapers for five years. *RBTH* and its predecessor, *Rusia Hoy (Russia Today)*, were inserted twenty times in *Clarín*, the country's main newspaper, between 2010 and 2011. *RBTH* was inserted in *La Nación* once a month between 2013 and 2015, totalling 49 inserts. According to *La Nación*, its circulation on weekdays is 100,000, not including the digital audience. A survey of the supplement's impact found that readers' satisfaction was "good," newspaper sources say.

Culture

Most of Russian culture in Argentina rotates around the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Buenos Aires. This institution, which depends on Russia's public diplomacy and cooperation agency Rossotrudnichestvo, has two main tasks: to spread Russia's historical narrative, culture, and economic and political policies; and to support the learning of the Russian language. The cultural center's self-described strategy, as well as its activities in Argentina, is no different from what Moscow does in over one hundred other countries where it is established.

Moscow's cultural links with Argentina date back to the Soviet era, when it was common for Russian operas, theatre, ballet, films, literature, music, and other examples of Russian art to be introduced in Buenos Aires. Nowadays, however, bringing over large groups of Russian artists occurs less frequently due to high travel costs. "In the Soviet days, costs were not a problem: The state would pay for everything. Aeroflot would also reach all Latin American capitals. But not anymore: Now it is a long and expensive trip with other airlines. This is the main obstacle for more artists to come," says a Russian diplomat in Argentina.

Today's financial limitations have had an obvious impact on Russia's cultural agenda in Argentina. It is now probably a less ambitious and more modest cultural proposal, but it still serves the purpose of spreading Russian culture, although in a slightly different manner. Without the attractive performances of the past, many cultural activities sponsored by the Russian government seem to have a well-defined emphasis beyond mere culture. For instance, of the roughly 75 events and cultural activities organized by the Russian Center of Science and Culture between 2012 and 2016, a large number of them appealed to Russian patriotism.

The Great Patriotic War, as Russians refer to World War II, is the most recurrent topic: from events that honor those who lost their lives to photo exhibitions of the battle of Stalingrad; from activities on the anniversary of Leningrad's liberation to Soviet and Russian films about the two world wars; from conferences that commemorate the battle of Kursk to seminars on Russian history. Other activities hosted by the Russian center have had an even sharper political angle. One was a "very successful" conference by Alexander Dugin, a controversial Russian political scientist who allegedly has direct links with the Kremlin and whose anti-Western views have been described as fascist.⁷⁷ Another example was the premiere of a movie on Crimea, just months after Russia annexed it from Ukraine.⁷⁸

The main target of such messages is the Russian community. The so-called Russian compatriots are of fundamental importance for Moscow, as illustrated by the fact that Rossotrudnichestvo has been tasked with strengthening ties to the Russian diaspora. Argentina's Russian community is relatively small,⁷⁹ but the CCOCR in Argentina is quite involved with the Russian Center of Science and Culture, jointly organizing cultural events on historical, patriotic dates. The cultural center is the venue where all Russians compatriots can get together, and it also serves people who studied or worked in Russia or are students of Russian language, history, and culture.

The cultural center is also the main institution in Argentina that offers courses on Russian language, history, culture, and traditions. It grants scholarships for language courses at universities in Russia that last from one to ten months, along with other scholarships that include summer courses at Russian universities for one to four weeks, training courses for teachers, and university or postgraduate degrees.

Academia

Relations between Russian and Argentine academia remain at a low level, even as Moscow has made efforts since 2015 to reverse this trend. Russian universities have signed eight cooperation agreements with Argentine counterparts since that year, with others forthcoming.⁸⁰ These deals are, however, little more than framework agreements that so far have been only partially effective in offering a handful of scholarships to students. Due to a lack of financial resources, there are presently no expectations of taking cooperation to another level, such as joint research projects or scholars' exchange programs.

It is not for lack of interest. Russian academic promoters underline the solid institutional relationship between both countries and value the responsiveness of the Argentine academy. However, they admit that language barriers as well as geographical distance, which make the programs very costly, are the main obstacles to further engagement.

The Russian State Social University has been the most active institution in establishing links with Latin American counterparts during the past three years, founding the Ibero-American Center in 2014, with the purpose of strengthening the relationship with Latin American academia. This center, which represents *Rossotrudnichestvo* in Latin America, joins efforts by both the Ministry of Education and Science and the Pushkin Institute to launch an internationalization strategy in the region. In March 2017, representatives of the Ibero-American Center and *Rossotrudnichestvo* toured several countries in the region, including Argentina, to promote Russia's academic offerings among Latin American students. In a presentation at the University of Buenos Aires, they announced that Russia would allocate 47 scholarships to Argentine applicants in 2017—up from fewer than 20 per year—out of a total of 15,000 scholarships granted to international students every year by the Russian state. The purpose is to attract young professionals who will “remain loyal to Russia” in the future.⁸¹

Analysis

Russia lost Argentina as an important political ally in Latin America when Macri was elected president of Argentina in late 2015. The previous government did not vote against Moscow at the UN after Russia's annexation of Crimea, and generally speaking, Argentina and Russia agreed that Washington and the rest of the Western world were mainly responsible for what they argued were geopolitical imbalances. Now, however, the bilateral relationship is dominated by pragmatism, and it is probably thanks to this dynamic that Moscow has ultimately been able to hold onto its main soft power treasure in Argentina: the free, 24-hour broadcasting of the television network RT en Español.

The Russian channel's impact in Argentina is unclear. TDA, the public platform over which RT is aired, reaches 82 percent of the population. This means that 33 million to 35 million viewers can access the channel's signal. Nevertheless, given the limited number of receivers installed in households, the potential audience is thought to be closer to 3.5 million viewers. Although Macri's government attempted to prevent its broadcast, Moscow's energetic reaction reversed the situation. More than that, cooperation between TDA and RT was raised to a new level.

A number of undetermined cooperation initiatives were also announced around that same period—including content co-production, exchange programs, and Internet and social network collaboration. If implemented, the presence and impact of RT in the Argentine television

market will increase considerably. Media observers in Buenos Aires warn about the risks of considering Russia’s television content a contribution to pluralism. “It is important to keep in mind who the country is behind this kind of deal—and its ideology. These are countries with no freedom of expression at home, but that are quite assertive through its content. Therefore, we have to check what kind of content is offered for free to Argentine audiences,” says one analyst with a media association in Buenos Aires.⁸²

Moscow uses RT, other official media, social networks, and culture to change the perception that the region, including Argentina, has of Russia. Currently its image is of a country that is a continuation of the Soviet Union, which was the embodiment of hard, militarized power. Looking to the future, Moscow’s goal is to promote a more culturally and technologically inclusive image, which is seen as key to being perceived as a modern, preeminent power, not just a strategic one. The challenge for Moscow is significant, not only because it needs to engage culturally with Argentina and the region, but also because it seeks to overcome what the regime sees are “Western prejudices” of Russia. The Kremlin sees new technologies as a great opportunity to reverse the situation in its favor.

Argentina’s Russian diaspora is also viewed as a channel for projecting soft power. While they play a role in keeping the overseas Russian community united, Russia’s efforts in Argentina seem to be mostly targeted at mobilizing those who are already convinced of Moscow’s official viewpoints, instead of focusing on those who do not share Russia’s values and goals. While this seems to contradict the concept of soft power, it also highlights the bumpy road ahead for Russia’s soft power objectives. It is not the only example. The National University of La Plata’s chair in Russian studies is another revealing case in point. It was created in 2011 to establish links with Russian universities, teach Russian language, and analyze Russia’s current affairs from an academic perspective. However, due to the lack of resources to finance an academic team of Russia experts, the chair has effectively been discontinued.

The views expressed in this paper represent the opinions and analysis of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

NOTES

- ¹ The author wishes to acknowledge Ludmila Flavia González Cerulli, a Buenos Aires-based journalist who is a contributor to CADAL’s Observatory of International Relations and Human Rights, for providing local research support to conduct fieldwork in Argentina.
- ² Source: María Romina Casas Silva, “Representaciones Sociales Sobre los Chinos y Taiwanese en los Medios de Comunicación en Argentina,” *Diversidad Cultural*, no. 11, December 2015–June 2016, www.diversidadcultural.net/articulos/nro011/11-03-Mag-Romina-Silva-Casas.pdf.
- ³ Editor’s note: Although the overview essay to this report uses the term “sharp power” to characterize the more malign and manipulative aspects of authoritarian influence, the authors of the individual country reports instead generally use the broader term “soft power.” In the country studies, the authors were asked to inventory and analyze the methods of authoritarian influence applied by China and Russia in democratic settings. The concept of “sharp power” introduced in the overview essay is an outgrowth of their comparative findings.
- ⁴ The Chinese ambassador’s activities have been compiled by the author from information published on the website of China’s embassy in Argentina. According to this information, the institutions that have engaged with the Chinese ambassador include twelve media outlets (*La Nación*, *Clarín*, *Dangdai*, *Télam*, *Agencia Noticias Argentinas*, *Tiempo Argentino*, *El Cronista Comercial*, *Revista Económica*, *Ámbito Financiero*, *Perfil*, *CCTV en Español*, and *Revista Oriental*) and the Federal System of Public Media and Contents (SFMCP, in Spanish); three political parties (Republican Proposal, the Justicialist Party, and the Socialist Party of Argentina); and twelve foundations and think tanks (Casa Patria Grande; the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth; the Foundation of Political, Economic, and Social Studies for the New Argentina; the Latin American

Center for Political and Economic Chinese Studies; the Institute of Strategic Planning; the “New Majority” Center of Studies; the Network for Political Action; the Contemporary Foundation; the Argentine Council for International Relations; the Center for Research and Social Action; the Ibero-American University Foundation; and the Open Embassy Foundation).

⁵ The comprehensive strategic partnership between Argentina and China was signed on July 18, 2014. The details of what this type of association means have not been made public in Argentina nor in China, but such comprehensive strategic partnerships made with China commonly include cooperation in the following areas: politics; defense; science and technology; agriculture; culture and education; health and medical sciences; environment, forestry and natural resources; nuclear energy; and space.

⁶ Argentina granted China 208 hectares to build and run a space facility in a remote area near the Chilean border for a 50 year period. Though it has been announced that the facility will be used for China’s moon program and, therefore, is purely for scientific purposes, this project is highly controversial because of its military and geopolitical implications. The station’s main asset is a 35-meter diameter antenna that allows communication with devices such as deep-space satellites, but critics warn that the military use of such a facility cannot be ruled out because of the antenna’s double use capabilities. The facility, which will be run by a state company linked to the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, is expected to be in full operation by early 2018.

⁷ Luke Patey, “China Made Mauricio Macri A Deal He Couldn’t Refuse,” *Foreign Policy*, 24 January 2017.

China’s loans jumped to US\$25 billion by 2016, according to Argentina’s ambassador in China. Among others, three main projects will be financed with those funds: the rehabilitation of Argentina’s main railway infrastructure, two hydropower dams, and two nuclear plants. The railway network, known as the Belgrano Cargas, is key for Argentina’s economy since it will allegedly upgrade infrastructure from the food producing provinces to the ports. The plan includes a complete renovation of 1,626 kilometres of tracks and 120 bridges.

⁸ Before the 2015 elections, members of Macri’s political party PRO handed a letter to China’s ambassador in Argentina that said that the deals “endanger the Argentine state for the next few decades” and that “the Argentine government’s conduct could violate the national Constitution and go against the most basic principle of transparency.” Mauricio Macri was a signatory to the letter, which was made public by *El Cronista*.

Néstor Restivo, “Los candidatos frente a China,” *Dangdai*, Winter 2015.

⁹ Macri’s intention to review the conditions for the construction of the Kirchner and Cepernic hydropower dams in the country’s south, which entailed a US\$4.7 billion loan, came to nothing when Beijing made it clear that the cancellation of this project would lead to the revocation of a US\$2.1 billion loan granted to renovate the Belgrano project, the country’s main railway infrastructure. A letter from the China Development Bank to the Argentine government in March 2017 said that “the Kirchner-Cepernic dams and the Belgrano project are major projects promoted by the [Chinese Communist] Party” and each of the agreements “contain cross default clauses.” At a later stage, both countries agreed to lower the capacity of the two dams that are allegedly the biggest to ever be built by a Chinese company abroad. Rubén Rabanal, “La Argentina acordó con China ante amenaza de cross default,” *Ámbito Financiero*, 24 March 2017, www.ambito.com/833726-la-argentina-acordo-con-china-ante-amenaza-de-cross-default.

¹⁰ Author’s interview with an anonymous source. Buenos Aires, December 2016.

¹¹ Meetings between the CCP and PRO happened indistinctly in Beijing and Buenos Aires. On one occasion, a member of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee offered a conference at PRO’s headquarters in the Argentine capital and was also received by Macri in the Casa Rosada, the government headquarters. Trips to China include meetings with party cadres as well as tourist visits to the Great Wall, other Chinese cities, or to company headquarters such as Huawei. Representatives of most other Argentine political parties have also been invited by the CCP to visit China. Sergio Massa, a presidential candidate in the 2015 election, was invited in March 2017. Source: Information collected by the author from articles about those exchanges published by the Argentine press.

¹² Humberto Schiavoni, “China, brújula para nuestro desarrollo,” *Clarín*, 30 August 2016.

¹³ Author’s interview. Buenos Aires, November 2016.

¹⁴ CLEPEC is a regional foundation based in Buenos Aires that was founded in 2013. It has historically been linked to the *kirchneristas*, and most of its China-related activity is done in Argentina and Venezuela.

¹⁵ Author’s interview. Buenos Aires, November 2016.

¹⁶ The best exception in the media was the article “Un chino anda suelto en la legislatura,” published by the political magazine *Qué* on 9 November 2016.

¹⁷ James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese*, Chinese Overseas Series, xiv (Brill, May 2014), 39–43.

¹⁸ *Boletín Informativo* has been published twice a year by the Chinese embassy in Argentina since 2015. Along with its online edition, it is printed and distributed to Argentina’s Congress, the Presidency, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy, Culture and Education, and other government agencies.

- ¹⁹ Since late 2014 the Chinese ambassador has published at least fifteen op-eds and has been interviewed ten times in the main national media outlets. *La Nación* and *Clarín* published ten of the fifteen op-eds. He also visited five media headquarters during that period. Source: Chinese embassy website; information collected by the author.
- ²⁰ According to the Argentine press, Xinhua and Télam signed several cooperation agreements during the last decade, including a deal “to deepen links” between both agencies signed in 2011. The deal includes information exchange.
- ²¹ *China Watch* was first published on March 15, 2016, and the campaign was ongoing in mid-2017 at the time of writing. The paid insert appears every fifteen days in the economic daily *El Cronista*, Rosario’s *La Capital* newspaper, and in the three local editions of *Diario Uno* in Mendoza, Santa Fe, and Entre Ríos provinces. The total combined circulation of these publications is 150,000, while combined weekday sales reach around 100,000.
- ²² Fernando Arredondo, “Destacan a China Watch como ejemplo de la fortaleza del vínculo con China,” *Diario Uno*, 10 May 2016, www.unosantafe.com.ar/santafe/destacan-china-watch-como-ejemplo-la-fortaleza-del-vinculo-china-n884361.html.
- ²³ Conducted by a TV presenter of Taiwanese origin, “Milenarios” is a television program that aims to bring China closer to an Argentine audience. It touches on Chinese culture, tourism, cooking, business, and similar topics. It debuted in April 2016 and is broadcast every Saturday. Channel A24 has national and regional coverage (except to Brazil) through cable and is one of the three most viewed channels in Argentina. As of mid-2017, *Milenarios* had 5,613 likes on Facebook, 366 Twitter followers, 717 YouTube subscribed viewers, and 487 followers on Instagram. According to sources, the program’s producer initially approached the Chinese embassy for funding. The embassy connected them to the House of Chinese Culture, which linked them to the group’s media holding Grupo América.
- ²⁴ The documentary can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGG4sOrT3dQ>.
- ²⁵ Statements by Wang Yu, director of CCTV Spanish, at a TV forum held in Lima, Peru, 7 December 2016.
- ²⁶ Both institutions agreed to actively cooperate to broadcast soap operas, animated shows, and documentaries; to promote television programs, sports activities and other television and film programs of the two countries in their own territories; and to co-produce documentaries, animation, and other television and film products. To do so, they agreed to create an audiovisual content database. Previously, the two countries signed a framework agreement in February 2015. The co-production of a documentary on tango was being discussed at the time of writing this report, but things had slowed down after the initial Chinese impetus, according to Argentine sources.
- ²⁷ “Acuerdo con el Diario del Pueblo, de China,” *La Nación*, 14 June 2015, www.lanacion.com.ar/1801618-acuerdo-con-el-diario-del-pueblo-de-china. The Argentine press reported that the *People’s Daily* was incorporated in Argentina on November 25, 2014, with a social capital of CN¥ 276.422.764 (US\$45 million at the time), suggesting that its initial plans in the country were very ambitious. As of 2017, the Chinese newspaper allegedly has one correspondent in Buenos Aires. *People’s Daily* is one of the regime’s main media outlets, with a daily circulation of more than 3.5 million copies. It also publishes nine other newspapers and six monthly magazines.
- ²⁸ China’s ambassador to Argentina, Yang Wanming, held a meeting in the newspaper’s newsroom on January 13, 2015, with the newspaper’s general manager and the editor in chief. According to the embassy’s public note, they “shared opinions on cooperation between both countries’ media.” The Chinese ambassador also met with *La Nación* executives on May 20 and June 12, 2015. On the day of the June meeting, he also attended the signing of the cooperation memorandum between *La Nación* and the *People’s Daily* newspaper. The ambassador paid another visit to *La Nación* on November 30, 2015. “El Embajador Yang Wanming visitó la sede del diario *La Nación*,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Argentina, 16 January 2015, <http://ar.china-embassy.org/esp/sgxw/t1229196.htm>; “El Embajador Yang Wanming se reunió con autoridades de la Nación,” 21 May 2015, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Argentina, <http://ar.china-embassy.org/esp/sgxw/t1265912.htm>; “El Embajador Yang Wanming se presentó en la ceremonia de firma del memorándum de cooperación entre Diario de Pueblo y *La Nación*,” 16 June 2015, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Argentina, <http://ar.china-embassy.org/esp/sgxw/t1273353.htm>; and “El Embajador Yang Wanming se reunió el Gerente General de Diario *La Nación*,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Argentina, 1 December 2015, <http://ar.china-embassy.org/esp/sgxw/t1320283.htm>.
- ²⁹ *La Nación*’s average daily readership dropped from 169,896 in October 2011 to 119,193 in June 2017. Sources: “Diario *La Nación*: record histórico de ventas,” Taringa, www.taringa.net/posts/noticias/14577801/Diario-La-Nacion-record-historico-de-ventas.html, and <http://enciclomeditos.com/>. *Clarín*, the other major Argentine newspaper that was also very critical of the Kirchner government, also lost more readership during those same years.
- ³⁰ *La Nación* launched the digital TV channel LN+ in November 2016. According to press reports, its average rating was 0.01 in May 2017, ranking last among the other news broadcasts in Argentina. The media group says that its TV project is long term. “LN+ no repunta su rating y C5N le pisa los talones a TN,” *Urgente 24*, 8 June 2017, www.urgente24.com/265707-ln-no-repunta-su-rating-y-c5n-le-pisa-los-talones-a-tn.

- ³¹ After more than a century, *La Nación* decided on October 2016 to reduce the newspaper to a tabloid-size format, allegedly to reduce the high costs of paper. “La Nación, con un nuevo formato: la edición impresa ahora es un compacto,” *La Nación*, 30 October 2016, www.lanacion.com.ar/1951757-la-nacion-con-un-nuevo-formato-la-edicion-impresa-ahora-sera-un-compacto.
- ³² According to the website of China’s embassy in Argentina, Chinese ambassador Yan Wanming authored op-eds on April 4, 2015; January 31, 2016; November 8, 2016; March 28, 2017; June 28, 2017; and September 20, 2017. The ambassador was also interviewed on August 22, 2016. “Noticias de la Embajada,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Argentina, <http://ar.china-embassy.org/esp/sgxw/>.
- ³³ “Belgrano recibe otra vez el Año Nuevo chino,” *La Nación*, 3 February 2017, www.lanacion.com.ar/1981371-belgrano-recibe-otra-vez-el-ano-nuevo-chino.
- ³⁴ Phoenix Dorada International Media Company was incorporated in Buenos on April 5, 2016, with two female shareholders who were 58 and 86 years of age at that time. It changed its name from Fundación Muralla Dorada (Golden Wall Foundation), which was founded in 2012. “The change in the company’s name was purely cosmetic. We chose the name Phoenix because of the director’s spirit, because of the Phoenix’s revival and its celestial message.” Currently the company employs 20 people. According to its website, its mission is to “produce and distribute television and film programs, [and] medium and large scale cultural events.”
- ³⁵ According to the company’s website, it received a US\$30,000 donation from the Chinese embassy in May 2015. “La Embajada China dona un fondo especial a La Fundación Muralla Dorada,” Phoenix Dorada website, accessed 15 May 2017, <http://phoenixdorada.com/la-embajada-china-regala-fondo-especial-a-la-fundacion-muralla-dorada/>.
- ³⁶ “Las empresas chinas auspician el Festival Año Nuevo Chino,” Phoenix Dorada website, accessed 15 May 2017, <http://phoenixdorada.com/las-empresas-chinas-auspician-el-festival-ano-nuevo-chino/>.
- ³⁷ It is relevant to mention that among large private Chinese companies, such as Huawei, Sany, Alibaba, and many others, shareholders typically have a very close relationship with the Chinese government. In this sense, it is not precise to equate these Chinese private companies with private companies in the West, where shareholders are mostly private individuals and entities.
- ³⁸ The Taiwanese were the first ethnic Chinese to migrate to Argentina in the 1970s, one and a half decades ahead of those from mainland China. At the time, the Taiwanese community amounted to 60,000, but the number has decreased to 10,000. The Taiwanese immigrant population congregated in a neighbourhood in Buenos Aires that later become the city’s Chinatown. Today the second generation of Taiwanese are the most successful members of the ethnic-Chinese community, given that the later wave of mainland Chinese arriving in Argentina generally had little education. For this reason, the better-educated Taiwanese are commonly chosen over the mainland Chinese to represent the Chinese community at public events.
- ³⁹ The program *Chino Básico* (Basic Chinese) made its television debut in 2014 and was aired weekly for two seasons. As the first Chinese television program in Argentina, it was dedicated more to Chinese culture than to Mandarin. The program had an average audience of 45,000, and is now available online. *Chino Básico* has 13,000 subscribers on YouTube.
- ⁴⁰ Phoenix Dorada International Media Company, accessed 8 November 2017, <http://phoenixdorada.com/#about>.
- ⁴¹ Mostly Chinese-born artists, many of them dissidents, founded Shen Yun Performing Arts in New York in 2006. Its four companies tour the world with the slogan: “Revive 5,000 years of Chinese civilization.” Shen Yun accuses the CCP of subjecting ancient Chinese culture “to a process of systematic annihilation” with the purpose of settling the party’s own culture “to monopolize power without interference.” It aims to recover Chinese culture through a show of classical dance, acrobatics, and music. The company, which is connected to the Falun Gong spiritual movement, says the show has performed in more than 130 countries and has been viewed by more than 1.5 million spectators.
- ⁴² Falun Gong practitioners have filed several complaints in Argentine courts against Chinese embassy personnel for harassment, threats, and beatings. The spiritual movement has also filed a criminal case in Argentina against the Chinese leadership in Beijing for crimes against humanity for the Falun Gong’s persecution.
- ⁴³ The following have been the topics of the cultural courses in the first semester of 2017: Confucius thought; Chinese economy; traditional Chinese painting; learning Qigong; Taichichuan; Chinese supply chains; Beijing Opera; Chinese history; Chinese thought; Chinese calligraphy; today’s Chinese society, culture, and business; and traditional Chinese medicine.
- ⁴⁴ Students receive six or twelve-month scholarships, as well as scholarships for three-week summer camps in China. Argentina received four scholarships from the Chinese government in 2015 and 25 for the 2016–17 academic year. In May 2017 Beijing announced that it would increase the number of scholarships available for Argentines to 40 per year. Also, the Confucius Institutes offer their own scholarships, while other grants follow bilateral deals between universities. Argentine students awarded with Chinese scholarships up until 2015 are estimated to be more than 400, said the Chinese ambassador in a media interview. In June 2017, the Association of Former Scholarship Students in China (ADEBAC, in Spanish) was founded in Buenos Aires for networking purposes.

- ⁴⁵ Scholar and Sinologist Eduardo Oviedo refers to this idea in his book *Historia de las Relaciones Internacionales entre Argentina y China, 1945–2010*. He is also critical of the Confucius Institutes, since they are part of the Chinese state and are established on campus, a factor that may compromise academic autonomy and freedom. See more: Oviedo, Eduardo Daniel, *Historia de las Relaciones Internacionales entre Argentina y China, 1945–2010*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2010).
- ⁴⁶ “El Puente Científico,” *Dangdai*, Autumn 2017.
- ⁴⁷ CONICET depends on the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Productive Innovation and is considered the most important research institution in Argentina. According to its website, CONICET is in charge of promoting science and technology in Argentina. Its objective is to boost and implement scientific and technical activities in all fields of knowledge, including social sciences and humanities. The institution has its own researchers and was founded in 1958.
- ⁴⁸ Before the creation of CIMI, both institutions had built a relationship for quite some time. CONICET’s Center for Labor Studies and Research and Shanghai University’s Center for Global Studies were engaged academically for several years through a mix of academic cooperation programs and activities. These included the exchange of PhD students, scholarship awards, and participation in seminars, workshops, and conferences in the social sciences. In 2015 CONICET and Shanghai University signed a framework agreement that led to the creation of CIMI in April 2017, with a validity of four years. CIMI is allegedly financed by both institutions and has head offices in both Buenos Aires and Shanghai. In terms of structure, it has one director per institution, a scientific board, an evaluation committee, and a consultative board, as well as staff with fifteen to twenty people. Source: Author’s interviews with anonymous sources in Buenos Aires, June 2017.
- ⁴⁹ A profile of CICIR published by the Open Source Center states that this Chinese think tank “is affiliated with China’s top intelligence agency, the Ministry of State Security, although this fact is rarely acknowledged in PRC media.” Source: “Profile of MSS-Affiliated PRC Foreign Policy Think Tank CICIR,” Open Source Center, 25 August 2011, <https://fas.org/irp/dni/osc/cicir.pdf>.
- According to Argentine press, CONICET and CICIR signed a framework agreement in 2009 that was renewed in 2014 “so that delegations of researchers can make academic and scientific visits between both countries.” In 2013, both institutions agreed to facilitate international cooperation projects in the areas of international politics and strategic relations between China and Argentina. Since then, the cooperation between the two has led to the organization of seminars, mutual visits by researchers, and published materials.
- ⁵⁰ “Building soft power of social sciences,” Opinion, *Shanghai Daily*, 19 May 2017, www.shanghaidaily.com/opinion/chinese-perspectives/Building-soft-power-of-social-sciences/shdaily.shtml.
- ⁵¹ Interview with CIMI’s promoters. Buenos Aires, June 2017.
- ⁵² Néstor Restivo, “Lanzaron un centro mixto histórico el Conicet y la Universidad de Shanghai,” *Dangdai*, 7 April 2017, http://dangdai.com.ar/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7705:lanza-ron-un-centro-mixto-historico-el-conicet-y-la-universidad-de-shanghai&catid=4:actualidad&Itemid=100.
- ⁵³ The Center for Argentine Studies was officially established on November 24, 2015 as part of the CASS Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS). It required special approval since CASS’ rules allow only five study centers to be established per institute—which ILAS already had. The new center was created as a platform to stimulate research on Argentine politics, economics, diplomacy, society, and culture, as well as to promote academic exchange and provide consultation services to governments and companies in both countries. Also that year, Sichuan University, Jilin University, Shanghai University, Sun Yat-sen University, and Xi’an University of International Studies established the Chinese Association of Argentine Studies for the same purpose.
- ⁵⁴ Jérôme Doyon, et al., “A Hundred Think Tanks Bloom in China,” European Council on Foreign Relations, August 2016.
- ⁵⁵ The Information Office of China’s State Council organized the “2016 Forum on the Development of Tibet” in July that year in Lhasa, which was attended by 130 foreign academics and diplomats. The attendees signed the Lhasa Consensus declaration that emphasized the importance of “helping the world better understand Tibet,” which Tibetan groups say is political language for endorsement of Chinese Communist Party propaganda. See Zhang Jianfeng, “Full Text of Lhasa Consensus,” CCTV, 8 July 2016, <http://english.cctv.com/2016/07/08/ARTIAoc2iH4o5uSNxYIQBLrD160708.shtml>.
- ⁵⁶ CARI’s seminar “Relationship Strategies with China” was held on November 25, 2016, in Buenos Aires, and was attended by the author.
- ⁵⁷ There were 10,316 Chinese supermarkets in the country in 2015, according to Cámara de Autoservicios y Supermercados Propiedad Residentes Chinos (Casrech), the chamber of Chinese supermarkets in Argentina. Source: “Los súper chinos sufren la competencia y cierran comercios” *Infobae*, 9 March 2015, www.infobae.com/2015/03/09/1714726-los-super-chinos-sufren-la-competencia-y-cierran-comercios/.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with the author. Buenos Aires, March 2017.
- ⁵⁹ Interview with the author.
- ⁶⁰ Carlos Moneta and Sergio Cesarín, *La Tentación Pragmática. China–Argentina: Lo Actual, Lo Próximo y Lo Distante*, Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Tres de Febrero (Buenos Aires: Euntref, 2016).

- ⁶¹ A debate in Argentina's Senate in June 2017 warned against Latin America's "new dependency" on China, whose practices in the region were condemned as "imperialistic." In addition, a former congressman had previously published an op-ed on a minor website under the headline, "China, what nobody says," warning about some of China's more well-known downsides, such as the country's human rights record and the role of the state in the economy.
- ⁶² The forum was held in Lima, Peru at the University of St. Martin of Porres on December 10–11, 2016, and was attended by Chinese and Latin American scholars, including Argentines. The keynote speaker was former Peruvian president Alan García, who has a very close relationship with China. His book *Confucius and Globalization: Understanding China and Growing with Her* (original title in Spanish: *Confucio y la Globalización. Comprender China y Crecer con ella*) was published in Mandarin by China's People's Literature Publishing House in 2014.
- ⁶³ The International Confucian Association (ICA) was officially established in Beijing on October 5, 1994. According to its website, it has the purpose of "studying and carrying forward Confucian thought in order to push for the freedom and equality of mankind and the peaceful development and lasting prosperity of the world," and "strives to unite Confucian societies, scholars and professionals to boost the study, dissemination, popularization and application of Confucianism in the international community." Specifically, ICA's work includes organizing international academic conferences and lectures, carrying out academic research, and promoting friendly international exchanges and cooperation, among other duties.
- ⁶⁴ Xinhua traditionally used to have only one correspondent. In the last few years, the Xinhua bureau in Buenos Aires has been upgraded to six people. As of December 2016, it includes one Chinese delegate, one cameraman, one photographer, and three Argentine journalists. For the Buenos Aires bureau, CGTN recently hired Carolina Cayazzo, former CNN senior correspondent. China Radio International and *People's Daily* have one correspondent each.
- ⁶⁵ Thanks to its larger financial resources, China's economic presence in Argentina is clearly more visible. Despite Chinese competition, a Russian-led consortium was awarded a US\$2.2 billion project to build a hydropower dam. In 2017, the project seemed to stumble after the Macri government demanded better financial terms for the repayment of the loan. Russia is also behind the building of a new nuclear plant in Argentina, and a US\$180 million project to build a port was announced, too.
- ⁶⁶ Analysis of editorials and op-ed articles from January 2014 to early 2017 shows that the Argentine media were almost unanimously critical of Russia's annexation of Crimea. *La Nación* published five editorials and twenty opinion articles, all of them disapproving. *Clarín* published nine critical opinion articles. *Página 12*, close to the Kirchner government, referred in its articles to the United States' responsibility in the Ukrainian crisis. Argentine experts on Russian matters agree that the media's coverage of the Ukrainian conflict lacked historical analysis.
- ⁶⁷ Although it emerged earlier as a way to consolidate power among compatriots in the post-Soviet space, Russia's soft power was formally introduced in its Foreign Policy Doctrine of 2013. Moscow reacted to the West's promotion of democracy in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine by encouraging a soft power strategy with the creation and reinforcement of institutions directly or indirectly linked to the Kremlin. Among them, the Ruskiy Mir Foundation, the Russia Today television network (now RT), the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' agency in charge of Russia's public diplomacy, known as Rossotrudnichestvo. The doctrine defines soft power as a set of instruments for achieving foreign policy aims by means of civil society institutions, information technology, communication interactions, humanitarian outreach, and other methods that differ from classic diplomacy. Alexander Sergunin, "Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy," *Politics* 35 (2015): 347–63.
- ⁶⁸ Despite the diplomatic honeymoon atmosphere at the time when RT began to be aired in Argentina, the Russian channel had been extremely critical of Cristina Kirchner in the past. A documentary screened in 2012 on the Patagonia region's land sale to foreign millionaires suggested the Kirchners were responsible for the massive land sales to Jewish people, while it accused the Kirchner government of turning the Argentine army into "third-world obsolete junk" and of being "absolutely covered with corruption." The documentary was erased from RT's website just a few days after the deal between Kirchner and Putin was signed in July 2014.
- ⁶⁹ During the Cristina Kirchner administration, Argentina participated in Telesur along with the governments of Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Uruguay. The Argentine state had a 20 percent share and, therefore, had to partially finance the channel, but it had no influence over its editorial line.
- ⁷⁰ Author's interview with anonymous source. Buenos Aires, October 2016.
- ⁷¹ Author's interview with anonymous source. Buenos Aires, November 2016.
- ⁷² More than 100 people attended the event, including the head of Argentina's Federal System of Public Media and Content, Hernán Lombardi. The Senate's president mentioned the "strategic relationship" between Russia and Argentina and showed gratitude for Russia's "permanent support on the Falklands issue." The 25-minute documentary "Falklands, a Dormant Conflict," produced by RT, was aired during the event. The Russian ambassador said that RT reached an audience of millions of people in Argentina after broadcasting for two years.
- ⁷³ In the months that followed the signing of the framework agreement, very little has been put into practice.
- ⁷⁴ "Lombardi firmó un acuerdo con su par ruso," *El Tribuno*, 19 October 2016, www.eltribuno.info/jujuy/nota/2016-10-9-1-30-0-lombardi-firmo-un-acuerdo-con-su-par-ruso.

- ⁷⁵ Author's interview with anonymous source.
- ⁷⁶ Sputnik has six other correspondents across Latin America, each of whom produces between six and eight stories per day.
- ⁷⁷ Following Dugin's visit to Argentina in 2015, a series of articles in favor of and against Russian President Vladimir Putin were published in *Gladius*, an intellectual magazine of Catholic thought. The article "Vladimir Putin, a Singular Statesman," in the magazine's issue 93, triggered a controversial discussion among intellectuals after portraying Putin in a positive fashion in the midst of the West's alleged moral decline.
- ⁷⁸ In February 2015, Viachesláv Kraskó's film "Krymchei" was shown at the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Buenos Aires, the film's premiere outside of Russia. The film tells the story of two friends who hitchhike across Crimea asking local people one question: Whose is Crimea? Supposedly, all opinions are presented without censorship or cuts. The film ends by highlighting how 93 percent of respondents voted yes in the March 2014 referendum on Crimea's annexation to Russia.
- ⁷⁹ It is estimated that there are 300,000 residents in Argentina with Russian origin, although the figure could be higher depending on whether the Ukrainian community is included. According to a source from the Russian embassy, there are "less than 10,000 people in Argentina who speak Russian." There are around a dozen clubs or associations of Russians throughout the country.
- ⁸⁰ The Russian State Social University signed cooperation agreements with Bahía Blanca's National University of the South (Universidad Nacional del Sur) in 2015; with Mendoza's National University of Cuyo in 2016; and with St. Louis University (Universidad de San Luis) in 2017. After two years of negotiations, a deal that includes the mutual recognition of qualifications was also agreed with the University of Buenos Aires, but had not been signed at the time of writing this report. Allegedly, another agreement was also signed with Santa Fe's National University of Litoral. Other academic ties include agreements between the University of Buenos Aires and the Altai State University and Peoples' Friendship University of Russia; between the National University of Mar del Plata and Saint Petersburg State University; and between the National University of Central Buenos Aires and St. Petersburg Polytechnic University.
- ⁸¹ Russia's state-funded scholarship program has offered 15,000 spots for international applicants every year since 2014. Around 500 Russian universities in 80 cities have joined this program. Along with the 47 scholarships for Argentine applicants, Russia also offers 100 scholarships to Cubans, 87 for Colombians, twenty to Paraguayans, and five to Peruvians. The scholarships cover tuition for the duration of the program, academic materials, and accommodation for both long-term studies and short courses. They also include a monthly maintenance stipend of between US\$50 and US\$150, but do not include travel costs, living expenses, or health insurance. Through this program, Russia aims to train foreigners who "will remain loyal to the Russian Federation" and will "establish close contacts with Russian educational institutions." In effect, Moscow believes it is "recruiting personnel for the Russian economy and education system." "Glebova: Russia Invites 15,000 Foreigners for Free University Education," Sputnik, 3 September 2016, <https://sputniknews.com/interviews/201603091035999331-rossotrudnichestvo-russia-invites-foreign-students-free-university-education/>.
- ⁸² Author's interview with anonymous source. Buenos Aires, November 2016.



Reframing Relations in Peru

By Juan Pablo Cardenal¹

CHINA

INTRODUCTION Peru is one of China's most important Latin American partners, along with Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina. In 2013, China upgraded its bilateral relationship with Peru to the status of a “comprehensive strategic partnership,” which is the highest level of relations between China and a Latin American country to date.² Such recognition reflects the last decade's strong economic and institutional ties between the two nations. China is Peru's largest trading partner, as well as one of its top foreign investors. Furthermore, in 2009 Peru became one of only three Latin American countries that have signed a free-trade agreement with China. Lima has also granted Beijing “market economy status.”³

China has in fact been a key player in Peru's economy since the global economic crisis of 2008. With its demand for commodities, China is currently the largest source of foreign investment in Peru's mining industry, with more than one-third of the total portfolio. Given the size of Peru's mining industry, the impact on Peru's GDP is significant.⁴ Overall, 170 Peru-based Chinese companies invested US\$14 billion in 2015, while bilateral trade reached US\$16 billion.⁵ At the same time, traditional Western investors have reduced their investments and presence in Peru during the last decade.

As a result, the perception that China is an essential partner for Peru's future prosperity is well rooted among politicians, as well as in public opinion. In Peruvian eyes, Beijing's growing relevance in the country is not entirely unrelated to the United States' diminishing presence in the region, which China has successfully exploited. In this context, it was no surprise that Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, the current Peruvian president, chose to visit China for his first official trip abroad in September 2016.

Prospective economic opportunities, as well as a past relationship that is without historical or territorial disputes between the two countries, lay a solid foundation for China's soft power efforts in Peru.⁶ Cooperation with institutions and engagement with influential figures in all levels of Peruvian society—particularly in the political arena, the media, and academia—are the axis on which its strategy is based. As a result, prominent actors are regularly invited to China by different Chinese institutions to participate in trainings and exchange programs. However, as is explained in the regional chapter, these trips often present a one-sided view of the country.

These propagandistic tours of China, even if couched as trainings or exchange programs, are central to Beijing's people-to-people diplomacy. And it appears to be working: With relatively little financial outlay, China is winning the sympathies of more and more prominent Peruvians. "Many have culture shock after visiting China for the first time. They do not expect China's modernity, the way the Chinese dress or the entertainment industry, but rather a less-developed China. They say the trip completely changed their view of the world," says an interviewed source at one of Peru's Confucius Institutes.

In addition to this people-to-people strategy, Beijing is also trying to recruit Peru's ethnic Chinese population, one of the oldest and largest in Latin America, to its own cause. It is important to note that this group is far from homogeneous. Rather, it is a multi-layered community formed as the result of several waves of migration over time from China, each of which had its own identity due to different regions of origin, distinctive dialects, and motivations for emigrating.

However, within this diversity, the broader population could be divided into two larger groups that are relevant to their relationship with China's current government. The first are those who maintain Chinese citizenship and, therefore, have stronger, more direct ties to China; this group includes the descendants of the workers of Cantonese origin who migrated to Peru after 1849, as well as the so-called new migrants—mostly from Fujian province—who have been flowing into the country since the 1980s. The second group are Peruvian citizens born in the country with mixed Peruvian-Chinese ancestry, locally known as Tusan.⁷

The Tusan are thought to be quite numerous: Up to 2.5 million people, or 8 percent of Peru's population of 31 million may have Chinese ancestry, according to estimates—about which there is still much debate.⁸ Through a mix of blurry patriotism, the prospect of business opportunities and economic gain, and stereotyped views of the motherland, many in the community are generally supportive of the Chinese regime. And what is indeed more relevant, Chinese citizens living in Peru, together with parts of the Tusan population, are decisively contributing to the normalization of China's image in the country: downplaying the authoritarian nature of its regime, highlighting China's alleged developmental efficiency, and legitimizing China's one-party regime in comparison with multiparty liberal democracies.

Beijing is not indifferent to this. Quite the opposite, the Chinese embassy actively promotes "a policy of seduction."⁹ While China uses people-to-people diplomacy tactics to target Peruvian elites, this policy of seduction is more far-reaching. This is so because the Chinese government regards overseas Chinese—whether they are PRC nationals or Peruvian citizens of Chinese ethnicity—as national assets that can be leveraged to support China's integration with the world, serve as a lobby against Taiwan's independence, and act as soft power promoters of Chinese pride and culture.¹⁰ This outreach effort, known as *qiaowu*, is then the key: an evolving strategy of behavioral control and manipulation of Chinese groups abroad through micro-management techniques.

As a tool to promote the PRC's stance abroad, *qiaowu* aims to win over community leaders who do not already support the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), neutralize party critics, build temporary alliances of convenience, and systematically shut down regime adversaries. It employs social and psychological tools that seek to influence—through coercive pressure and positive incentives—the choices, direction, and loyalties of the population that the PRC considers as overseas Chinese. *Qiaowu* is therefore a shared duty for all government agencies, including Chinese embassies across the globe, under the guidance of the CCP.¹¹ While it appears to be a straightforward attempt to encourage transnational cultural interest, raise ethnic awareness, and promote business, *qiaowu* is in fact designed to legitimize the CCP and elevate China's international image.¹²

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Ultimately, the overseas Chinese happen to be, consciously or not, the custodians of the CCP's values. This is clearly the case with the two main institutions representing the Chinese community in Peru: the Beneficencia China (Chinese Benevolent Association) and the Association of Chinese Companies in Peru.¹³ Founded in 1886 to offer support and protection to the Chinese migrants, the Beneficencia China is a perfect example of how effective *qiaowu* can be. Not only does the Chinese embassy give its blessing—somehow invisibly—to the association's initiatives. It is also primarily through informal interaction and personal ties, rather than through financial support, that the Beneficencia China has become a significant platform enabling the embassy to connect with both Peru's Chinese residents and the broader Peruvian society.

Doing so is logical. The Beneficencia China enjoys a solid position in society: It has a long history of representing the local Chinese community in Peru, is recognized as the most well-established Chinese institution, and is a primary promoter of Chinese culture in the country. It also has physical space to share and has begun to promote values that are in line with official Chinese discourse, particularly during the last decade as a new wave of patriotic Chinese nationals has immigrated to Peru. Thus, it periodically hosts visiting Chinese delegations and organizes cultural activities jointly or with the participation of the embassy. The activities are nothing unusual:

From flashmob activities during the Chinese New Year, to exhibitions and shows celebrating the association's 130th anniversary, from gala dinners with 1,200 selected guests, to commemorating China's victory over Japan in World War II.

Perhaps more surprisingly, the Tusan community as a whole, and particularly those who are considered community leaders through different cultural or business associations, are increasingly growing closer to China despite historical isolation from the community of Chinese nationals. For the mix of reasons mentioned above, many Tusan are now active in promoting Chineseness in every possible way: Sponsoring cultural activities, encouraging business, engaging academically, and participating in trips to China to discover their roots. The words of a Lima-based scholar illustrate the pro-China hype: "It is now customary among Peruvians that approach the Chinese diplomatic or business ambits to unearth some remote ancestor, supposed or real, to suddenly rediscover that they belong to the Chinese community in Peru after all."

Likewise, some Chinese Peruvians are beginning to be referred to, and to refer to themselves, as *Huayi*—or overseas Chinese, in the Peruvian context.¹⁴ If the Tusan allow themselves to be

recognized as Huayi, this would be very significant, writes Isabelle Lausent-Herrera, a Lima-based China scholar. Yet “this is not impossible as China has great draw, and the sense of identity for the Tusan is diminishing in the process of globalization,” she adds.¹⁵ In addition, given that Chinese-Peruvians are represented across society and many are successful and influential people, they are receiving more attention from the Chinese embassy, too. For instance, Beijing contributed US\$3.2 million in aid to build the Chinese-Peruvian Friendship Center. This 294-seat facility was completed in 2014.¹⁶

It is estimated that around 10 percent of the 229 Chinese associations that have been founded in Peru since the late nineteenth century were still in existence in 2014.¹⁷ The Beneficencia China is the most active, continuously welcoming visitors from the motherland, hosting events to support political causes such as China’s position on the South China Sea, and developing a cultural agenda. Many of the other Tusan associations promote the integration of Chinese-Peruvians through socio-cultural activities. Among these, the most representative are the Peruvian-Chinese Association, the Peruvian-Chinese Cultural Center, and the Peruvian-Chinese Friendship Foundation. All three are quite dynamic in spreading Chinese culture.

In particular, the Peruvian-Chinese Friendship Foundation also created the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, which is linked to former Peruvian president Alan Garcia’s Partido Aprista. Both the foundation and the institute, which is technically a research and study platform with an emphasis on China, are behind a great deal of pro-China activity, including conferences, book presentations, book fairs, and academic research. The mix of activities also includes public relations and networking initiatives with diplomats, intellectuals, politicians, and academics; publishing the Chinese-Spanish publication *Nuevo Mundo*; and was the driving force behind the twinning of two districts of Lima and Beijing in September 2016.¹⁸ The relationship with the Chinese embassy and the institute is friendly, and the institute’s promoters are regularly invited to China.

Media

China pays significant attention to the media sector in Peru. Historically, China was never a priority topic covered by Peruvian media. The cultural and geographical distance between the two countries, relatively modest economic ties (until recently), and the absence of permanent Peruvian correspondents based in Beijing¹⁹ probably explain why China was mostly absent from mainstream media coverage. Most news about China has instead traditionally come from Western outlets, whose own resources for reporting on China have generally shrunk over time. These factors partially explain why knowledge of China among the Peruvian public is limited.

But with China’s influence growing in the country in recent years, this is slowly starting to change. Beijing has two clear goals in mind with regard to media: on one hand, to promote among local audiences its own version of China and the country’s political system, in an attempt to neutralize what the regime considers to be a biased Western account; and, on the other, to build a friendly image that fosters support for its strategic objectives in Peru and Latin America at large—regardless of whether such objectives are economic, diplomatic, or geopolitical. Ultimately, Beijing’s intention is to legitimize the CCP regime, too.

Beijing’s strategy to shape public opinion and have some sort of sway in the local media is based on a three-pronged approach. The first is closer engagement with Peru’s state-owned media corporations, which has recently borne fruit with the signing of TV cooperation agreements at different levels. The second is for Beijing to rely on its own official media to eventually reach

Peruvian audiences with China's message. And the third, in line with China's people-to-people diplomacy strategy, entails putting resources into personal interactions with journalists and opinion leaders.

Cooperation between State-Owned Media

China's soft power hopes in Peru's media sector made significant inroads during Kuczynski's first official visit to China in September 2016, with the signing of two important deals. First, a memorandum of understanding between China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television and the National Institute of Radio and Television of Peru (IRTP, in Spanish), the public broadcasting television network also known as TV Peru, states that both parties will actively cooperate in news coverage and promote the exchange of documentaries, TV dramas, movies, and animation. "The Chinese part is ready to provide these products to IRTP's Peruvian radio and television," says article 1 of the agreement.

Second, a cooperation agreement between IRTP and China Central Television (CCTV),²⁰ now re-branded as China Global Television Network (CGTN), further emphasizes joint collaboration in four areas: news exchange,²¹ co-production and non-newsworthy content swaps, technological cooperation, and personnel training and mutual visits. In the weeks that followed the agreement, TV Peru's Channel 7 broadcast twelve documentaries about China for six consecutive days during the 21-nation Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Lima.²² All but one were entirely produced by CGTN and were screened during prime time.²³ Wang Yu, director of CGTN in Spanish, later called this milestone airing of several Chinese documentaries "the first great success."

On those same dates, seven of IRTP's radio and television journalists spent a month in China for a "training on sinology," while another crew of Peruvian journalists flew to China to produce a documentary—with all expenses paid for by the state-funded CGTN. Once again, China's financial muscle proved to be key. Although the deals established that the cost of all activities will be "covered by both sides as agreed between them," so far travel costs have been funded almost entirely by China.

In any case, this is the most comprehensive agreement ever signed by the Peruvian broadcasting corporation with a non-Spanish-language or Latin American counterpart. By comparison, TV Peru has broad cooperation deals with other countries, too, but the partner country does not typically cover all costs. "The deal with the Chinese is extremely generous with the Peruvians, apparently because the Chinese believe that Peru does not have the economic conditions to cover the costs of everything that they would like to see broadcast," said a journalist source familiar with the deals.²⁴

China's tradition of interacting with foreign, state-owned peers at all levels reflects the type of relationship that China's state-backed media has with its own state. So does China's idea that journalism should be tailored to meet the needs of the state. With diplomatic relations between Lima and Beijing at their pinnacle, China's state media is seeking to build bridges with Peru's public media partners, which the Chinese media approach as their counterparts. In fact, as early as 2012, *Diario Oficial El Peruano*, the state-owned official newspaper, started to publish China specials with up to three paid publications inserted into the newspaper on any given day. These supplements commemorated the 63rd and 65th anniversaries of the PRC's foundation, and the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru.²⁵

The Chinese-produced content of such paid inserts follows a clear structure and a common narrative. The cover page has an inviting headline that appeals to emotional clichés, such as the “China dream” or the “friendship that connects Machu Picchu with the Great Wall.” This is followed by content about the bilateral institutional relationship, economic opportunities, historical ties, and cultural links—in that order. The narrative emphasizes symbolic wording: civilization, partnership, friendship, and brotherhood are part of a broader, frequently used party-line language. The goal is to highlight a “China that is on the way to being prosperous, democratic, civilized and harmonious.”²⁶ It is the new China that Peruvians do not want to miss out on.

El Peruano and its Chinese partners have also explored the option of having a permanent campaign of paid inserts, similar to the deals that *China Watch* has established with several international newspapers. Despite being a relatively inexpensive campaign,²⁷ the Chinese side apparently dismissed the idea “because of the limitations” of the Peruvian outlet—including a small circulation of 15,000 daily copies, a lack of flexibility due to out-of-date equipment, and the use of low-quality paper. Nevertheless, Editora Perú, the state corporation that owns both *El Peruano* and *Andina*, agreed to print the Spanish edition of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s book *The Governance of China*, which was officially presented in Lima on November 2016.²⁸ During the presentation ceremony, Editora Perú and China’s Foreign Languages Press announced an agreement to increase their relationship further.²⁹

Chinese Media in Peru

In terms of human resources, the presence of Chinese state-media outlets remains low in Peru, but this could change soon. Under the agreement between IRTP and CCTV (now CGTN), IRTP has committed to assist CGTN in eventually setting up a permanent “delegation” in Lima, which would not only encompass a local news bureau, but also provide a base for executives charged with additional duties. Currently, CGTN’s only presence in Peru is an English-speaking freelance correspondent who reports to CGTN’s English-language news service in Washington, D.C.

The Chinese television network’s forum held in Lima in late 2016 had the core purpose of “further promoting the cooperation between Chinese and Latin American media.” The forum’s slogan left no doubts about China’s subtle approach: *The communication that unites us*. Globally, CGTN started Spanish-language broadcasting in 2004 with just four hours of programming a day. However, the Spanish service of the Chinese network now claims to employ 120 people worldwide, have 3.7 million Facebook followers, and is broadcast in Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, and Venezuela.

What is more, the potential Spanish-speaking audience of 400 million is worth its weight in gold to CGTN: “We won’t give up on our efforts to promote CGTN in the whole of Latin America,” says the network’s top executive.³⁰ Presently, its television guide has 15 programs produced in Beijing and Sao Paulo, Brazil, where CGTN has its regional headquarters. All of them touch on common, predictable topics, namely “Chinese culture, China’s economic development and scientific achievements, the process of building a harmonious society, the life of the Chinese people.”

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A revealing example of the kind of joint cooperation that CGTN hopes for in the region is its deal with Telesur, the international television network largely backed by Venezuela. Since 2016, the Chinese channel has produced the program “Prisma Cultural,” which is broadcast by the Venezuelan network. Under the motto “The culture that enlightens us,” its aim is to “show China’s cultural richness” and promote “knowledge of the Chinese culture among the Spanish-speaking countries.”³¹ In Peru, there seems to be little concern about a greater presence of CGTN in the country: “Until now we obtained information from the media of the big powers. We are not against them, but we also wish for other countries’ opinions. And now with just one click, we can be informed of the Chinese version too,” says the former president of the Peruvian Federation of Journalists.

While this trend might be taking root little by little, it is still at an early stage. Not even the Chinese official news agency, Xinhua, with its regional headquarters in Mexico, has a large bureau in Lima. It employs just five reporters, camera operators, and photographers under the supervision of a Chinese manager. Their journalistic work is “quite bureaucratic,” as one source familiar with the outlet described it, and the agency has not been successful in attracting the main Peruvian media outlets to their service. The newspaper *Diario Oficial El Peruano* and the national news agency *Andina*, both state-owned, are the only exceptions.

The only other official Chinese media outlet in the country is *China Hoy (China Today)*,³² whose single representative in Peru also organizes cultural events on behalf of the Chinese embassy. Printed by the state-owned publishing corporation Editora Perú since 2009, this magazine focuses on China–Latin America affairs from a Chinese perspective. Despite a professional appearance that comes from being printed in color on thick, high-quality paper, by journalistic standards its content is nothing more than party-line propaganda that follows the same editorial rationale described above. The materials are produced in Beijing and Mexico, where the regional office is based; the magazine’s only representative in Lima oversees stories related to Peru.

China Hoy has a monthly paid circulation of 3,500 copies, sold at newsstands and supermarkets for PEN10 (US\$3). It is also distributed for free at the publisher’s initiative to the main Peruvian governmental agencies, as well as to foreign embassies in Lima. “Its contents are too erudite for the average Peruvian. So sales are low while costs are high. But they don’t need to be profitable. They are in Peru for political reasons,” says a source.³³ Despite what seems to be a limited reach, *China Hoy* is a good example of the financial resources that China is ready to invest for its soft power purposes. Among these efforts, *China Hoy* has been successful in having op-eds of high-ranking Chinese officials published in the Peruvian press, including *El Comercio*.³⁴

Other than *China Hoy*, there are two China-related magazines that target the Chinese-Peruvian community. *Oriental*, Peru’s oldest magazine, was originally linked to the Kuomintang—China’s ruling nationalist party until 1949, when the Communist takeover drove the nationalists offshore to Taiwan—when it was founded 86 years ago. Over time, the publication’s perspective has shifted to reflect a much more neutral position on Taiwan. It now distributes 8,000 copies of an 84-page, full-color magazine every month.

Integración, founded in 1999 and linked to the Chinese-Peruvian Association, is a 64-page monthly magazine with a circulation of 12,000 copies that are distributed for free, by subscription. Both publications have a clear cultural focus and typically avoid sensitive topics. The Chinese embassy’s role is indirect: “They don’t support us financially, but they send us their

cultural agenda. They forward us the press releases and the graphic arts, and they get upset if it is not published,” says a source in one of these magazines.³⁵

People-to-People Diplomacy

As well as the institutional deals, Beijing is engaging with local journalists at different levels. The Chinese embassy in Lima maintains close personal relationships with several well-known journalists, including editors in chief, television anchors, and opinion leaders. Above all, they are active in inviting journalists on free visits to China. Chinese authorities seem pleased with the results, according to the Chinese embassy’s political advisor in Lima: “Many Peruvian media representatives have visited China recently, which has yielded good results. It can be assured that cooperation among both countries’ media is at its best.”³⁶

Journalists interviewed in Lima agree that the Chinese embassy “invites the Peruvian media all the time,” something that has become “a common practice.” Those trips do not have pre-established agendas. Tours typically last between six days and four weeks and usually include visits to at least two cities. Peruvian reporters sometimes join groups of other Latin American journalists or broader delegations made up of academics, entrepreneurs, students, or executives linked to political parties, think tanks, or foundations. A number of these non-journalist participants—mostly academics—end up publishing China-related articles in Peruvian media, too.

The trips include visits to corporations’ headquarters, free trade or special economic zones, museums, universities, city governments, media corporations like Xinhua, or other institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Discussions pivot around China’s politics and economy, as well as the strengths of the Chinese model, but avoid sensitive topics such as Tiananmen, Tibet, Falun Gong, or the prospects for China’s democratization. The impact these journeys have on journalists is illustrated by the remarks of one Peruvian participant: “I was very interested in knowing China. It was my first visit, and during the trip I had the sense of not really understanding what was going on. But I returned home with a better idea of China than what I previously had. My thought was that Chinese society was oppressed, but I saw a lot of happy people walking on the streets.”³⁷

Obviously, showcasing an idyllic China to journalists who are generally unfamiliar with China’s domestic issues can have a powerful effect. The big question that remains is clear: Do journalists without solid prior knowledge of China, and who are honored with free trips to China—where they are typically immersed in the regime’s one-sided perspective—really have the judgment to fully understand the reality of China? The regular omission of key factors in reporting about China, particularly ignoring the undemocratic nature of its ruling regime, suggests that this strategy is working well—in Beijing’s favor.

Culture

Chinese cultural activities in Peru have become progressively more noticeable in the last few years. While there is no coordinated, unified cultural agenda, different institutions organize their own sets of activities. The most visible and relevant activities are those organized and sponsored by the cultural section of the Chinese embassy, or by any of the four Confucius Institutes established in the country. Beneficencia China occasionally benefits from the embassy’s support, too. Other institutions with less financial muscle, including a handful of Chinese-Peruvian associations, have their own, self-financed cultural events typically scheduled around commemorative dates, the Chinese New Year in particular.



China's cultural efforts in Peru gained momentum in 2016 with several activities across the calendar year under the China–Latin America Year of Cultural Exchange program. These activities included Chinese exhibitions of all types, such as book presentations, conferences, film festivals, and a variety of theatrical, opera, and philharmonic performances.³⁸ The common thread uniting them was that they were planned, organized, supported, or financed by the Chinese state. This means that, even beyond 2016, virtually all Chinese cultural activities in Peru are state-driven, which is a crucial factor to keep in mind.

The bulk of what was presented as Chinese culture on these occasions in reality falls under the umbrella of the state. Non-mainstream artists or groups such as Ai Weiwei or Shen Yun Performing Arts, which are well-known abroad but are regarded by Beijing as dissidents, often face considerable financial burdens or diplomatic pressures when trying to export their art.³⁹ Since China holds, in one way or another, an almost total monopoly over determining what is Chinese culture and what is to be exported to Peru, Peruvian audiences inevitably have access only to that official Chinese culture which is in line with the CCP's standpoint. One example of China's dominant role is the last-minute cancellation in May 2016 of a painting exhibition featuring Falun Gong Chinese artists at a Peruvian university that hosts a Confucius Institute.⁴⁰

More importantly, being in command of the country's culture, as well as being its benefactor, allows Beijing to make self-serving use of China's cultural heritage by employing it to project a friendly image abroad. In addition, it serves as a useful tool for persuading Peru that both countries share a common past and a promising future. This explains why China's cultural activities and the marketing around them are so often infused with a subtle, deliberate political message.

The best example of such tactics was the closing event of the Year of Cultural Exchange, an exhibition of 120 Chinese relics at the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology, and History of Peru, attended by presidents Xi and Kuczynski. Through a succession of impressive, 50-meter-long charts and exhibits, the "Two Cultures United by the Same Ocean" exhibition looked at the history and culture of China and Latin America, drawing similarities between ancient civilizations on either side of the Pacific.⁴¹

Although it is not always clearly recognizable, this sort of official narrative is repeated time and again. It leverages rhetoric of a true and solid friendship, of historical ties that go as far back as the era before Spanish colonization, of the brotherhood between two countries with civilizations that extend thousands of years. “Despite being separated by an immense ocean, friendship between China and Peru goes back to the old times. The two countries opened a sea route in the Pacific 400 years ago through which they began their friendly exchanges and forged a deep friendship,” wrote Luo Shugang, the Chinese minister of culture.⁴² Such references to a maritime Silk Route across the Pacific Ocean lead scholars to believe that they allude to the transpacific trade route of the so-called Manila galleon, which was in fact opened by the Spaniards more than 450 years ago.⁴³

There are plenty of other examples. Speaking at a conference in Lima’s House of Chinese-Peruvian Friendship in 2016, China’s former ambassador to Peru, Zhao Wuyi, referred to the noticeable “feeling that the Chinese and the indigenous people of America have a common origin,” given their many similarities “including in DNA.” He also suggested that, according to Chinese legends, the Chinese visited America before Columbus. While admitting that there is “insufficient evidence” to prove all such assertions, he jumped to the conclusion that the people of both countries “experience a natural cultural proximity.”⁴⁴ It is subtle, but the message is clear.

Scholars believe that, from a historical perspective, this is an audacious approach at best. “It is such an artificial and false narrative that it is really amazing that there are no more voices being raised to say that this is not accurate,” says one scholar who was interviewed by the author. Yet China repeatedly uses this soft-manipulation of history for its own benefit. Behind the subtlety lies a powerful message: of historical and cultural proximity, of belonging to ancient civilizations that originated long before Western colonization, of being alike and, consequently, distinct from the others. With this, Beijing expects to bring the two countries and their peoples closer together—politically, economically, and culturally.

All of this is important in view of the asymmetric economic relationship between the two countries. If Peruvians become convinced that they share a common history and culture with the Chinese, and if it is accurate that they are both the beneficiaries of equal, ancestral civilizations, then identifying with China is less problematic. Some critics contend that, like Beijing’s anti-colonialist discourse in Africa, this insinuating historical revisionism has the purpose of discrediting other global economic powers—namely the Japanese and Westerners.

In this same fashion, seminars and roundtables about Confucianism that have lately joined the Chinese cultural offerings in Lima follow the same tune.⁴⁵ “One good way of neutralizing the debate of asymmetry in the bilateral relationship is to take it to a cultural and spiritual level,” says scholar Lausent-Herrera. Directly or indirectly, Chinese and Peruvian officials, academics, diplomats, and others repeat this kind of assumption over and over in public appearances. In particular, cliques of Peruvian personalities who have various connections with China have become China’s de facto cultural ambassadors.

They are a prominent elite: ex-diplomats and former high-ranking government officials, including ex-presidents; sinologists, writers, and journalists with long careers related to China; and historians, academics, and China experts, a great many of them proud members of the Tusan community. They all have in common that they avoid sensitive topics and are never publicly

critical of Beijing. They stick to the party-line narrative either by spreading it or by remaining silent. With their support, China's narrative in Peru has become normalized. If no one rebuffs the manipulation, it slowly becomes more widely accepted as fact.

On top of an initial contribution of US\$100,000, Hanban, the Confucius Institute headquarters, provides additional yearly funds to pay for the Chinese faculty's costs, academic materials, and local cultural agenda.

Academia

China's involvement with Peruvian academia has gone from almost irrelevant to significant in less than a decade. Although there were earlier sporadic contacts between Chinese and Peruvian universities, the opening in 2009 of the first Confucius Institute in Lima was a turning point. The institute planted its flag at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP, in Spanish), which has about 25,000 students and is recognized as the number one university in the country. Like all other Confucius Institutes, it offers a mix of Chinese language courses together with a cultural program, both of which are open to the university's students and the general public.

At the time the institute opened, it was uncertain what the demand for learning Chinese really was. But it has grown steadily since then, with the number of enrolled students jumping from just 29 in the first trimester of 2009 to more than 400 per trimester in 2016.⁴⁶ Having more than 1,600 annual registered students has already allowed PUCP's institute to break even, making it one of the few profitable Confucius Institutes worldwide.

On top of an initial contribution of US\$100,000, Hanban, the Confucius Institute headquarters, provides additional yearly funds to pay for the Chinese faculty's costs, academic materials, and local cultural agenda. The university's main contribution is hosting the institute in a university building located next to the campus.

This arrangement has obvious advantages for the institute, particularly in being close to its target audience and being able to use the university's facilities for its cultural activities. However, attendance at the institute's events has generally been poor, despite Hanban's calls for having as much impact as possible. At times, proximity to the university has proven to be a source of friction, too. On the institute's fifth anniversary, a six-foot bronze statue of Confucius—donated by the Chinese partner of the institute, the Shanghai International Studies University—was unveiled in a prime location on the PUCP campus. The issue caused a considerable stir in university circles, not only because of the symbolism around it, but also because it was believed that the Confucius Institute had overstepped its bounds by erecting the statue in a location that made it appear as if it were an initiative of the university.

Two other Confucius Institutes followed in Arequipa and Piura, two medium-sized provincial cities, before a second institute opened in Lima in 2010 in partnership with Ricardo Palma University. All four institutes face a number of similar human resources issues. Only a small percentage of the native Chinese teachers speak fluent Spanish, which is crucial for interacting with beginner students. The quality of teaching becomes a more serious challenge given local teachers' "lack of linguistic, methodological, and Chinese cultural knowledge" and volunteers who "do not have enough academic training, experience, and Chinese teaching competence." This is causing students to drop out "due to lack of motivation, comprehension, and learning difficulties."⁴⁷

The Ricardo Palma University's Confucius Institute, which also actively pushes a cultural agenda, enjoys an on-campus location in a university that offers translation studies, with

Chinese as a specialization. Enrollment at the Ricardo Palma University's institute remains unknown,⁴⁸ but the institute vehemently opposed the opening of a fifth Confucius Institute in Peru, the third in Lima, which was planned for the end of 2016. "There is just not enough demand for three institutes in Lima," argued one Confucius Institute employee in private. The opening, planned in partnership with the National University of San Marcos, was called off at the last minute. But it showed the authority and determination of the Chinese embassy's cultural attaché to push such an initiative forward even if there was no academic rationale to do so.

In addition, the Ricardo Palma University's Confucius Institute, whose Chinese partner is Hebei Normal University, has so far published two books jointly with the university's publishing house.⁴⁹ Such published academic research increases the Confucius Institute's ability to send its message and have an influence through soft power. None of the contributors to the research projects, which include a handful of academics and historians, has a record of being publicly critical of China's government.



With the Confucius Institutes at the top, other institutions across the Peruvian education system are connected—at different levels—to China. In pre-university education, two Lima schools with a historical Chinese tradition offer Mandarin as a regular course.⁵⁰ Five other schools have Mandarin as an optional language, while another five centers also offer Chinese courses. At the same time, a growing number of private and public Peruvian universities are trying hard to establish links with Chinese institutions, but such attempts have not gone beyond the occasional exchange of scholars.

Geographic distance, mutual unfamiliarity, high costs, and, above all, language issues, work against taking cooperation to the next step. For example, a visiting Chinese scholar from a Beijing university taught a few years ago at PUCP for one semester. Following this experience, both universities signed an academic cooperation agreement with the expectation that it would promote joint research projects, as well as the exchange of scholars and students. However, there has been virtually no progress since then.

Not having more interaction with Chinese academia is something that some scholars in Peru deplore. “The world in general, and social sciences in particular, are too Western-focused—and on the United States in particular. In [the] social sciences, it is really like a virus. Now the young professors are all in the U.S. Having a China-trained teacher with us would be just great,” says one academic interviewed by this author.

Scholars in most Peruvian universities are extremely eager to engage further with their Chinese peers. Some are invited to China regularly and publish articles that are uncritical of China in the Peruvian press. It is undeniable that China is an academic topic in high demand, and increased ties between the countries make it important to study. However, it is also evident that cooperating with Chinese universities is potentially good for the scholars’ careers. In this context, the danger of academic ethics being downplayed is real. “Some of the academics do not ask themselves how this engagement might impact the students,” warns a Lima-based university fellow, particularly in an environment in which “the Chinese message is well received because the general cultural knowledge among students is generally low, and they do not usually question anything.”

Lima’s Universidad del Pacífico has probably gone furthest toward establishing permanent cooperation with China. In 2013, it founded the Center for Peru–China Studies with the goal of conducting joint research projects, promoting academic exchanges, spreading knowledge through events, and consolidating contact networks with Chinese institutions. Despite financial and human resource constraints, the center has been relatively successful in establishing connections with Chinese counterparts. Along with attending several trips to China to visit institutions and participate in events, the center is also active in hosting workshops, conferences, and other events in Lima. Given the number and profile of its Chinese peers, the center appears to be on the right track.⁵¹ Over time, the idea is to eventually conduct joint projects in the future.

The SinoLATAM Forum—founded in 2012 by a Chinese-Peruvian businessman to promote development, integration, and exchange between China and Peru—has also put together a few events. Its debut in 2013 was a conference with a revealing theme: “The ‘Chinese Dream’ and the Decade of Xi Jinping.”⁵² In 2016, it organized the “First Dialogue of Chinese and Latin American Think Tanks,” which was hosted by PUCP. A number of recognizable, regional think tanks were present, as well as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Institute of Latin American Studies, which allegedly paid a portion of the costs of the event.

The event was a good example of how the dynamics in these meetings work: The Chinese co-organizers changed the dates and attendee lists several times, there was no contact or work preparation among scholars ahead of the event, attendees offered nothing more than generic presentations, a few in the Chinese delegation did not speak Spanish or English, and there was no solid agenda. Hence, the meeting was not very substantive.⁵³

Analysis

With both advancement and shortcomings, China’s soft power efforts in Peru seem to be paying off as a variety of factors converge. To start with, Chinese money is a powerful force of attraction in the midst of economic uncertainty. The West’s perceived retreat from the region, as well as its past and recent contradictions, have weakened its moral legitimacy. To a large extent, Peruvian society appears to value only China’s economic success and does not question the downsides of its model or seem to be concerned by the potential negative effects of

a Chinese-driven globalization process. In other words, the so-called Chinese Dream is gaining momentum. Key to understanding why this is happening is the fact that Peruvian society is not fully aware of the oppressive realities of the Chinese regime.

This powerful mix, together with the vulnerabilities of a still-young democracy and unequal society, is fertile ground for Beijing's strategies. One way to measure this is to analyze the local media, where China is generally portrayed in a positive light. This sweet-tempered image rests on the combination of two factors: the persistent emphasis on China's economic prominence, and the regular omission of the more negative aspects of the Chinese system—namely the undemocratic nature of its political regime and its poor human rights record. Consequently, the image of China and its regime among the Peruvian public is clearly distorted.

A close-up look at the Peruvian media landscape helps to explain why this is happening. Not all media outlets are advocates of liberalism, but they all generally support economic stability. From this perspective, anything that obstructs foreign investment is frowned upon. Public opinion's common judgement is that the system should make it easy for companies in order to keep the economy rolling. This trend has consolidated in recent years, at a time when the narrative that China is crucial for Peru's economic future is becoming more widespread, while the West is somehow inevitably declining. This explains why there is hardly any disapproval of China apparent in the media.

As media outlets do not have correspondents permanently based in China, foreign desks must rely on the news wires. This lack of awareness is well suited to China's narrative.

Similarly, there is not much critical discussion connected to the environmental, labor, or social controversies and violence that periodically shake China's operations in the extractive industries in Peru.⁵⁴ The media tend to address these episodes from the perspective that the country badly needs investment. "Censorship is not obvious but it comes in other forms. Even if a Chinese scandal gets published, it is downplayed in less than 100 words buried inside the newspaper and never reaches the front page. This is crucial because any issue properly published by *El Comercio* is likely to set the agenda," says an investigative journalist in Lima.⁵⁵

China's potential role in Peru's economy overshadows every other issue. But the lack of interest in these topics and the notion that foreign investors have to be left alone are not the only factors behind the media's failure to report the full picture on China or to better play its watchdog role by scrutinizing China's investments in the country. Just as in the Western press, the media's economic sustainability crisis is also a critical factor. Not only are financial resources for high-quality journalism lacking, but the shortage of journalists who specialize in China is also acute. As media outlets do not have correspondents permanently based in China, foreign desks must rely on the news wires. This lack of awareness is well suited to China's narrative. The subtle anti-colonialist discourse, the hidden disapproval of Western values, and the alleged virtues and harmony of Confucianism that China promotes generally find a warm welcome in Peruvian society, too.

In addition, Beijing's people-to-people diplomacy strategy turns out to be tremendously effective, especially its free trips to China for journalists, politicians, students, and others. Many participants had no previous contact with China, and therefore lack the capacity for critical reflection about the country. More worrying is the fact that, once they are back, they highlight China's upsides while downplaying the negative aspects. And if they do acknowledge the downsides, the

common reaction is very often to evaluate China's inequalities, unfairness, or despotism as being on the same level as Peru's corruption, social disparity, and democratic drawbacks.

It is thus no surprise that Beijing is commonly portrayed as a success story as well as an imminent world power—all wrapped up with astonishing bilateral economic figures and references to both countries' historical ties and current friendship. This win-win rhetoric, which—consciously or not—resembles the CCP propaganda, has built up in recent years, peaking in 2016 during both presidents' reciprocal official visits. It also surged during the 2016 APEC summit in Lima, in which Xi was awarded the Grand-Cross Medal of Honor of the Peruvian Congress. His speech, and an accompanying full-page op-ed in *El Comercio*, emanated a somewhat patronizing air: from appealing trade and investment statistics to invitations to “fulfill together the dream of development.”⁵⁶

For most opinion leaders in Peru, Xi is now “the most influential leader,” while China is “the champion of [economic] openness and free trade, as opposed to the United States.”⁵⁷ A friendly image of China is emphasized continuously in the media, and it is now common to come across articles that imply “the agony of democracy” and the decline of the United States.⁵⁸

Only a few exceptions to this trend can be noted. One is Peru's national coordinator for human rights, who publicly expressed concern in a communiqué about the Peruvian Congress' award to Xi, “the highest authority of one of the most questioned countries in the world for serious and systematic violations of human rights.”⁵⁹ Another is a relatively small political coalition, Frente Amplio, one of the very few political organizations that have rejected invitations to visit China, condemned Xi's award, and questioned Kuczynski for “negotiating with a dictatorship.”

One of its congressmen warns about “the risk of Chinese neo-colonialism” and the “subjugation of Peru's economy, politics, and culture” to China. He also raised concerns over the nature of China's political regime, which prompted the Chinese ambassador to pay him a visit. The congressman described the meeting as “excessive by protocol,” which goes well beyond the usual rhetoric of friendship: The ambassador “told me not to interfere in China's internal affairs, in the same way that they do not interfere in ours; he added that China is in Peru to invest at a difficult time for the Peruvian economy, and that we are not properly assessing the importance of China's investments.”⁶⁰

However, even if Beijing is indeed achieving some success in its goal of polishing its image and, as a result, is gaining international legitimacy, it has encountered setbacks on other fronts. For example, Xinhua news agency failed in its efforts to market its services to the main Peruvian media outlets, even after offering them for free.⁶¹ Succeeding in doing so would not only give Xinhua a status similar to that of the most reputed international news agencies, but would also allow the Chinese regime to disseminate its own version of events among Peruvian audiences. Behind such failure rests the lack of credibility of an autocracy's official media. “Most Peruvian media outlets feel uneasy working with foreign state-owned news agencies,” says a journalist source.

In fact, all of the Chinese state media based in Peru—Xinhua, CGTN, and *China Hoy*—only cooperate with Peru's state media through formal, institutional agreements. This Chinese tradition of engaging only with peers has downsides, namely less exposure and visibility. This is because

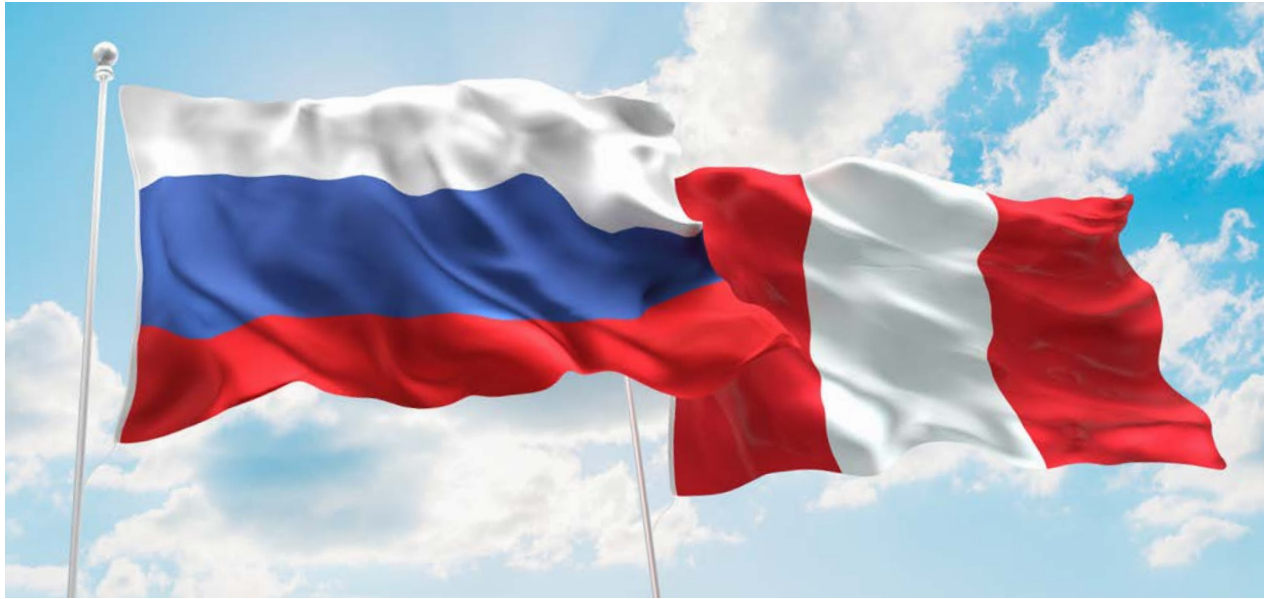
China's media partners in Peru—TV Peru, the national news agency Andina, and *El Peruano* newspaper—have relatively modest influence and small audiences compared to their competitors. This is particularly the case of *El Peruano*, where three issues of a paid China special have been published in recent years with limited impact.⁶²

In the cultural sphere, despite the Chinese government's undeniable efforts to upgrade its cultural agenda and have a greater impact locally, the Chinese are underperforming when it comes to marketing their activities in society. The program for the 130th anniversary of Beneficencia China was a clear example. China brought in the 60-member Zhujiang Symphony Orchestra, more than 200 Chinese artists performed in a street flashmob with dragons and lions all around Lima's Chinatown, and a few other activities were organized, including exhibitions and debates. However, the program was hardly acknowledged outside the Chinese community. Similarly, Xi's book presentation, the donation of 1,000 copies to the National Library, and the three forums held in Lima on media, think tanks, and Confucianism—all meant to target the Peruvian elites—had little significant impact in terms of awareness.

“They need to learn to be more effective in outward communication. Right now, they do not have the expertise in managing this kind of activities, probably [because] they do not handle the local language very well, and they do not have the right people to promote what they do. That is why their impact was much lower than it could have been,” says a source familiar with the association's everyday operations.

If opening up cultural activities to society has been challenging, focusing them inward has exerted a centrifugal force in and around the Chinese community. The main information and communication channel is, in fact, the Chinese social network platform WeChat, through which Chinese residents—including the embassy's cultural attaché, as well as scholars, students, journalists, politicians, and other Peruvian elites interested in China—are in contact. That being said, China's presence, importance, and influence in Peru have grown significantly in the last few years. In particular, 2016 saw a considerable amount of soft power activity, in part because of Beijing's efforts at the regional level, including the Year of Cultural Exchange, as well as different cooperation and exchange programs.

The coming years seem promising, too. China and Peru signed in September 2016 a memorandum of understanding that sets the legal framework for establishing reciprocal cultural centers in each country. Although there has been no further news at the time of writing this report, it might be a focal point to watch. The year 2021 is also marked in red, when several high-profile celebrations will converge: the 50th anniversary of Chinese-Peruvian diplomatic relations, the bicentenary of Peru's independence, and the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding.



RUSSIA

The strategic partnership signed in November 2015 by former Peruvian president Ollanta Humala and Russian President Vladimir Putin came as a surprise to almost everyone in Peru. Not only had ties between the two countries never been that close, but the Russian government was facing international sanctions related to its involvement in Ukraine at the time, and Lima had supported the Western position on a U.N. vote over Russia's annexation of Crimea one year earlier. Yet despite the international context, the two countries' upgraded alliance did not raise any criticism in Peru's mainstream, typically pro-Western media.

Russian investments in Peru are incidental, while bilateral trade remains at a low level: US\$415 million in 2015, most of it related to Peruvian purchases of Russian military equipment, according to official estimates.⁶³ In 2016, however, Putin and the newly elected Peruvian president, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, publicly agreed to triple bilateral trade to US\$1 billion in the coming years.

In addition, some observers see in the new partnership a strategic turn by Russia toward Latin America to avoid international marginalization and forge new alliances. This would represent a significant alteration of Moscow's traditional strategy of engaging principally with left-wing governments in the region, such as Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, or Ecuador, that also have a history of antagonism with the United States and the West.

It could be too that Moscow is putting in place some sort of reciprocal policy in Peru and the region to mirror what the Kremlin considers to be meddling by the West in its own backyard. "It probably responds to that same logic. They know that they do not have much influence in Peru, but symbolically they are present here," says a Lima-based academic. From this perspective, Russia's soft power activities, albeit unpretentious and unexceptional, are consistent.⁶⁴ Russia's most important public diplomacy narrative supports what it calls "the Russian world"—millions of people abroad who are in touch with Russia, its language, and its culture. In Peru, a few hundred resident Russian citizens and some 10,000 Peruvians who graduated from the universities in the Soviet Union and Russia comprise this imagined "Russian world."

While there has been no relevant criticism of Russia in the Peruvian media, not even during and after the Crimea crisis, Putin's image is shockingly good in Peru. Observers in Lima assert that there is a tendency among many people in Peru to appreciate leaders who rule with an iron fist, and they see Putin in this fashion. In particular, he has significant backing among the Peruvian students who have studied in Russia. "Many people stand up for him. You can see the support he has when you go over the readers' comments on the Internet news. There are a lot of positive comments about him. You can tell that they are Peruvians, not Russians, because of the language they use, with a lot of slang. People of different social backgrounds tell you: Putin is the best president in the world," says one of these students.

Media

Russia's efforts on the media front are less prominent than those of China. Russia has fewer commercial interests in Peru and fewer soft power financial resources, but it still pays attention to the media on a smaller scale. Having a voice in the Peruvian media appears to be important to Russia, given that its state media have been relatively active in cooperating with the Peruvian written press. During the period 2015-16, a Russian state-sponsored supplement, *Russia Beyond the Headlines (RBTH)*, more recently rebranded online as *Russia Beyond*, was inserted in *El Peruano* newspaper on 11 occasions.⁶⁵ In addition, according to *Russia Beyond* website, the Peruvian edition of the Spanish daily *El País* also distributed the Russian publication at least twice in 2015.⁶⁶

The main features of the eight-page *RBTH* inserts were a blunt topic selection and a direct narrative. The contents were mostly produced in Russia and reflected a mix of familiar issues, such as international and geopolitical affairs relevant for Moscow; key historical episodes and dates, including World War II anniversaries; Russia's military, space, and technological cooperation with Peru; and the merits of Russia's best tourist destinations. Despite *RBTH's* investments and marketing efforts since its foundation a decade ago, the print version was reportedly discontinued in early 2017, a sign that it probably was not delivering the projected utility.⁶⁷

Topics covered in *RBTH* were consistent with those published by *Rusia a Toda Marcha (Russia in Full Swing)* magazine, perhaps with a more international and geopolitical angle. This full-color, 34-page magazine, which is not available for sale, is entirely produced by the Russian embassy in Lima, where the delegation's press officer happens to be the magazine's editor in chief. The magazine does not appear to have any additional staff. It is published once a year, and its distribution is limited: in Lima's Russian Center of Science and Culture, at Russian-organized events, to a number of Peruvian government agencies, and to several foreign embassies in the Peruvian capital.

At the time of writing this report, Peru and Russia were also discussing a memorandum of understanding for television collaboration at all levels. Russia's Ministry of Telecom and Mass Communications is behind this initiative to exchange information, as well as to promote television, radio, and cinema productions. The draft also aims to support the activities of the accredited media representatives of both countries.

In the television sector, RT—a network funded by the Russian government and formerly known as Russia Today—provides free content materials to TV Peru's Channel 7, but it is up to the Peruvian network to decide if it wants to broadcast it, says a Russian diplomatic source in Peru.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, according to its website, RT en Español is broadcast on almost

100 small, local cable TV networks around the country.⁶⁹ The network's Spanish service claims to have more than two million followers on Twitter, and its Spanish-language website reports 24 million page visits every month. If reliable, these figures suggest RT has a larger audience on the Internet than other international TV networks with a Spanish service.⁷⁰

Culture

In contrast to Russia's almost incidental business presence in Peru, Russian culture is clearly more active and relatively more visible. The Lima-based Russian Center of Science and Culture is the official institution behind the promotion of Russian culture, and it receives funding from the Russian government through Rossotrudnichetvo.⁷¹ According to the Russian Embassy's website, the center aims to "contribute to creating in Peru an objective image of the Russian Federation as a new democratic state," as well as supporting "the historical and cultural knowledge" of Russia in the country. To do so, the center regularly hosts a variety of activities throughout the year: from academically oriented activities such as debates, conferences, symposiums, and seminars about current events with a Russian interest, to artistic and cultural activities such as folk concerts, Russian movies, and photo, painting, and sculpture exhibitions.

Patriotism is a recurring magnet in these activities. Throughout 2015, a number of events were organized to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Russia's victory in the World War II. Among the events were a photo exhibition hosted by the Ricardo Palma University; the presentation of the documentary "They Defeated Fascism," which included a debate that highlighted the Soviet Union's "liberation of its people and all of the world from fascism;"⁷² and two Russian and Soviet film festivals that screened ten and six movies, respectively. May 9th, Victory Day, is also an annual opportunity for Russian compatriots to get together around the center's folkloric activities. The event typically touches on the patriotic pride of those who consider themselves the bearers of Russian culture, language, and values.

However, outside the Russian-born and Russian-speaking communities, the center's ability to reach the rest of Peruvian society is limited.⁷³ The main reason is the lack of human resources and funding to manage big cultural events and advertise them widely. But an alternative way for Moscow to spread its first-class culture in Peru without having to assume huge financial burdens is to let the market do its part. Culture is a strong Russian asset, given that prestigious Russian artistic companies have excelled in all genres for decades. Top-quality traditional Russian cultural shows, including ballet, dance, circus, and music, are praised as unique globally and are equally appreciated in Peru. Consequently, people are ready to pay for it. This makes a big difference.

Even if the shows are able to turn a profit through ticket sales, these are very expensive performances. Flying dozens of artists and their materials all the way from Russia is costly, and so is touring around Peru for several weeks. In addition, world-class artists and prestigious companies typically charge pricey fees and royalties. In this regard, Moscow makes a small but decisive contribution by offering soft financial conditions to Peruvian partners who manage the shows. "These are not commercial terms but soft conditions. The Russians make things much easier than others. For instance, sending us the artists without asking for large down payments is key. An American company wouldn't release their artists without paying US\$100,000 in advance," says one source involved in the cultural management business in Peru.⁷⁴

Doing so is a smart way of promoting Russia's renowned already successful culture: "They don't give away their shows but thanks to these terms they make them accessible," adds the aforementioned source. It is therefore no surprise that the Russian cultural agenda in Peru, which includes top companies such as the Russian National Ballet, Great Moscow State Circus, and the Berioska National Ballet of Russia, grows more attractive year after year. In Lima alone, more than 200,000 and 25,000 spectators have attended the Russian circus and ballet shows respectively during the last six years.⁷⁵



Academia

Russia and Peru have a long tradition of academic cooperation that goes back to the Soviet Union era. During the sixties, seventies, and eighties, thousands of Peruvians studied in the Soviet Union thanks to scholarships granted by the Communist government. Ideology was a strong driver. "They became mostly engineers and doctors, and returned back home as heroes," says one of those Peruvian students who graduated in Russia. However, academic cooperation programs almost came to a complete stop following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and only resumed a decade and a half ago.

Current figures detailing the number of scholarships offered by Moscow, or the total number of Peruvians studying in Russia, are fragmented and mostly inconsistent. During the 2014-15 academic year, the Russian embassy in Lima officially offered 30 scholarships. Other sources estimate that about 50 Peruvians study every year in Russia, the majority of them on scholarships. There is a common belief among those who studied in Russia that the conditions to study there are financially much better than in Peru, even for those who pay their own way. "The difference is huge. With the monthly tuition fee of a Peruvian private university, you can pay for the whole year in Russia," one student says.

It is estimated that there are currently some 10,000 Peruvians who have graduated from Russian universities, about half of them after the Soviet Union era. Many make a living as university teachers and continue to maintain links to Russian academic circles. They have been invited on short-term trips to Russia in which they join courses in their fields—normally engineering and sciences—and meet with fellow academics.

Moscow is in fact investing more resources in this type of people-to-people engagement. Rossotrudnichestvo, the government agency in charge of promoting Russia's soft power, launched a similar program in 2011 with the purpose of "expanding the number of young foreigners with a positive view of Russia." Under this "New Generation" program, young leaders largely from Asia and Latin America and aged between twenty and forty, are invited to visit Russia. A total of 2,350 people from 80 countries visited the country under this program in the period from 2011–2014, according to Russian media.⁷⁶ Now Moscow wants to increase that figure to 1,000 guests per year.

In late 2016 a group of forty young Latin American professionals participated on a six-day trip to Russia that had a mixed academic, cultural, and economic agenda. They had the opportunity to discuss perspectives on economic and technological collaboration with Russian colleagues. During the trip, one Russian official explained that it is important for Latin Americans to know Russia's reality first-hand, in order to oppose "the false and stereotyped image that has been spread [about Russia] in most Latin American countries."⁷⁷ The account of one of the Latin American attendees explains the kind of impact that these trips can have: "I kept thinking about how misleading the message is that we Latin Americans receive on a daily basis through the media; most likely, Russia's image in Latin America is wrong."⁷⁸

Cooperation between academic institutions in both countries has also resumed. A joint project between Lima's National Engineering University (UNI, in Spanish) and Kursk's South-West University resulted in the development and launching of Chasqui-1, the first Peruvian-made satellite. Since the Peruvians had virtually finished the design and building of the satellite at the time the agreement was signed, Russia's involvement in the project involved only the certification and launching of the device in 2014. In effect, Russia's role was to finance the launching because the Peruvian university "did not have the money for it," says a university researcher.⁷⁹

However, this scientific collaboration had a significant impact in terms of image. The project was one of Peru's most relevant scientific projects in recent history and became a source of national pride. Hence, the Russians highlight it as an example of fruitful bilateral cooperation. Since the launch, six Russian cosmonauts have visited Peru, given lectures in universities, and been interviewed in the local press. During the lectures, the scientist that put Chasqui-1 into orbit appeared in his blue uniform, with the Russian flag on his left arm. "Hopefully in the future there will be a Peruvian astronaut in space who will be able to speak Quechua from there," he said to warm applause from the audience. Even before these visits, Russian cosmonauts communicated several times from the International Space Station with UNI's researchers in Peru, which received substantial media attention.

Analysis

Russia's soft power efforts in Peru are modest, but relatively significant when compared with its small presence in the country in terms of investments and trade, as well as migration. Moscow's investment in soft power resources may be explained through a combination of geopolitical and economic reasons. These efforts are probably not unconnected to Moscow's desire to meddle in the United States' sphere of influence in response to what Russia perceives as Western interference in Eastern Europe. Likewise, Moscow's need to forge international alliances after its confrontation with the West over Ukraine, which resulted in sanctions against Russia, is another probable driver of these efforts. This is evidenced by the Russian ambassador's success in

placing a number of op-eds and interviews in *El Comercio*, thereby spreading Moscow's version of the Crimea crisis through Peru's most influential newspaper.

In addition, increasing the bilateral business relationship, particularly military trade, is a clear economic incentive. Furthermore, projecting soft power in all regions of the world is probably a matter of national pride, and a useful tool for shoring up support for the ruling regime at home. This is not unrelated to the Russian embassy's efforts to maintain close relations with the two associations that unite both the tiny Russian community in Peru and the Peruvians who studied in Russia. Moscow, in fact, urged embassies across Latin America to encourage associations of graduates of Russian schools "to meet periodically, create solid networks, and stay united," says a member of the Peruvian association. This policy was recommended just after events that led to Russia's annexation of Crimea. The idea behind these associations is to keep links with Russia alive. To do so, these associations have a small agenda of activities throughout the year that involve the embassy or the Russian Center of Science and Culture.

In addition to geopolitical and domestic intentions, Moscow's will to maintain and increase its presence in Peru is also linked to the more subtle aim of improving its national image—as opposed to being irrelevant in this country and in the region. In this sense, Russia seems eager to reach Peruvian audiences (particularly those who have links to Russia) with its own message with the purpose of gaining sympathy for its expansionist foreign policy. To do this, Moscow has made establishing a presence in Peru's state-run media a priority to underpin its soft power strategy.

The views expressed in this paper represent the opinions and analysis of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

NOTES

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge Carmen Grau Vila, a Lima-based journalist specialized in East Asia and Latin America, for providing local research support to conduct fieldwork in Peru.

² China classifies its relations with other countries through a variety of partnerships. The characteristics of each type of alliance reflect how strategic any given country is for China. As a whole, this classification is designed to protect China's core interests and create a better environment for China's rise. Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, *China's strategic partnership diplomacy: engaging with a changing world* (European Strategic Partnership Observatory, June 2014).

³ Many analysts around the world argue that awarding China with market economy status implies surrendering the most effective tool that might be leveraged in a World Trade Organization investigation to guard against unfair competition by China. These voices contend that a number of countries have granted this status to Beijing more for political rather than objective economic reasons. Critics warn that China's overall dumping in global markets could eventually cause industries to decline, companies to shut down, and mass unemployment in other parts of the world. See for example: Barbara Barone, "One year to go: The debate over China's market economy status

(MES) heats up," European Parliament Think Tank, 17 December 2015, [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/570453/EXPO_IDA\(2015\)570453_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/570453/EXPO_IDA(2015)570453_EN.pdf).

⁴ According to the Peruvian Institute of Economy, the mining sector represents 11 percent of Peru's GDP, 50 percent of the country's foreign currencies, and 20 percent of the nation's tax revenue. Juan Vargas Sánchez, "¿Por qué es tan importante la minería para el Perú?" *El Comercio*, 15 June 2015. <http://elcomercio.pe/economia/peru/importante-mineria-peru-192754>.

In addition, China is the biggest foreign investor in Peru's mining industry, with an estimated 36 percent of the total portfolio of mining projects. Minerals including copper, iron ore, and gold represent 60 percent of Peru's exports and 25 percent of foreign direct investment in Peru, Cynthia Sanborn and Victoria Chonn, "La Inversión China en la Industria Minera Peruana: ¿Bendición o Maldición?" ch. 5 of *China en América Latina. Lecciones para la Cooperación Sur-Sur y el desarrollo sostenible* (Lima, Universidad del Pacífico, Boston University, 2016): 217–69.

⁵ "China y Perú celebran 45 años de relaciones diplomáticas," Xinhua, 3 November 2016, <http://spanish.peopledaily.com.cn/n3/2016/1103/c31621-9136743.html>.

- ⁶ Editor's note: Although the overview essay to this report uses the term "sharp power" to characterize the more malign and manipulative aspects of authoritarian influence, the authors of the individual country reports instead generally use the broader term "soft power." In the country studies, the authors were asked to inventory and analyze the methods of authoritarian influence applied by China and Russia in democratic settings. The concept of "sharp power" introduced in the overview essay is an outgrowth of their comparative findings.
- ⁷ In Peru the term *tusan* commonly refers to people of Chinese ancestry born in Peru. *Tusan* refers to the town of Taishan, in Guangdong province, where Chinese migration to Peru and Latin America originated. See Isabelle Lausent-Herrera, "Tusans (tusheng) and the Changing Chinese Community in Peru," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 5 (2009): 115-52.
- ⁸ While there are no official statistics tracking the percentage of Peru's population that self-identifies as *Tusan*, Peruvian linguist Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez says in his book *Diásporas Chinas a las Américas* that 10 percent of Peru's population of 31 million are Chinese and Chinese descendants. In their study *Dinámicas de las asociaciones chinas en Perú: hacia una caracterización y tipología*, Carla Tamagno and Norma Velásquez refer to Peruvian writer and historian Fernando de Trazegnies' work, which estimated the number of Chinese-Peruvians living in Peru at 3 million in 1986. Scholars interviewed by the author in Lima commonly refer to the 8 percent figure. However, others like Isabelle Lausent-Herrera, believe this figure is not supported by evidence. This scholar also underscores that not all Peruvians of Chinese origin consider themselves *Tusan*, while many of those who do, are attracted by China's economic success.
- ⁹ Isabelle Lausent-Herrera, "New Immigrants: a New Community? The Chinese community in Peru in complete transformation," in *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora* (November 2012).
- ¹⁰ James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese*, Chinese overseas series, xiv (Brill, May 2014).
- ¹¹ James To, "Beijing's Policies for Managing Han and Ethnic-Minority Chinese Communities Abroad," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 41(2012): 183-221.
- ¹² To, "Beijing's Policies."
- ¹³ The official name of the Beneficencia China is Sociedad Central de Beneficencia China Ton Huy Chong Koc. On the other hand, the Association of Chinese Companies in Peru was founded in 2011 and currently has 61 members, according to its website. Most are big, state-owned mining, fishing, construction, oil, telecommunications, or shipping companies that have close ties to the Chinese embassy. Although it is business-oriented, the Association of Chinese Companies participates in some social and cultural activities jointly with the Beneficencia China and other Chinese-Peruvian associations, or when requested by the Chinese embassy.
- ¹⁴ Members of the Chinese associations in Peru often use the Mandarin term *Huayi* to refer to Chinese citizens as well as to the first generation of *Tusan*. While the term *Tusan*, which means "born in this land," has a Peruvian singularity of its own, using the term *Huayi* in the Peruvian context to refer to the *Tusan* is a subtle way of cultivating a closer sense of affiliation to the PRC.
- ¹⁵ Lausent-Herrera, "Tusans (tusheng)."
- ¹⁶ According to the report *Situación y Tendencias de la Cooperación Internacional en el Perú: 2011-2014*, China provided more than US\$3.2 million in aid for the construction of a center to "strengthen friendship" and "spread cultural values of both countries." According to a source in Lima interviewed by the author, the local municipality in Lima donated the land for free, while China contributed money, equipment, and human resources to build the facility.
- ¹⁷ Carla Tamagno and Norma Velásquez, "Dinámicas de las asociaciones chinas en Perú: hacia una caracterización y tipología," *Migración y Desarrollo* 14 (January-June 2016): 145-66.
- ¹⁸ Lima's Rímac district and Beijing's Dongcheng district became sister cities on September 22, 2016, after a signing ceremony during the fifth Beijing Wangfujing International Brand Festival in China's capital. The Peruvian-Chinese Friendship Foundation, linked to former Peruvian president Alan García's Aprista Party, promoted the agreement. The first planned activity under the agreement is to signpost the entire Rímac historical district in Chinese and English.
- ¹⁹ The only exception is *El Comercio*, Peru's most influential newspaper, which in the past had permanent correspondents in Beijing for several years. One of them, Patricia Castro, is among the most authoritative voices on China issues. She regularly writes non-critical analysis and soft news about China in her blog in *El Comercio* from Beijing, where she participates in a post-graduate program on a scholarship granted by China.
- ²⁰ CCTV rebranded its six foreign-language television channels under the name of China Global Television Network (CGTN) on December 31, 2016. The move underlines the Chinese government's determination to have its perspective on the world disseminated more widely in a more credible fashion. Although the contract was signed with CCTV, in this paper all references are to CGTN.
- ²¹ Article 1.2 of the agreement states that two separate deals will be signed to regulate "the reception and utilization of news programs, the authorization of free access to live signal...joint reporting and the exchange of newsworthy materials."

- ²² Channel 7 is TV Peru's general-interest channel. It claims to be "the first TV channel of the country," as well as "the channel of all Peruvians, [which has] the largest news coverage of the country, [and] offers education and entertainment in its programming." Over 22.2 million people have access to its signal, although its real audience is thought to be much smaller. IRTP, *Memoria Institucional del IRTP 2016*, 9 and 11, accessed 9 April 2017, <http://peirtp.blob.core.windows.net/archivos/Memoria-IRTP-2016.pdf>; and IRTP, *Plan Estratégico Institucional 2017-2019*, accessed 9 April 2017, <http://peirtp.blob.core.windows.net/archivos/pei2017-2019.pdf>.
- ²³ The "Chinese Television Week" aired by Channel 7 included one-hour travel and cooking documentaries produced by CCTV, as well as a joint documentary film on both countries' bilateral relationship titled "China-Peru: building bridges." A crew of Chinese journalists produced the film in Peru with the assistance of TV Peru, who provided cameras, translators, and journalists.
- ²⁴ Author's interview with anonymous source, Lima, November 2016.
- ²⁵ The first printing appears to have been financed by Chinese companies with operations in the country, since seven of its sixteen pages were advertisements paid for by these corporations. There is no advertising in the two subsequent editions, which suggests that this may have been the reason for cutting the supplements down to eight pages each.
- ²⁶ The quoted sentence is included on the cover's lead of the supplement inserted in *El Peruano* on September 25, 2014.
- ²⁷ A source in Lima told the author that it was initially thought to have a monthly insertion in *El Peruano*. According to this source, a paid insert in this newspaper costs in the neighborhood of US\$3,500, or around one-tenth of the cost of the same supplement if inserted in *El Comercio*.
- ²⁸ This book is a compilation of Xi Jinping's major works from November 15, 2012, to June 13, 2014; it comprises 79 speeches, talks, interviews, instructions, and correspondence in eighteen chapters. China claims to have sold six million copies of this book internationally. The Peruvian first edition published 6,000 copies.
- ²⁹ According to its website, Foreign Languages Press (FLP) was established in 1952 and has published more than 30,000 book titles, "including the works of Party and State leaders, important records and documents, and books providing social, political, economic and cultural insight on China." More than 400 million printed copies have been distributed throughout more than 160 countries. FLP aims to be "the way for Chinese culture to go international." Homepage, Foreign Language Press, www.flp.com.cn/en/.
- ³⁰ Speech by Wang Yu, director of CGTN in Spanish, during CCTV's China-Latin America TV forum held in Lima on December 7, 2016. The following quote in the paragraph is also hers.
- ³¹ "CGTN en Español," Facebook, www.facebook.com/cgtnelespanol/videos/286428215108314/.
- ³² *China Hoy (China Today)* was founded in 1952, although its Spanish edition was not launched until 1960. The magazine is also published in Chinese, English, Tibetan, French, German, Portuguese, Turkish, and Arabic, according to its website. *China Hoy* opened a branch in Mexico in 2004, from where the publication is distributed to the rest of Latin America. In 2010, it opened its only other regional office in Lima. In November 2016, it published a special edition focusing exclusively on the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Peru. The magazine is distributed in Peru by *Caretas*, a weekly publication that has a well-earned journalistic reputation.
- ³³ Author's interview with anonymous source. Lima, November 2016.
- ³⁴ On November 18, 2016, *El Comercio* published three op-eds in its online version whose source was *China Hoy*. Wang Yi, China's foreign affairs minister, authored the article "China y Perú, de la mano hacia un brillante porvenir"; Gao Hucheng, China's minister of commerce, authored "Perspectivas de la cooperación económica China-Perú"; and Luo Shugang, China's minister of culture, signed "China-Perú: Un capítulo brillante en el intercambio cultural." The articles are available at <http://elcomercio.pe/mundo/actualidad/china-peru-mano-brillante-porvenir-opinion-228913>; <http://elcomercio.pe/mundo/actualidad/perspectivas-cooperacion-economica-china-peru-opinion-228906>; and <http://elcomercio.pe/mundo/actualidad/china-peru-capitulo-brillante-intercambio-cultural-228911>.
- ³⁵ Author's interview with anonymous source. Lima, November 2016.
- ³⁶ Declared during CCTV's China-Latin America TV Forum held in Lima on December 7, 2016.
- ³⁷ Quote from a Peruvian newspaper journalist who attended one trip to China.

- ³⁸ Among the most important Chinese cultural activities in 2016 were the following: the photographic exhibition “Meeting between Chinese and Latin American civilizations,” which toured eight Peruvian cities and had an audience of 20,000 visitors; the Zhejiang Wu Opera, which put on a show performed in four cities combining martial arts, acrobatics, Chinese traditional music, dance and puppets; a contemporary Chinese Aquarelle exhibition; the play “The Crowd,” by China’s most prolific playwright, Nick Rongjun Yu; the “High Mountain and Fluid Water” concert, performed with *guqin*, a traditional Chinese instrument associated with Confucius; the Zhujiang Symphonic Orchestra with pianist Yuan Jie and three tenors; the “Two Cultures United by the Same Ocean: Chinese Cultural Relics in Peru” exhibition, attended by Xi Jinping and Peruvian president Kuczynski; two Chinese film festivals screening movies such as “Xuanzang,” “The Monkey King,” “The Taking of Tiger Mountain,” “Monster Hunt,” and “Go Away, Mr. Tumor”; an exhibition on Chinese calligraphy in Peru’s National Library; the presentation of the Spanish edition of Xi Jinping’s book *Governance of China*, which included a Chinese donation of 1,000 books; and several other Chinese New Year activities. Information compiled by the author.
- ³⁹ Ai Weiwei and Shen Yun are more capable of getting around obstacles than other Chinese artists. Ai, who is well-known worldwide partially because he has become a dissident of the Chinese regime, can more easily avoid official channels by finding international sponsors. In countries with limited resources, like Peru, it is less likely that he could be sponsored. For its part, Shen Yun is said to self-finance its own shows, but allegedly faces setbacks because of Chinese diplomatic pressures.
- ⁴⁰ The “International Exhibition: The Art of Zhen, Shan, Ren (Truth, Compassion, Tolerance)” was programmed for May 9, 2016, at Lima’s Ricardo Palma University, which also hosts one of Peru’s four Confucius Institutes. Despite plans to show the exhibition at the university’s campus and not on the Confucius Institute’s premises, it was cancelled just four days before the opening. According to the event organizers, the head of the university’s Confucius Institute told them “the Chinese embassy ordered us to prohibit the exhibition.” The international exhibition, which has been publicly displayed in many countries, was shown months later at the National University of Callao, in one of Lima’s districts. All the exhibition’s artists are Falun Gong practitioners.
- ⁴¹ Using the same chronological charts as reference, China International Publishing Group published immediately after the exhibition the book *The Long River of Civilizations: Mutual Learning Between the Civilizations of China and Latin America*, a high-quality, unique edition not meant for sale but to be given to a selected Latin American audience. The section on Chinese civilization is based on the previous book of a Chinese scholar, while the Latin American part was compiled by Chinese academics in cooperation with CECLA.
- ⁴² Luo Shugang, “Un capítulo brillante en el intercambio cultural,” *China Hoy*, special edition, November 2016, 14-15. Xi Jinping also wrote in his op-ed in *El Comercio* that “the Chinese opened the Silk Maritime Route through the Pacific” more than 400 years ago.
- ⁴³ Spanish navigator Andrés de Urdaneta in 1565 discovered the west-to-east route across the Pacific Ocean that made trade between Asia and America possible. The Manila galleons, the largest ships at that time, were the Spanish trading ships that made these round-trip voyages once or twice per year for commercial exchanges including spices, silver, and Chinese porcelain, silk and goods. The route took four months and operated for two and a half centuries. Despite anecdotal historical evidence of earlier contacts between Peru and China, academia commonly agrees that the first Chinese migration to Peru was in 1849.
- ⁴⁴ Event attended by the author.
- ⁴⁵ The most significant event on Confucianism was a two-day symposium held in Lima in December 2016. Lima’s University of San Martín de Porres, China’s International Confucian Association, and Junefield, a Chinese company with Peruvian operations, sponsored the “I Lima’s International Symposium on Confucianism.” Former Peruvian president Alan García, who in 2013 authored the book *Confucius and Globalization*, was the keynote speaker.
- ⁴⁶ PUCP’s Confucius Institute has a very flexible Chinese-language academic offering, which includes programs for children, young students, and adults, as well as basic Chinese courses, in-house programs, and free, short courses on Chinese culture. Language courses last three months and cost US\$200. It also offers a cultural agenda with conferences, film series, calligraphy and photography exhibitions, and activities linked to traditional Chinese festivals. These activities are advertised on Facebook and are performed inside the university campus. The PUCP institute’s partner in China is the Shanghai International Studies University.
- ⁴⁷ Confucius Institute Regional Center for Latin America, *Survey About the Situation of Teaching Chinese in Latin American Countries* (2015), accessed 15 May 2017, www.crical.cl/encuesta-crical-2015. Quoted in the text are two of the survey’s conclusions and a specific remark by the Ricardo Palma University Confucius Institute in relation to the volunteer teachers.
- ⁴⁸ The author’s several requests for an interview were unanswered.
- ⁴⁹ *The Chinese Migration to Peru* (2012) was researched by 24 academics; and *Arts and Culture in China and Peru* (2014) involved eight historians and academics. The Ricardo Palma University’s Editorial Universitaria published both books.

- ⁵⁰ The Peruvian School “October Tenth” was founded in 1961 through the merger of two Chinese schools, Chung Wha (1924) and San Min (1934). Therefore, until the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and Peru in 1972, the school was linked to Taiwan. The Chinese-Peruvian School Juan XXIII was founded in 1962 by the Franciscan order, and until not long ago, the teaching language was Cantonese. Both schools technically offer bilingual education in Spanish and Mandarin, although sources told the author that the Chinese level among students is generally low because of the limited number of hours taught per week. Juan XXIII has 1,600 students, with only 15 percent of them Chinese nationals. More recently, the school enjoys close ties with the Chinese embassy: “We have a very direct and close communication with them,” says Jennifer Pajan, the school’s principal. During the 2016 APEC meeting in Lima, the Chinese first lady officially visited the school.
- ⁵¹ Universidad del Pacífico hosted the workshop “International Development Financing System for Inclusive Growth: Partnership and Prosperity Issues in Developing Countries” in April 2016, as part of the official agenda of the Think 20 (T20), a network of research institutes and think tanks from the G20 countries. The Chinese co-organizers—the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies and Renmin University, which led the T20 activities in 2016—invited the Peruvian university to host this event in Lima for the first time. According to the university, this was “undoubtedly a sign of China’s interest in Latin America and Peru.” Source: “Think 20, under Chinese presidency, met at UP with the participation of 24 foreign experts from 15 countries,” Universidad del Pacífico, 26 May 2016, www.up.edu.pe/prensa/noticiasold/Paginas/detalle.aspx?idn=1897.
- Universidad del Pacífico has also had meetings with Tsinghua University and Peking University, and hosted an event with a Chinese delegation of fourteen academics, diplomats, writers, musicians, and journalists in its center in late 2016. The event was promoted by the China’s embassy in Lima, and the China Public Diplomacy Association headed the Chinese delegation. Founded in 2012 with the aim of strengthening China’s soft power, on paper it is a Beijing-based non-profit organization “formed by experts and scholars, celebrities, and relevant institutions and enterprise.” Sources: Universidad del Pacífico’s website, and the author’s interview with one of its executives, Lima, November 2016.
- ⁵² The event was co-organized with the Center for Peru–China Studies of Universidad del Pacífico. A short book with all the participants’ essays was published with the title *El “Sueño Chino” y la Década de Xi Jinping*.
- ⁵³ The author attended the event.
- ⁵⁴ There are more than 300 large-scale mining projects currently active in Peru. China is the top foreign investor in the Peruvian mining industry, holding more than one-third of the investments. Over 200 social conflicts, mostly related to environmental concerns, erupt every year in mining projects run by Chinese and other foreign investors. Peru is among the countries with the most deaths linked to violence erupting from these conflicts. Sources: Author’s interviews in Lima.
- Among all, the Shougang Hierro Perú iron ore project, China’s first large investment in the country that goes back to the early 1990s, has been a source of conflict since then. Strikes, riots and violence break out periodically because of the labor, environmental, and social impacts of the mine’s operations. Source: Juan Pablo Cardenal and Heriberto Araújo, *China’s Silent Army*, (Penguin), 2013.
- ⁵⁵ Author’s interview with anonymous source. Lima, September 2016.
- ⁵⁶ Xi’s op-ed underlines “the growing bilateral trade,” which has reached US\$15 billion, and China’s investment in Peru of “over US\$14 billion that has created more than ten-thousand jobs in Peru.” In a separate press release, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce ensured that Chinese and Peruvian companies signed on the same dates a “procurement agreement worth over US\$2 billion.” Xi Jinping, “Cumplir juntos el sueño secular del desarrollo para escribir un nuevo capítulo de cooperación,” *El Comercio*, 17 November 2016.
- ⁵⁷ Enrique Castillo, “La Influencia de Xi Jinping y de China,” *Perú 21*, 21 November 2016.
- ⁵⁸ Francisco Miró Quesada Rada, “Trump: la agonía de la democracia,” *El Comercio*, 24 November 2016.
- ⁵⁹ “CNDDHH expresa preocupación por vigencia de los DDHH en China y en las actividades económicas chinas en Perú,” Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 21 November 2016, <http://derechoshumanos.pe/2016/11/cnddhh-expresa-preocupacion-por-vigencia-de-los-ddhh-en-china-y-en-las-actividades-economicas-chinas-en-peru/>.
- ⁶⁰ Author’s interview with Marco Arana, a congressman representing Frente Amplio, a coalition of political parties, organizations, and activists.
- ⁶¹ Xinhua has established 21 bureaus in nineteen countries across Latin America and the Caribbean. It claims that 200 regional media outlets subscribe to Xinhua, plus 200 non-media additional subscribers, including the Ministry of Culture of Peru. Xinhua alleges to have 50,000 subscribers worldwide.
- ⁶² *El Peruano* and *Agencia Peruana de Noticias Andina* are both owned by the state corporation Editora Peru. *El Peruano* has a long tradition, and is the official bulletin that publishes new national laws. However, its reputation as a modern newspaper is in question, as it has out-of-date printing machinery, mediocre paper, and a small audience. The newspaper circulates 15,000 copies daily, while *El Comercio* distributes 160,000.

- ⁶³ “Rusia y Perú buscan fortalecer el intercambio comercial,” Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru, accessed 7 November 2017, www.mincetur.gob.pe/peru-y-rusia-buscan-fortalecer-el-intercambio-comercial/.
- ⁶⁴ Rossotrudnichestvo is a government agency operating under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is in charge of Russia’s public diplomacy. In representing Russia’s cultural heritage abroad, the agency’s tasks include working with Russian compatriots abroad, supporting Russian language through different educational programs, engaging in international humanitarian cooperation, and promoting culture. The agency says “public diplomacy contributes not only to strengthening kindly feelings for our country, but also the promotion of a specific foreign policy.” Source: Rossotrudnichestvo’s website, accessible at www.rs.gov.ru/en/activities/4.
- ⁶⁵ According to *RBTH*’s website, the publication “offers news, opinion, analysis, and comment on far-ranging issues—including politics, culture, business, science, and public life in Russia.” It claims to have published *RBTH* in 17 languages together with 46 newspapers from 30 countries. Of these, it has been published in seven countries in Latin America: Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico. It has been reported that *RBTH* abandoned its print version in 2017.
- ⁶⁶ *RBTH* was published in Spain’s *El País* 51 times between 2010 and 2016, according to the Russian outlet’s website. In addition, the newspaper’s Mexican and Chilean editions also carried *RBTH* inserts eight times each, while the Peruvian edition published the supplement in May and June of 2015.
- ⁶⁷ Author’s interview with anonymous source. Buenos Aires, March 2017.
- ⁶⁸ Author’s interview with anonymous source. Lima, January 2017.
- ⁶⁹ “Peru: Cable TV,” RT, <https://actualidad.rt.com/acerca/cobertura/Peru>.
- ⁷⁰ Ángel Villarino, “RT en español, la fábrica de noticias de Putin para que odies a Occidente,” *El Confidencial*, 15 January 2017.
- ⁷¹ Since 2008, the Russian Center of Science and Culture has been part of Rossotrudnichestvo, which has established 72 such centers in 62 countries, including Peru.
- ⁷² “Sobre la presentación en el Perú del documental ‘Ellos vencieron al fascismo,’” Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Peru, 5 October 2015, http://embajada-rusa.org/es/noticias-de-la-embajada/70_anos_victoria/441-sobre-la-presentacin-en-el-per-del-documental-ellos-vencieron-al-fascismo.html.
- ⁷³ The Russian Center of Science and Culture also holds a weekly screening of Russian and Soviet films, small concerts in the center’s 200-seat auditorium, book presentations, painting exhibitions, conferences, and a number of folkloric activities for the Russian community. The center has a poet and writer’s club, and teaches Russian courses.
- ⁷⁴ Author’s interview with anonymous source, Lima.
- ⁷⁵ Among other activities, the Russian National Ballet performed its *Swan Lake* show on 22 occasions in Peru in 2016. In 2017 the Berioska National Ballet of Russia performed in Peru with a crew of 50 dancers for the first time in Latin America in the last 35 years. The Great Moscow State Circus did 55 shows in Lima alone in 2016. Also, the famous Obraztsov State Academic Puppet Theatre performed in Peru.
- ⁷⁶ “Moscú apuesta por nuevas generaciones de China y Latinoamérica,” Sputnik, 15 June 2015, <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/prensa/201506151038322588/>.
- ⁷⁷ Author’s interview with anonymous source. Buenos Aires, November 2016.
- ⁷⁸ The participant’s account was published on the Facebook page of Chile’s Russian Center of Science and Culture, accessed 7 November 2017, www.facebook.com/CCCR.Chile/photos/pcb.1137289626319357/1137286089653044/?type=3.
- ⁷⁹ According to the same source, the cooperation between both institutions includes the development of a new micro-satellite. But given that Chasqui-1 was in the final stages of development at that time, Russia agreed to contribute to the project with the launching. The project’s budget amounted to about US\$384,000, not including US\$170,000 for the launch.



Exploiting Political Polarization in Poland

By Jacek Kucharczyk

INTRODUCTION The aim of this report is to analyze the influence of Russian and Chinese authoritarian forms of soft power on Polish democracy.¹ Russian and Chinese influence on the quality of democratic governance in both new and established democracies has relatively recently become a subject of research and vigorous public debate. The context of this Polish case study is defined by two closely linked developments in Poland's public life and politics. The first is extreme political polarization and diminishing areas of consensual (domestic and foreign) policymaking. The second development is the alleged decline of democratic standards, which stems from the polarized political environment but has particularly accelerated since the victory of the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland's 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections.²

Most analysts would attribute Poland's political polarization and democratic recession to domestic factors rather than foreign influence from Russia or China.³ However, the research detailed in this essay reveals many dangerous liaisons between specific political narratives employed by homegrown populists and Russian propaganda, as well as calculated efforts by China to portray itself as an ultramodern, benevolent power featuring an authoritarian political system that offers a better incubator for economic growth than liberal democracy. For this reason one should re-examine the assessment of some earlier studies, which claimed that Poland is relatively less vulnerable to Russian interference than other fragile democracies in Central-Eastern Europe.⁴

Similarities between populist political narratives in Russia and Poland are evident in a number of ideas circulating domestically, such as the need to defend Poland, its traditional family, and Christian values from the cultural influence of "decadent" Europe with its secularism, "moral relativism," and multiculturalism. This narrative mirrors the Kremlin's homophobic

propaganda about “Gayropa,” as well as the political rhetoric of populist and far-right groups elsewhere in the European Union, who are inconvenient bedfellows for Kaczyński’s regime. The same is true about anti-Muslim and anti-migrant narratives, which are a staple of Poland’s right-wing populist propaganda as well as of Putin’s political friends and allies across Europe.⁵ This narrative overlap makes it difficult to distinguish propaganda contents originating in and propagated by Russia from material produced by domestic actors. At the same time, the proliferation of populist narratives creates an opportunity for Russian propaganda, as these narratives can be amplified with different propaganda tools, such as online trolling. Whether originating in Poland or not, these narratives make Poland vulnerable to foreign authoritarian influence.

Another factor making the Polish public vulnerable to such propaganda is the toxic polarization of political debate, which more often than not precludes rational debate on even the most important policy issues. The current level of polarization can be traced back to the Smolensk airplane crash on April 10, 2010, in which President Lech Kaczyński and 95 others, including parliamentarians and senior state officials, were killed while traveling to Russia to commemorate the martyrdom of Polish officers murdered on Joseph Stalin’s orders in Katyn in April 1940. The Smolensk air crash has had a powerful impact in Poland, deeply polarizing both the political scene and society at large. Since then many PiS supporters of Poland’s ruling party have levied accusations that their political opponents are Russian agents of influence, or even spies. Such allegations have been made against former president Bronisław Komorowski, whom Poland’s right-wing media have nicknamed “Komoruski,” and former prime minister and current European Council president Donald Tusk. Both men, as well as Radosław Sikorski, who served as foreign minister in Tusk’s administration, are named in conspiracy theories regarding the causes of the aircrash.

The so-called Smolensk conspiracy theories—claims that Lech Kaczyński was assassinated by the Russian secret services with collusion by Komorowski, Sikorski, and Tusk—were skillfully amplified and sustained by the PiS and a veritable industry of right-wing media, conspiracy websites, and social movements such as “Solidarni 2010,” and have been embraced by a significant minority of Poles.⁶ As is the case with most conspiracy theories, the lack of evidence for such a terrorist act has been taken as a sign that the evidence has been destroyed, in this case by Russian security services, further “proving” the theories’ veracity.

This toxic polarization of political debate, to which both sides contribute, albeit in different degrees, helps explain why Poland remains vulnerable to Russian propaganda in spite of the fact that most political actors, including the two largest parties, generally agree that Russia remains both a hard and soft threat to Poland’s security. Indeed, one could presume that the suspicion of Russian meddling would make Poland less vulnerable and more resilient to Russian propaganda efforts. This is not the case. On the contrary, the spread of the Smolensk conspiracy theories has led to the trivialization of discourse on Russian interference and information warfare. Mainstream media and some politicians came to dismiss any inquiries on Russian activities in Poland as spinoffs or variations of Smolensk conspiracy theories. In the atmosphere of deep polarization, where both sides often accuse political opponents of acting under Russian influence without sufficient evidence, the public becomes skeptical and, ultimately, rather complacent about such threats.

While possible Russian influence on the state of Polish democracy remains insufficiently investigated and discussed, even less can be said about the possible influence of Chinese soft power on Poland's democratic culture and institutions. There is very weak perception within Poland of any threat from China, and no discussion about a need to contain Chinese influence. On the contrary, the developing economic, political, and cultural relations with China tend to be viewed favorably by Polish opinion makers and the general public. In recent years, many politicians, experts, and media commentators have regularly spoken of the need for Poland to adopt a different model of development based on a stronger role for the state and for state-owned economic entities, with China and other Asian countries seen as possible role models. At the same time, both previous and current governments have advanced relations with China within bilateral and multilateral frameworks, including the 16+1 forum for cooperation between Central and Eastern European countries and China. Importantly, the 16+1 initiative designates 2017 as a year of people-to-people cooperation, with the planned participation of individuals involved in the arts, media, academia, and think tanks.⁷

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This report explores the extent to which both Russia and China are investing in their own forms of soft power efforts to exert authoritarian influence on Poland's democratic politics and culture, albeit in different ways. While Russian soft power strategies in Poland are aimed at sowing internal discord, with the goal of weakening the country's commitments to the European Union and NATO, the Chinese authorities are also scaling up engagement activities with Poland by facilitating political and cultural exchanges, in addition to building up economic relations. China promotes itself as an "alternative model of governance," mainly in order to legitimize its own authoritarian style of rule. However, by doing so in the context of the deep polarization of the political scene, China helps to popularize the notion, popular among far right circles but also among some supporters

of the current Polish government, that an undemocratic one-party state can deliver economic growth, social security, and development more efficiently than a liberal-democratic polity. At the same time, the report discusses the Russian and Chinese soft power toolboxes in the following two sections, which respectively set out the context of Polish-Russian and Polish-Chinese relations, and then examine in more detail the four areas of research: media, culture, academia, and think tanks.



RUSSIA

Polish-Russian Relations in Historical Context

Poland's historical relations with Russia have been adversarial for centuries, and the perception of Russia as an existential threat to Poland is well-grounded in the Polish historical experience. Russia was the key player in the so-called Partitions of Poland toward the end of the eighteenth century, which wiped the country from the world map from 1795 until 1918, following several decades of meddling in Poland's already fragile internal politics.⁸ After the twenty-year interbellum period between World Wars I and II, Poland was partitioned yet again by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. After World War II, Poland found itself under Soviet occupation, and the communist regime installed in Poland survived almost half a century. The country once again regained independence in 1989 after communism eventually collapsed in Poland and in the other so-called People's Republics.⁹

Poland's foreign policy after 1989 was built upon two pillars. The first was European and transatlantic integration into the EU and NATO. The second was support for the independence and democratization of the post-Soviet states of Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine. The tensions in Polish-Russian relations in the 1990s were mostly based on Russia's vehement opposition to NATO membership for Poland and other postcommunist countries. Poland joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004.

After it came to power in 2007, the Civic Platform-led (PO) government pushed for the alignment of Poland's foreign policy objectives with key EU partners, especially with Germany.¹⁰ At the same time it declared Poland's ambition to become a significant player within the EU and to have an impact on the agenda of EU external relations. In 2007, together with Sweden, Poland proposed the Eastern Partnership Programme, which was adopted by the EU as

a framework for the relations with post-Soviet countries, most notably Ukraine. The general aim of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was to bring these countries politically and economically closer to the EU. The EaP was seen in Moscow as Poland's attempt to move these countries away from the Russian sphere of influence.

At the same time, as part of the process of joining the EU policy mainstream, but also to counter-balance the perception (in Moscow as well as in key EU capitals) Poland was pushing an 'anti-Russian' agenda by advancing the EaP, Tusk's government attempted its own version of a "reset policy" towards Russia under President Dmitri Medvedev. Among other things, the reset resulted in the so-called Kaliningrad Triangle meetings between the foreign ministers of Germany, Poland, and Russia, and the opening of visa-free "small border" traffic between two Polish provinces and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad in 2012. The Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding was established in 2011 under the auspices of both governments to enhance a dialogue on difficult issues between the two countries, especially in the area of "historical memory."¹¹

PiS-led opposition has consistently criticized both Poland's policy on Russia and the EaP. President Lech Kaczyński attempted to pursue a more assertive Eastern policy in other ways, for example by actively supporting Georgia during the Russian invasion of 2008.

Key Developments in Polish-Russian Relations After 2012

The past five years have witnessed the resurgence of fears and suspicion in Poland concerning Russian foreign policy. The reset of Polish-Russian relations initiated by Tusk and Sikorski began to stall following the death of President Kaczyński and many other Polish lawmakers and officials in the Smolensk air disaster in April 2010.

Right-wing media and PiS politicians have given voice to conspiracy theories claiming that Tusk and members of his government conspired with Putin in order to hide alleged Russian responsibility for the death of President Lech Kaczyński and many other Polish lawmakers and officials. The claims range from allegations of concealing negligence to claims that a bomb was planted or that the plane was shot down, and have been propagated by a broad coalition of media, politicians, and social activists, with the support of many Catholic officials. This movement was crucial in solidifying the leading position of the PiS as the main opposition to the center-right PO. As previously mentioned, the Smolensk issue, more than any issue in Polish politics, has also contributed to the current toxic polarization of public debate.

However, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine are the most important events to affect Polish-Russian relations in the past five years. The Polish government has been one of the most outspoken critics of the Kremlin's intrusion into Ukraine. The victory of Andrzej Duda of PiS over the incumbent Komorowski, of PO, in the May 2015 presidential election did not change the Polish approach to the Ukraine issue, nor did the installation of the PiS government following its victory in parliamentary elections held later that year.

The Russian intervention in Ukraine has affected various fields of Polish-Russian cooperation. The Polish cultural year in Russia that was planned for 2015 was cancelled. In addition, the activities of the aforementioned Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding all

The Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine are the most important events to affect Polish-Russian relations in the past five years.

but died, mainly because the Russian side refused to participate and defined topics that were clearly unacceptable.¹² The Kaliningrad Triangle meetings were suspended, as was local border traffic between Poland and Kaliningrad.

Economic cooperation between Poland and Russia also suffered as the EU (and U.S.) imposed economic sanctions to deter the Russian government from breaking international law, and Russia reacted with countersanctions. While the countersanctions have had a negative effect on some sectors of the Polish economy, they have not succeeded in softening the Polish position on Ukraine.¹³

The previous and current Polish governments also successfully lobbied Poland's allies to strengthen NATO's presence in Central Europe, which resulted in decisions confirmed during the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw.¹⁴ Under the PiS government, the tensions between Warsaw and Moscow have increased even more with regard to the 2010 Smolensk plane crash, with Russian officials angered by Polish officials' repeated suggestions that the crash was a result of a deliberate action by the Russian security services.

Meanwhile, the previous and current governments also made efforts to decrease Poland's dependence on energy imports from Russia, primarily by building the liquefied natural gas, or LNG terminal in Świnoujście, on the Baltic Sea next to the German border, which has been operational since December 2015. Another strategy for increasing energy security consists of developing energy integration programs among Central and Eastern European countries, especially the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Slovakia. And while it remains in its early stages, an Energy Union initially proposed by Tusk in 2014 seeks to enhance cooperation in the EU's energy sector and thereby reduce dependence on external suppliers. Taken together, these activities contribute to Polish resilience toward possible economic pressure from Russia.¹⁵

The Polish Public's Perceptions of Russia

The Poles tend to have critical views of Russia, and this criticism has been deepening in recent years. According to a Pew Research Center poll, unfavorable opinions of Russia increased from 54 percent in the spring of 2013, to 80 percent in the spring of 2015 and 69 percent in 2017.¹⁶ A separate study by Poland's Institute for Public Affairs (IPA) found that in 2015, 78 percent of Poles viewed Polish-Russian relations negatively.¹⁷ The same study showed that 62 percent of the Polish public held Russia responsible for the war in Ukraine's Donbas region. The IPA study also found broad societal support for sanctions against Russia: 41 percent of Poles believed sanctions should be strengthened, and 35 percent supported maintaining sanctions at the current level.¹⁸ Russia is perceived not only as a primary aggressor in Ukraine, but its foreign policy is believed by many to be a potential danger to other European countries, including Poland. As the results of IPA research show, 71 percent of Poles view Russia as a possible military threat to their country.¹⁹

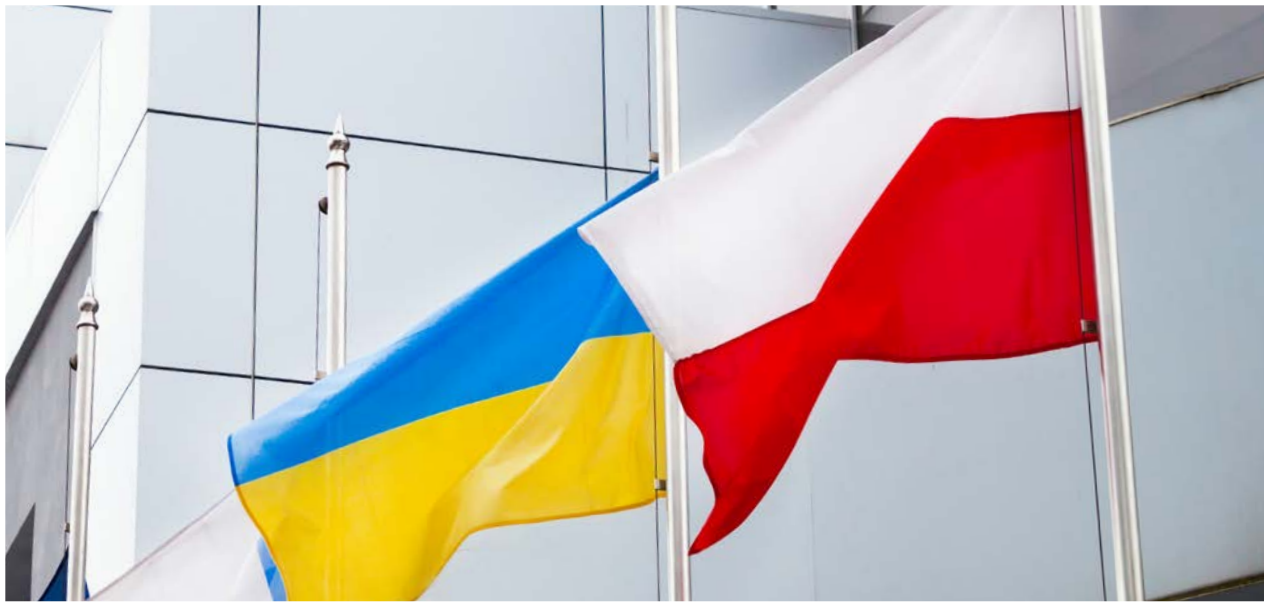
In contrast, Polish perceptions of the EU and NATO are generally positive. A survey conducted by Poland's Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in April 2017 showed a record 88 percent of respondents expressing support for Poland's membership in the EU.²⁰ Another study by CBOS from April 2017 put support for Poland's NATO membership at 82 percent, the highest recorded figure since Poland joined the alliance.²¹ The same survey showed a strong majority in favor of stationing NATO troops in Poland, as well as a strong belief that in case of aggression, NATO partners would come to Poland's defense.

Each of these studies demonstrates the high levels of societal resilience in Poland to pro-Russian propaganda. However, Russian propaganda in Poland uses a number of narratives that circumvent this resilience by amplifying politically sensitive issues.

Instruments of Russian Authoritarian Influence in Poland **Russian Narratives in Poland**

Given the strong suspicion and fear of Russia in Poland, as well as the consensus of mainstream politicians and the media regarding Poland's place in NATO and the EU, Russian propaganda in Poland focuses on several narratives aimed at the indirect subversion of this consensus, and at encouraging social discord.²² Some of these narratives are similar to the ones seen in other countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

The first is the reactionary narrative, which stresses the need to reassert so-called traditional values and morality in the face of the perceived moral decline of Western liberal democracies. Political Capital, a Hungarian think tank, found in a 2016 study of the Kremlin's crusade to defend what it refers to as traditional values, that Polish society could be receptive "to the traditionalist, anti-gender and ultra-conservative messages" promoted by Russian propaganda.²³ The report posits that "[c]onservative values are not evidence of Russian influence in Poland, but these are tools that might be used by the Kremlin to achieve its political goals."²⁴ The Russian-sponsored narrative that Europe (and the West) are morally bankrupt is designed to appeal to some elements of the current traditionalist agenda supported by the Polish Catholic Church—an agenda which has also been adopted as a political program by PiS and other right-wing parties in Poland.²⁵



Another Russian propaganda tool is the narrative concerning the so-called refugee crisis, and migration from predominantly Muslim countries in general. While anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric used to be relatively marginal in Polish public discourse, it entered the mainstream in the fall of 2015, when the PO government agreed to accept more than seven thousand Syrian refugees under the EU quota system. This decision was strongly criticized by the then opposition PiS, and backlash against the deal helped the PiS win the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Amid the political debate and media reports that accompanied the PiS's opposition to the quota deal,

the stance of the Polish public towards the refugees toughened, and the percentage of people opposed to accepting refugees grew from 21 percent in May 2015 to 53 percent by December of that year.²⁶ The current government is adamant in its refusal to accept what it sees as EU *diktats* regarding asylum policy, but this issue is also raised by all anti-EU forces in Poland, especially on the far-right, with the intent to undermine society's support for EU membership. This makes anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim narratives an attractive topic for Russian propaganda in Poland.

While traditional values and migration are typical themes for Russian propaganda to leverage in Europe, the area of Polish-Ukrainian relations is specific to Russian efforts in Poland. The aim of Russian propaganda in this field is to weaken Polish support for pro-Western, democratic changes in Ukraine. This narrative attempts to take advantage of the long history of ethnic and political conflict between Poles and Ukrainians, with a particular focus on the World War II-era Volhynia massacre of ethnic Poles in Nazi-occupied parts of eastern Poland (now part of Ukraine) by Ukrainian nationalists. These attempts fall on fertile ground. According to an IPA survey conducted in Poland and Ukraine in 2013, more than one in five Polish respondents asked for their first associations with the words “Ukraine” and “Ukrainian” mentioned Volhynia and other historical conflicts. In a subsequent question, 73 percent of Polish respondents agreed that Ukrainians have historical guilt vis-à-vis Poland, and should apologize. The study concluded that,

“The analysis of free associations indicates that Poles pay much more attention to shared history than Ukrainians. Polish-Ukrainian history, and especially conflicts during and after [World War II], including the Volhynia massacre are an important element of the image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the eyes of Poles.”²⁷

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, the previously mentioned Smolensk conspiracy theories should also be included in the list of Kremlin-sponsored narratives. While it may at first seem odd to believe that Russia fuels the narrative about its own involvement in the death of the Polish president and other prominent Poles, this narrative has a devastating effect on the state of Polish democracy, as it has become a source of deep political polarization. Moreover, it systematically undermined the credibility of then-key Polish leaders—former president Komorowski, former foreign minister Sikorski, and former prime minister Tusk—who represented the idea of a pro-EU, pro-NATO foreign policy, and accompanying support for a free and democratic Ukraine. Their international credibility helped them make the case to their Western partners for the necessity of a strong response to Putin's aggression in Ukraine.

While the Smolensk conspiracy theories most likely originated in Poland rather than Russia, they have all the features of Russian propaganda narratives and should be included in any discussion of Russian authoritarian influence in Poland. Indeed, it is quite compatible with our existing knowledge of the workings of Russian propaganda to think that the Kremlin fuels anti-Russian propaganda in order to make Poland look blinded with Russophobia, and hence not credible in discussions on Russian-European relations. Edward Lucas and Peter Pomerantsev in a report by the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) reached a similar conclusion when they argued that:

“Kremlin narratives also seek, paradoxically, to promote extreme Polish nationalism—even anti-Russian nationalism—with the goal of making Poland seem unreliable and “hysterical” to its Western allies. It is important to note that official Russian policy—for example Russia's refusal to return the wreckage to Poland—has helped to feed speculation over the Smolensk air disaster.”²⁸

Thus, all four propaganda narratives—the reactionary, the anti-immigrant, the anti-Ukraine, and the Smolensk conspiracy theories—ultimately aim to undermine the key goals of Poland’s foreign policy and Poles’ self-identification with Western values and institutions. These narratives are deeply embedded in the ideologies of Polish far-right organizations (and to a lesser degree, their far-left counterparts) that are the primary consumers of Russian propaganda, but there is also the strong potential that they may be picked up by more mainstream media and political actors.²⁹ The choice of such narratives shows the opportunistic and extremely flexible character of Russian information warfare, which explores the vulnerabilities of a given public and identifies the areas of least resistance. The authors of one report on Kremlin information warfare concluded “the main danger is that Russian influence will grow in Poland as a consequence of social objection, historical issues and national animosities.”³⁰

Media

Polish mainstream media are typically critical of Russia and President Putin’s foreign policy, reflecting the existing consensus among the political classes and in public opinion. A notable exception to this rule was the interview with controversial Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin in the conservative *Do Rzeczy*, a popular weekly that supports the current PiS government.³¹ *Do Rzeczy*’s publication of the interview, titled “Globalism and Liberalism Represent the Civilization of the Antichrist,” reflects the fact that the Kremlin’s conservative crusade in defense of “traditional values” appeals to Polish ultraconservatives.³²

Russian state-sponsored media such as the television channel RT and the news agency Sputnik are available in Poland. RT can be accessed through most cable operators, as can one or two channels of Russian public television, but their viewership seems to be minuscule. Sputnik has a Polish-language outfit and its Facebook page has some 12,500 likes, which is relatively small compared to 450,000 likes for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland’s most important liberal daily.

The general public views sources of opinion and information backed by the Russian state with deep suspicion. For this reason alone, such media outlets should not be seen as primary tools of Russian propaganda. The very fact that someone has agreed to talk to these media outlets can be used to discredit that person, so very few recognizable opinion makers or politicians appear there. They are mainly important as sources of (dis)information, which finds its way to other websites that do not reveal their connections to Russia or the Russian government. Those “independent” internet-based media outlets should be seen as the key instrument of Russian information warfare in Poland.

The most successful of such websites is *Kresy*, ostensibly devoted to Polish cultural heritage in the territories east of Poland, which are known as Kresy and in the past were part of the Polish state, but are now integral parts of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.³³ Since it was established in 2008, the portal has grown in popularity, particularly after it started to regularly publish information about developments on the 2013–2014 Euromaidan protests in Kiev, and later the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. The website has evolved into a news site with considerable readership and almost 100,000 followers on Facebook, and provides news and information on international affairs consistent with the kind of information found on RT and in other Russian media.³⁴ *Kresy* is financed by Marek Jakubiak, owner of a network of breweries and a member of parliament elected on the Kukiz’15 antiestablishment platform. The party includes a number of extreme-right-wing politicians known for pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian views.

Similar, if less successful, websites to *Kresy* include *Konserwatyzm* and *Antykapitalizm*. They cater to the hard right and hard left, respectively, without many explicit references to Russia but promoting anti-Western and anti-liberal narratives that are very close to content originating from the Kremlin.

Xportal is an openly pro-Russian website established by Bartosz Bekier, a leader of Falanga, a Polish ultranationalist organization linked with the Global Revolutionary Alliance.³⁵ Bekier has visited the occupied territories of Donbas to work as a journalist for *Xportal*, and actively supports the separatists fighting the Ukrainian army.³⁶ Other examples of fringe media sources fueled by Russian propaganda include the *Novorossiya Today* and *Tragedia Donbasu* (Tragedy of Donbas) websites, and the Facebook page *Noworosja Walczaca*, or *Fighting Novorossiya*.³⁷

A different type of pro-Russian, internet-based media is *Obserwator polityczny*, or Political Observer,³⁸ which is supported by the Russkiy Mir Foundation, a Russian soft-power project. It is relatively little-known in Poland, but its articles are often presented in Russia as an “alternative” Polish point of view, which seems to be a secondary function of a number of pro-Russian websites.³⁹

Alternative media create a dense network of disinformation; they share not just the same narratives, but specific contents often written by the same handful of pro-Russian journalists and commentators.

Individuals sometimes called “lone wolves” also play an important role in Russian propaganda and disinformation activities, and in building pro-Russian influence. Like some “independent” pro-Russian websites, they are not formally tied to any movement, but are very active on behalf of the Kremlin, often disseminating their views to followers via social media. As the Hungarian think tank Political Capital put it:

*“Their role is to impose a certain point of view on recipients, create discussions, [and] ideologically inspire trolls who will then . . . sell these ideas to mainstream forums on their own, strengthening a belief among Poles that such views are common.”*⁴⁰

Trolling is a tool of Russian propaganda that appears in Polish internet-based media and social media. Comments consistent with Russian narratives invariably appear under articles on sensitive topics like the war in Ukraine or, more recently, the destruction of Aleppo. Trolls also post links with information originating from RT or similar sources that contradicts the main article or Facebook entry. The same comments or links appear under many articles, indicating a concerted effort. Some comments contain threats against the author of the article. Sometimes the authors of sensitive articles face even further harassment. In one case, blogger activist Marcin Rey, well-known for his investigations into Russian propaganda, and who maintains a Facebook page called “The Russian Fifth Column in Poland,” became the victim of a smear campaign: leaflets with his sketched portrait, warning of a ‘dangerous pedophile’ were distributed in the village where he and his family live.⁴¹

The Russian penetration of Polish media reveals a number of general characteristics. Firstly, most direct influence can be traced to internet-based alternative media, which regularly use materials supplied by official Russian outlets such as RT or Sputnik. Secondly, these alternative media create a dense network of disinformation; they share not just the same narratives, but specific contents often written by the same handful of pro-Russian journalists and commentators.

Together with the “lone wolves” and trolls, they create a vast ecosystem of influence (also encompassing think tanks and other organizations). Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, mainstream media outlets in Poland are not immune to influence from these “alternative” and official Russian sources. The reasons for this vulnerability are often ideological, such as with the Dugin interview in *Do Rzeczy*. More likely, they result from weak professional standards and an accompanying failure to scrutinize and verify the sources of information.

Culture

An enduring aspect of Polish-Russian relations is the intensity of people-to-people contacts. In particular, Russian dissidents and, later, critics of Putin’s authoritarian turn, have been welcome, and even celebrated in circles of Polish intelligentsia, artists, and opinion makers. In a similar vein, appreciation of Russian culture has traditionally been distinguished from support for Russian government policies. Adam Michnik, a leading dissident during the communist era and the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, used to call himself an “anti-Soviet Russophile,” and later updated this to an “anti-Putin Russophile.” However, some pro-Russian figures are far-right ultranationalists with contempt for Russian culture, who claim to base their political ideas on purely “realist” assessments of Russia.⁴² One should keep this distinction in mind while trying to assess the current extent of Russian authoritarian influence in the cultural field.

Given this history of people-to-people ties, many initiatives promoting Russian culture in Poland, such as exchanges between Polish and Russian artists, do reflect genuine expressions of independent arts and culture. Initiatives such as the annual Russian film festival, although sponsored by both the Polish and Russian ministries of culture, can rightly be viewed as a normal type of soft power initiative that any country might engage in. Furthermore, for interested Poles, many contemporary Russian films and books provide a window into “the other Russia,” with all its problems and complexities, beyond Kremlin propaganda.

However, such cultural activities carried out with support from Russian state-sponsored organizations also can serve at the same time as a venue for promoting certain narratives and propaganda. This overlap between genuine cultural expression and propaganda can make it difficult for Polish audiences to distinguish the difference, leaving them potentially vulnerable to the influence of the latter. For example, the scope of the Russian-government-sponsored Russian Center for Science and Culture (RCSC), located in the Russian embassy in Warsaw, includes Russian language courses and various theater, film, music, and art shows that are generally free of direct propaganda.⁴³ However, historical memory events related mostly to what is referred to in Russia as the “Great Patriotic War” are also part of the center’s repertoire. So too is the case with the Ruskiy Mir Foundation, which is one of the key actors of the Kremlin’s soft power and supports many institutions and organizations whose ostensible aim is to teach the Russian language to Poles.⁴⁴ Its programs popularize not only the Russian language, but also the Kremlin-vetted version of Russian culture, history, and art.

In some cases, seemingly innocuous cultural exchanges can be used as venues for Russian influence in that they provide a platform for contacts between persons who might be described as Russian lobbyists, and mainstream Polish politicians and opinion makers. One example is the Anna German Festival, named after a Polish singer who was popular throughout the Soviet Union in 1960s and 1970s. The festival’s main organizer is the League of Polish Women, whose current president, Aldona Michalak, was previously a lawmaker with

the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP) party. Currently, she is a board member of the Association for Cooperation Poland-East, a pro-Russian lobbying group that has co-organized the event, along with the Center for Russian Science and Culture in Warsaw, and the Association for Cooperation Poland-Russia. The festival's honorary committee has included a deputy prime minister, and the mayors of six Polish cities.⁴⁵

While these more typical venues of soft power, such as cultural exchanges and language teaching programs should not be neglected, the key area of the Kremlin's "weaponization of culture" is its self-proclaimed crusade against Western and liberal values through the promotion of an ultraconservative social agenda.

Needless to say, conservative values within Polish society have not been imported or imposed by Russia. These values are actively promoted by the Catholic Church and a plethora of socially conservative organizations and media, as well as a number of right-wing political parties. Nonetheless, these "traditional values," as well as Polish nationalism, are tools that Russian propaganda may successfully employ, and has employed, in Poland.⁴⁶

One gets insight into how Russia can seize upon Polish culture in order to promote messages that are advantageous to it by reviewing a joint statement by the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Polish Catholic Church after their historic first meeting in September 2012, and events surrounding it. Many liberals in Poland welcomed the meeting as an opening of a long-needed dialogue between the two denominations, and as a milestone for Polish-Russian dialogue. However, calls for rapprochement and dialogue in the statement gave way to an indictment of the contemporary liberal consensus in Western society, with the hierarchs warning of new challenges by which unnamed forces hiding behind secular ideology worked to dismantle "traditional values," and promote abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and consumerism.⁴⁷ The statement was published on the same day a Moscow court announced the high-profile convictions of three members of the Pussy Riot group on charges of hooliganism and inciting religious hatred; the women earlier in the year had performed a raucous "punk prayer" inside a landmark Moscow cathedral in which they called for Putin's removal from power. Columnist Miroslaw Czech of *Gazeta Wyborcza* declared in the announcement's aftermath that while their sentences of two years in a labor camp were too harsh, in principle the state has an obligation to protect the religious feelings of society, and praised the joint statement of the two churches for its declared aim of fighting secularization.⁴⁸ This example demonstrates that the Kremlin's conservative crusade can appeal not just to Polish ultra-conservatives, but also to people who declare themselves to be in the political center.

Ultraconservative groups from Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries have also backed some of the "conservative values" legislation adopted by the Russian Duma that have drawn international criticism. Russia's infamous law against "homosexual propaganda" won the support of a number of well-known conservative Polish organizations, for example.⁴⁹

Another Russian propaganda strategy in the cultural field is to drive a wedge between Poland and Ukraine by supporting demonstrations that amplify anti-Ukrainian propaganda regarding ethnic conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians in Eastern Ukraine, especially during World War II. Polish and Ukrainian media reported that anti-Ukrainian protests in Poland (as well as in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia) were supported by Russian funds, channeled through

Belarusian businessman Aleksandr Usovski and supplied by the Orthodox Christian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, who also sponsored anti-Ukrainian activities in Donbas.⁵⁰

To counterbalance these state-sponsored initiatives, a group of recent Russian immigrants has started the For a Free Russia association in Warsaw.⁵¹ The foundation aims at uniting the Russian community, sharing democratic values, and promoting informed and unbiased public debate on current events in Russia and relations between Poland and Russia. Their weekend club, *Zavarka*, hosts Russian language and culture lessons for children as well as other cultural events.

Think Tanks

Like other Central European countries, most of Poland's think tank community is strongly rooted in the ethos of democratic transformation, and has consistently supported liberal-democratic values and Poland's membership in NATO and the EU. However, there are some Polish think tanks that serve as instruments of Russian authoritarian influence. One such organization is the European Center for Geopolitical Analysis (ECAG), which was established in 2007 by Mateusz Piskorski, a leader of the pro-Russian *Zmiana* political party. The body presents a controversial pro-Russian narrative known as Eurasianism, which advocates for a conservative Eurasian society with Russia at its center, and which counts Dugin as its most prominent backer. Piskorski and the organization's staff have traveled frequently to Russia and the post-Soviet areas, including Crimea, presenting pro-Russian and anti-Western views.⁵² ECAG has also organized election-monitoring missions in the unrecognized, Russian-backed republics of Abkhazia and Transdniestria, as well as in Nagorno-Karabakh, in an apparent move aimed at conferring legitimacy to the territories, and has undertaken research and other projects backed by authoritarian regimes in Belarus, Libya, and Syria.⁵³ ECAG staffers until recently have been regularly invited to mainstream Polish media to comment on international affairs.

However, in May 2016, Piskorski was detained by Polish prosecutors on suspicions of spying for Russia, and possibly for China. More recently, investigative journalists revealed that ECAG in May 2013 had received a payment of almost €21,000 originating in Russia, but which was laundered through a British company; the payment was for "consulting services," even though ECAG is barred by Polish law from engaging in for-profit activities. The revelations marked one of few cases in which financial support for pro-Kremlin organizations in Poland has been firmly established.⁵⁴

Perhaps more troubling and controversial is the case of the National Center for Security Studies (NCSS), a think tank close to Poland's current defense minister, Antoni Macierewicz. NCSS developed the Territorial Defense (TO) concept, which envisions voluntary military units that support the Polish army in case of a military or terrorist threat. It was revealed that the President of NCSS, Jacek Kotas, a former politician of Law and Justice, had previously worked for a Russian-owned real estate company *Radius*, controlled by a Swiss citizen, Robert Szustowski, who has been doing business with Russia for 20 years. In Poland, *Radius* has been active in the real estate market, and the name of the company has come to public attention in relation to a scandal concerning real estate restitution in Warsaw. Other NCSS experts Grzegorz Kwaśniak and Krzysztof Gaj, who were directly involved in the preparation of the Territorial Defense concept, have in the past made anti-NATO and pro-Putin statements, with Gaj offering explicit approval of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁵ The Territorial Defense has already begun recruiting members from paramilitary groups. It has been reported that some of these members are skeptical of NATO and other Polish alliances with its liberal Western allies, and could easily be infiltrated by Russian special services.⁵⁶

Macierewicz and His Secrets

A number of the trails analyzed in this report lead to Antoni Macierewicz, vice president of the Law and Justice (PiS) party and current defense minister in the PiS government. Macierewicz is one of the most controversial figures in Polish politics and is distrusted by a significant portion of the population.⁵⁷

As defense minister, Macierewicz has taken a number of controversial decisions that the opposition and a number of security experts have denounced as harmful to national security and Poland's relations with its allies. He purged the army of a large number of senior commanders—including many who were key to Poland's ongoing cooperation with NATO—and on one occasion ordered military services to break into a NATO counterintelligence center on the pretext that an officer who worked there had lost his security clearance. He also cancelled a crucial contract for military helicopters, and put on hold the procurement of other military equipment, thereby interrupting the process of modernization of Poland's armed forces. Instead, he focused the ministry's efforts and resources on the creation of Territorial Defense (TO), an army of volunteers whose aim is ostensibly to protect the country in the face of "hybrid" aggression—or nebulous covert actions carried out to support conventional forces—of the type that Russia used to gain a foothold in Crimea.

Many security experts doubt the usefulness of TO for protecting Poland from external military threats, and point out that its statutes allow the formation to be used in case of domestic disturbances—for example, against anti-government protesters. The fact that Territorial Defense units do not report to the Chief of General Staff, as is the case with all other military units, but instead directly to Macierewicz, has given ground to claims that he has created a kind of private militia.

The story of the inception of the Territorial Defense at the NCSS is one of the many trails of investigation into Macierewicz's connections with Russia summed up in Tomasz Piątek's book, *Macierewicz and his Secrets*. Piątek has been investigating these links for more than a year as a journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's biggest liberal newspaper, where he regularly shares the results with his readers. The book, which has become a nationwide bestseller,⁵⁸ offers a detailed analysis of connections between a number of Macierewicz's close collaborators with the Kremlin and pro-Russian groups in Poland; thus far, none of the specific allegations contained in his book or newspapers articles have been investigated or officially denied. On the contrary, Macierewicz ordered military prosecutors to investigate Piątek over claims of insult crimes and making threats against a public official, the latter of which could potentially draw terrorism charges. Macierewicz notably declined to initiate a civil defamation case against Piątek, which would require the defense minister to prove that the allegations are false.⁵⁹

The book describes Macierewicz's contacts as including informers of the communist-era secret police, some of whom maintained links with Russian intelligence agencies long after the fall of the Soviet Union. It suggests a possible Russian connection to the "Waitegate" scandal—in which leaked recordings revealed Civic Platform (PO) politicians making controversial remarks about internal party politics and Poland's foreign relations; the tapes' release in 2014 shook the PO government, and helped pave the way for the PiS victory ▶

in 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections.⁶⁰ Among other things, Piątek traced the ownership of the restaurant where some of the recordings took place to the Radius group, a Russian-controlled company.⁶¹

The book also traces some international contacts of Macierewicz's past and present collaborators. These include Semion Mogilevich, an alleged mobster reportedly linked to both Russian and American organized crime, as well as to Russian counterintelligence services and the Kremlin.⁶²

Despite persistent rumors that Macierewicz will be fired from the government, his position remains strong, as he is highly respected by the more radical members of the PiS electorate due to his informal position as the leader of the Smolensk conspiracy "movement," as well as to the support of influential oligarch and Catholic priest Tadeusz Rydzyk.

After the book's publication, it was revealed by a German newspaper that another of Macierewicz's associates, Bartosz Kownacki, a vice minister of national defense, had traveled to Moscow in 2012 as a member of a right-wing, pro-Putin group of election observers together with Mateusz Piskorski of the European Center for Geopolitical Analysis (ECAG).⁶³ It was also alleged that Kownacki, together with Piskorski, has been involved in the Alliance of European National Movements, which includes a number of far-right and pro-Kremlin parties from the EU. Kownacki has acknowledged his 2012 trip to Moscow, but denied collaboration with Piskorski.⁶⁴

Ordo Iuris is an ultraconservative think tank closely associated with the current Polish government. Its president, Aleksander Stępkowski, a law professor at Warsaw University, served as undersecretary of state in the current government between November 2015 and August 2016, where his duties included leading the dialogue with the Venice Commission, an expert body of the Council of Europe, that investigated controversial, PiS-backed legislation on Poland's Constitutional Tribunal. He was allegedly fired for mismanaging this portfolio, after the Commission issued a very critical assessment of the new legislation. Ordo Iuris came to the attention of the general public when it proposed a law that aimed to radically restrict access to abortions in Poland, and which included jail sentences for women who have abortions and for doctors who perform them. The legislation was ultimately withdrawn in the aftermath of huge protests across Poland.⁶⁵

This defeat notwithstanding, Ordo Iuris remains at the forefront of Poland's conservative revolution. The institute is part of an impressive international network of like-minded organizations, and among other controversial positions has indicated support for the Russian law on so-called homosexual propaganda. Tomasz Piątek of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, who regularly writes about Russian influence in Poland, has described Russian connections of Ordo Iuris,⁶⁶ and has revealed that the Peter Skarga Institute, the institutional founder of Ordo Iuris, is an official Polish patron of the World Congress of Families in Moscow, one of the key instruments of Kremlin efforts to promote conservative ideas globally.⁶⁷

Academia

Polish academics specializing in Russian affairs are generally very critical of Putin's policies and contribute to the broader consensus on this topic in Polish society. However, there are a number of notable exceptions. The Polish Geopolitics Society (PTG)⁶⁸ unites a group of academics who either openly propagate Dugin's Eurasianism, or who stage themselves as "realists" that understand the true significance of geopolitical location. They claim that because of its geographical proximity to Russia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet states should remain part of the Russian sphere of influence, and thus they should not seek closer links with the West. Many of them also are closely associated with the far-right Geopolityka web-portal, which is associated with ECAG, and belong to a closed Facebook group—Geopolityka i Geostrategia, or Geopolitics and Geostrategy—that counts more than 900 members.⁶⁹ The group of administrators includes a number of high-profile academics including Dr. Andrzej Zapałowski of Rzeszów University, Dr. Michał Siudak of Jagiellonian University, and Dr. Leszek Sykulski. The latter initiated graduate studies in geopolitics at the Higher School of Business and Entrepreneurship in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. More importantly, Zapałowski has been a regular lecturer in Polish military academies around the country, not without the permission of the Ministry of Defense.

The previously mentioned Russkiy Mir Foundation, an influential Russian soft-power organization that propagates Kremlin-approved views on history and culture in its Russian-language classes and other programs, has a presence at several Polish universities.⁷⁰ It also gives grants to other Russian language centers including the Polish Association of Russian Language Teachers,⁷¹ and organizes various public events as well as visits to Russia for students, academic lecturers, and scientists.

In addition, many Polish universities have bilateral cooperation agreements with Russian universities—many of which facilitate independent academic cooperation in the spirit of international exchange.⁷² However, these programs, which include language and culture summer schools and study visits to Russia for Polish students and lecturers, are often exploited as a vehicle for state-sponsored propaganda, in particular regarding historical memory and current political affairs, including the annexation of Crimea and the Russian-sponsored war in Donbas. In some cases, the language centers in Poland organize celebrations of Russian national holidays that provide opportunities to present participants with the official Russian version of historical events that serve to justify current Russian policy in Ukraine and the post-Soviet areas, amongst other places.⁷³

According to one expert formerly involved in Polish-Russian dialogue programs, academic cooperation had provided a platform for relatively free exchanges on important Polish-Russian issues at a time when the Russian government was closing down other venues of dialogue, such as independent think tanks and foundations. He posits that in recent years, space that had been created through academic exchanges has too been shrinking, leaving in place only the types of exchanges that are in line with official Kremlin narratives.⁷⁴



CHINA

Polish-Chinese Relations in Historical Context

During the Cold War, Poland and China were both part of the communist bloc. The communist-era Polish People's Republic was politically dependent on Moscow, and followed the Kremlin's line in its bilateral relations with China. The Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s led to the deterioration of mutual relations, although this was gradually recovered following Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in the late 1970s. The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union opened new possibilities in Polish-Chinese relations. These were driven by economic considerations along the lines of the so-called Budapest Principles, which were outlined by then Chinese president Jiang Zemin in 1995.⁷⁵

At the end of the Cold War, Poland's strategic priorities were built upon the desire to integrate with the West. Once this aim was achieved through NATO membership in 1999 and EU membership in 2004, priorities shifted in part toward assuring the strength of transatlantic relations and the U.S. commitment to Europe. In this context, both U.S. president Barack Obama's "pivot to Asia" and his "reset" with Russia were widely viewed in Poland as a threat to transatlantic relations and NATO, and hence to Poland's security in the wake of a resurgent Russia.⁷⁶ At the same time, close relations between Russia and China have been viewed with suspicion. In both cases, the attention paid to China and Chinese foreign policy, including its soft power in Poland, has been secondary to a preoccupation with implications of Russian resurgence.

Polish-Chinese Relations from 2012–2015

In recent years, Polish-Chinese relations have been strongly focused on economic cooperation. In this respect, Poland's 2004 accession to the EU was a turning point, especially with regard to Chinese investment in Poland, which grew quickly after the latter gained access to the EU market of 500 million consumers, growing from \$12 million in 2006 to over \$200 million in 2011, and reaching a record \$536 million in 2016.⁷⁷ However, this is less impressive when compared to Chinese investment in Germany and the United Kingdom, which in 2016 reached \$12 billion and \$9 billion, respectively.⁷⁸ This discrepancy has been pointed out by some Polish media commentators, who note that Chinese investments in Poland are still below expectations and that when they come, they do not always result in job creation.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, China's economic and political presence in Poland and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe is growing. In 2011, Poland and China established a "strategic partnership" with the intention of boosting economic and political ties.⁸⁰ On the 2012 occasion of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to Warsaw, Wen announced the 16+1 format for dialogue between China and Central and Eastern European countries.⁸¹ The establishment of the 16+1 platform was welcomed as the most significant event for Polish-Chinese relations since the end of the Cold War, and was considered a springboard for Chinese public diplomacy.

Additionally, in 2013, Chinese leader Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known variously as the One Belt One Road or Silk Road Initiative, by which China would invest in new and enhanced trade routes between it and dozens of countries, including Poland. The initiative, whose ultimate aim is to create a Chinese-dominated trade network that counters the U.S.-led transatlantic one, is a significant component of Chinese foreign policy. Another important step for the advancement of Polish-Chinese relations was Poland's agreement to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

China's motivations for the development of cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries are political and economic. Given that 11 countries in the region are members of the EU and 12 are NATO members, cultivating political and economic ties in the region could be seen as China's attempt to gain a foothold within these organizations in order to increase Beijing's influence on their decision-making processes. These potential motivations did not go unnoticed in Brussels and Berlin. The PO government, which had prioritized Polish-German relations, decided (according to some analysts) to distance itself from the 16+1 initiative by sending a relatively low-level representative to the Belgrade summit in December 2014.⁸² Nevertheless, Poland's key role in the 16+1 initiative was reflected in the opening of the group's secretariat in Warsaw the following year.⁸³

The PiS government, which over time has distanced itself from both the EU and from Germany, has embraced Polish-Chinese relations. During her visit to China in May 2017, Prime Minister Beata Szydło told journalists that her visit marked the point when China "finally started to pay attention to Poland."⁸⁴

This statement, however factually inaccurate, shows that in view of its growing international isolation, the PiS government is willing to invest in Polish-Chinese relations. The statement was also intended to cover a split within Szydło's government over its policy toward China.⁸⁵ This came to the public's attention in January 2017, when minister Macierewicz blocked the sale of land in the city of Łódź upon which a Chinese company planned to build a key terminal for the Chengdu-Łódź railway, considered an important element of the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2015, Macierewicz had stated his opposition to China's expansion and the Belt and Road Initiative, saying it was an "agreement of Western Europe with Russia and China aiming at the elimination of U.S. influence from Eurasia, and the liquidation of Poland as an independent actor."⁸⁶ Media reported that following Macierewicz's veto, the Chinese cancelled the Łódź terminal project.

The Instruments of China's 'Soft Power' in Poland

China's image in Poland has undergone a significant change in recent years, in parallel with impressive economic growth and the rapidly expanding influence of China in global affairs. However, China's image in Poland still retains elements of its earlier incarnations, namely of

a faraway and rather exotic traditional culture, with all the “orientalist” trappings—alongside the image of totalitarian communism, which can be seen as a kind of common denominator between the Polish and Chinese historical experiences. This latter image has enduring significance, at least for the part of public opinion in Poland that identifies itself with the tradition of democratic opposition to communism. One can say that the different trajectories that Poland and China have taken in recent decades are symbolically expressed in the fact that the Polish parliamentary elections on June 4, 1989, which ended communism in Poland, coincided with the Tiananmen Square massacre, which put an end to pro-Western democracy movements in China. Small groups of Polish activists organize on that day vigils and protests to commemorate the victims of the Tiananmen atrocity. In June 2013, then speaker of parliament Ewa Kopacz came under criticism for traveling to Beijing with other deputies on a trade mission during the week of June 4. In response, Kopacz promised to address the issue of human rights in China while there.⁸⁷ The following year, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the massacre, a group of prominent NGOs wrote an open letter urging the Chinese government to condemn the events.⁸⁸ Later, during the 2016 visit of Xi Jinping to Warsaw, a group of activists gathered outside Xi’s hotel to protest human rights abuses in China.⁸⁹ In previous years, there were also protests in Poland concerning the occupation of Tibet and repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

Over the past decades, China’s authoritarian system of government and its human rights transgressions have been increasingly overshadowed by a perception of the country as an economic powerhouse likely to displace the U.S. as the world’s leading economy.

However, over the past decades, China’s authoritarian system of government and its human rights transgressions have been increasingly overshadowed by a perception of the country as an economic powerhouse likely to displace the U.S. as the world’s leading economy. This shift has been particularly pronounced since the 2008 financial crisis, which shook the public’s confidence in both American and European models of economic governance. By contrast, many commentators pointed to what they saw as China’s long-term strategic management of its economy, which they believed allowed China to maintain strong economic growth at a time when most of the Western world was plunged into recession. In a parallel development, controversies over the 2003 U.S. intervention in Iraq have led to

skepticism in Poland about the merits of democracy promotion as a viable objective of foreign policy. Thus, the narratives about China in the Polish media have shifted from China’s lack of progress in democratization to its impressive growth and the model of “state-driven” market economy, which has been credited for its success. Meanwhile, the visible presence of Chinese companies and products may also contribute to a more positive view of China in Poland.⁹⁰

The aim of China’s soft power in Poland does not seem to differ from its primary global aim: to present China as an economically successful, friendly power that cooperates with its partners on a win-win basis, and which does not seek to impose its values on its trade partners. A secondary aim is to legitimize the undemocratic Chinese regime as effective in providing economic prosperity for the Chinese people, as well as political stability and predictability in an uncertain world. These aims and narratives became notably available for public consumption during Xi’s visit to Poland in June 2016. On this occasion, copies of the state-run, English-language *China Daily* newspaper were distributed free of charge in central Warsaw, and many newsstands carried large advertisements for Xi’s book, *The Governance of China*. The book has since been permanently available at the Warsaw airport, displayed on a separate case among a number of

books on Chinese culture, which are mostly in Polish and are devoted to topics including tea, the Chinese calendar, and the arts of gardening and embroidery.

However, in the Polish political reality, the promotion of the idea that an undemocratic country can develop as well as, or even better than, a democratic one can have an important demonstration effect, especially during a time when Poland is experiencing a period of democratic backsliding. The section that follows will explore the ways in which the promotion of the Chinese model of government could contribute to a weakening of democratic values in Poland.

Media

The presentation of China and Polish-Chinese relations in mainstream media is almost entirely focused on economic cooperation. While independent media have pointed out that some Chinese-Polish cooperation initiatives have failed to deliver on bright economic promises, in principle they almost unanimously support such cooperation as an opportunity that Poland should not miss.⁹¹ The government-controlled public media are uniformly enthusiastic about current economic cooperation and future such projects.⁹²

The direct presence of Chinese media in Poland is limited, although China Radio International is accessible in the Polish language, and has its own website and Facebook site in Polish. There is also a limited pool in Poland of media commentators and experts on China. However, the few who are active tend to focus on economic issues, and rarely scrutinize the country's authoritarian government or the human rights violations it presides over. On some occasions, the experts who endorse the policies of the Chinese government are confronted by human rights activists, but the latter are in a disadvantaged position as they rarely have detailed knowledge of China. A number of Polish experts endorse the arguments of official Chinese propaganda, namely—that Chinese and European people have different definitions of democracy and human rights—and contend that the West should not seek to impose its “ethnocentric” views on ancient civilizations such as the Chinese. Krzysztof Gawlikowski, a professor at the Institute of Political Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences, is perhaps the most prominent Polish academic to make this argument. He maintains in his books and opinion articles that democracy is just one of many possible political systems, and should not be promoted as a universal model of governance. He is critical of democracy promotion, framing such efforts in the context of the Iraq War, as well as of the Polish “former dissidents” who became part of the foreign policy establishment after 1989, for making democracy promotion part of Poland's foreign policy agenda.⁹³

One of the few critical experts is Krzysztof Łoziński, who authored a number of books on Asia and a number of articles on the subject for *Gazeta Wyborcza*. He cites as his reason for writing a book on the Chinese government's human rights abuses the need to challenge the “fascination of media experts” with the Chinese approach to modernization, which combines authoritarianism and strong economic growth. Łoziński, a democracy activist during the communist era, has recently become more visible to the general public as a cofounder and the current chairperson of the Committee for the Defense of Democracy, a grassroots organization that was established in December 2015 to protest the PiS government's assault on the Constitutional Tribunal, and has become a prominent player in antigovernment protests since then.⁹⁴

A more direct influence of Chinese soft-power efforts on Polish debates on democracy and economic governance can be observed when invited experts promote the Chinese model of

state capitalism as a good example for Poland to follow. Recently, this has been seen in the popularity of Song Hongbing in right-wing pro-government media. He is usually presented as world-class economist, who predicted (so it is claimed) the 2008 world financial crisis. His book, with the English title *Currency Wars*, was translated into Polish and advertised as a bestseller in China.⁹⁵ The author is critical of the U.S.-led model of globalization, and of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada, as well as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the U.S., and is enthusiastic about China's Belt and Road Initiative. In the US, the book has been criticized as promoting anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.⁹⁶ Hongbing shared his views in Polish media and in a recent lecture sponsored by the Confucius Institute at Wrocław University.⁹⁷ Hongbing's ideas are in line with the stated PiS priority of changing the Polish model of development from one driven by foreign investment and EU funds, to one driven by internal investment and trade expansion, which helps to explain his popularity in right-wing media.⁹⁸ His ideas were also promoted in a conference organized in the Polish parliament, hosted by a lawmaker from the antiestablishment Kukiz'15 party, Jacek Wilk.⁹⁹ The media sponsor was a right-wing website *Opcja na prawo* [Right Option] that specializes in antiglobalization and anticapitalist publications.¹⁰⁰ Hongbing's ideas are also warmly received by some pro-Russian websites.¹⁰¹

The story of Hongbing's warm reception in Poland connects far-right media, populist politicians, conspiracy theories websites, and official Chinese soft power outlets (Confucius Institutes). Therefore, it is an excellent example of the circulation of the idea that the "Chinese model" is a viable alternative to Western-style capitalism.



Culture

Among other goals, Chinese soft power aims to amplify existing perceptions of China as an ancient, anodyne culture. This perception aligns with the Chinese government's concept of win-win cooperation, by which China does not threaten anyone's interests, nor would it attempt to "impose" its norms on others (in contrast to how it views Western support for democracy). Thus, the image of a speedily developing economic superpower finds its counterbalance in

cultural events projecting images of tranquility and benevolence. Such initiatives are supported by the Chinese government as well as by private companies, both Chinese and Polish. Among them are the recent cultural programs in the Royal Baths Park in Warsaw, including renovations to Chinese Avenue, a cherished part of Warsaw's historical heritage where some Chinese artifacts were housed in the late eighteenth century. In 2012 Chinese lanterns were placed among one of the key paths in the park, leading up to the Royal Palace. Media reported that the establishment of the Chinese path cost 2 million Polish zlotys (approximately \$500,000 USD) and that the renovations were sponsored by the China Minmetals Corporation and KGHM Polska Miedź SA, through the SINOPOL Foundation for Polish-Chinese Economic and Cultural Cooperation.¹⁰² The Chinese section of the park was expanded in 2016, again with the support of the SINOPOL Foundation. A Chinese lantern festival developed with SINOPOL's support has taken place in the park each year since 2012.

The SINOPOL Foundation also publishes *Bursztyn*, a cultural magazine, and promotes the Chinese city of Chengdu and the Sichuan province as vacation destinations.¹⁰³ Although it is not mentioned on SINOPOL's website, Chengdu is the starting point for the aforementioned railway connection to the city of Łódź, reflecting an alignment of culture promotion, business promotion, and the overall political vision of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Academia

Like many other countries, China promotes its language and cultural traditions abroad, with its Confucius Institutes (CIs) taking the lead role in projecting this kind of soft power. Such institutes exist at five locations in Poland: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; Gdańsk University; the University of Wrocław; Jagiellonian University in Kraków, where Poland's first CI was established in 2006; and in Opole. The institutes offer Chinese language courses to both university students and outsiders, including high-school students and businesspeople; host conferences and lectures on China, exhibitions, film screenings, and other cultural events; and offer scholarships and academic exchanges. Some CI lectures and conferences cover potentially sensitive issues, such as Tibet, but most seem rather innocuous to a casual observer.¹⁰⁴ The Confucius Institute in Opole has a less academic and more probusiness focus that falls largely within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is also strongly present in the agendas of other institutes. The Belt and Road Initiative seems to give all these academic and cultural activities and institutions a coherence and sense of purpose, which at least in principle, allows them to have a "critical mass" effect by which they may be perceived as much greater than the sum of their parts.

In Warsaw, the plan to establish a Confucius Institute prompted student protests, at which the proposed institute was denounced by a group of protesters as a threat to academic freedom. They mobilized through a Facebook group, which seems inactive but at some point had gathered around 200 supporters.¹⁰⁵ The protesters, who organized via Facebook, expressed concern that Confucius Institutes are a propaganda tool of the Chinese government, claiming that one of the aims of CIs is to block politically sensitive issues, such as the Tiananmen Square massacre, repression in Tibet, or the status of Taiwan, from being discussed in academia. One of the organizers of the protests asked if it would be possible for Warsaw University to host a meeting with the Dalai Lama, as has happened in the past, after the CI is established there.¹⁰⁶ These student protests may have delayed, but not stopped, the establishment of CI in Warsaw, which is due to open in 2017.

Another important development in Poland is the Sino-Polish university consortium, which launched in 2017 and consists of 23 mainly technical academic centers located in both countries. According to the *China Daily*, its goal is to “increase educational cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries, in line with the objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative.”¹⁰⁷ It is the first such educational consortium in the world with a specific focus on the development of the BRI. Polish members of the consortium will establish “Confucius classrooms”—CIs—to teach Chinese to their students. The Polish and Chinese centers will also undertake joint research projects under the umbrella of the BRI, and will seek grants to that purpose.¹⁰⁸

Think Tanks

Poland’s best-known think tank specializing in research on China is the Center for Poland-Asia Studies (CSPA).¹⁰⁹ The Center was established in 2008 by Radostaw Pyffel, who had previously spent time studying in China, where he learned Chinese. Most of its researchers are also graduates of Chinese universities. According to one expert, the center receives some funding from the Chinese government, although this is not acknowledged on its website, where it claims that financial support comes from individual donors.¹¹⁰ The center’s website offers comments, in Polish, on political developments in Asia, with a special focus on China. The general tone of commentaries about Chinese affairs is seldom critical, and is sometimes laudatory; in a commentary on the 2017 BRI summit in Beijing, a CPSA expert called an address by Xi Jinping “captivating.” On the contrary, U.S. policies toward Asia and U.S. tensions with China are usually framed in a critical light, with the U.S. presented as an antagonist. The center was rather critical of the foreign policy of the previous PO government, while it is more favorably disposed towards the pro-China policies of Beata Szydło’s cabinet. In 2016, the government announced that Pyffel, CPSA’s founder, had been appointed as a deputy director of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and his CPSA colleague Krzysztof Iwanek appointed as the director of the Center for Asian Studies at the National Defense Academy.¹¹¹

As noted previously, part of the 16+1 initiative is the development of people-to-people contacts, including with those at think tanks. Like academics, think tank professionals are invited to join study visits to China. One participant of such a visit, who participated along with two dozen think tank representatives and NGO activists, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe, said the program was well funded and carefully planned. This particular study visit targeted young experts and activists who were actively sought after by organizers who encouraged them to apply. When viewed against the limited exchange and study opportunities for young researchers from Central and Eastern Europe afforded by established democracies, this proactive approach targeting the future generation of activists and scholars may be quite effective in encouraging interest in China, as well as certain Chinese narratives, among such young professionals.¹¹²

According to this participant, the study visit presented participants with the image of an ultramodern, rapidly developing, and well-governed China, without social conflicts and with peaceful intentions toward the rest of the world. However, the participants had extremely limited opportunities to see anything or talk to anyone not vetted by their hosts, and the group moved around with official police assistance. A farewell presentation delivered by a prominent member of the Chinese Communist Party assured the participants of Chinese benevolence and the benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative, repeatedly contrasting the Chinese model with what he presented as aggressive U.S. policies and an American desire to impose its values on other countries.¹¹³

Conclusions: The Impact of Russian and Chinese Authoritarian Influence on Poland's Democracy

This report describes in some detail the tools and impact of Russian and Chinese soft power on Poland's democracy, showing that while Chinese soft power is focused on promoting the image of China as an ultramodern, dynamic, and benevolent global power, Russian propaganda consists of mostly negative narratives: anti-American, anti-EU, and anti-Ukrainian. While the Chinese government promotes tranquil visions of traditional Chinese culture, Russian propaganda is focused on promoting a brand of "traditional" "conservative" values offered as an antidote to the "decadence" of Western liberal democracies. This choice of narratives makes Russian propaganda effective in Poland, despite a historical Polish skepticism of anything coming from Russia. These themes align very well with the ideology of the present PiS government, which uses some of the same narratives, despite its ostensibly anti-Putin and anti-Russian stance. In similar fashion, the Chinese narrative on the redundancy of democracy for economic development, prosperity, and effective governance under a one-party system chimes in well with the authoritarian leanings of the government in Warsaw.

While it is impossible to ascertain to what extent democratic setbacks in Poland are linked to the influence of these two authoritarian powers, it is clear that the decline of democratic norms in Poland and its consequent marginalization within the EU—which has repeatedly criticized the PiS government's reforms to the media sector and judiciary, and which has now opened infringement proceedings against Poland over the latter—is very much in line with the interests of Russia.¹¹⁴ Weakening Poland's ties with its democratic partners is also arguably part of the Chinese agenda. Both have similar aims in the region generally, as a disunited Europe will not be able to defend its interests and values vis-à-vis an autocratic superpower. Even if it cannot be proven that Russian and Chinese soft power is responsible for the decline of trust in liberal democracy in Poland, the current crisis makes Poland open and vulnerable to authoritarian influence from both.¹¹⁵

In spite of deep political and ideological divisions in Poland, there is a sort of consensus that the current Russian resurgence, as exemplified by both its hard-power displays in Ukraine and Syria, and its soft-power efforts to undermine the liberal-democratic consensus in the West, poses a threat to Poland. However, there are heated disagreements about how to contain this threat, and even deeper divisions over the effectiveness of the current and previous governments in countering it. There is broad consensus that NATO remains essential to Poland's security. While EU membership remains popular in Poland, there is no consensus as to what the EU's role is with regard to national security. The previous PO government considered multilateralism a crucial framework for the containment of Russia, while the current PiS government seems to have little faith in supranational institutions, and prefers to build regional alliances of like-minded (or similarly threatened) countries, such as The Three Seas Initiative.¹¹⁶ It also sees the U.S. as a key partner in terms of hard security.

While direct Russian propaganda seems limited to political fringes, some Kremlin-sponsored narratives have been successful in penetrating mainstream political discourse. In spite of the belief that Poland is relatively resilient to Russian propaganda, this report notes several ways in which certain ideas and policies, which were once marginal for Polish politics, have become more and more widespread and how a significant part of the opinion-making elites are eager to discuss alternatives to Poland's pro-European and pro-democratic orientation, which were part of the post-1989 consensus. The current PiS government not only encourages right-wing

extremism—a key entry point of pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation—but also actively undermines democratic standards.¹¹⁷ Preventing Poland’s democratic backsliding by strengthening societal resilience to authoritarian rhetoric and policies, as well as investing in rebuilding the weakened transatlantic links with Polish civil and political society, should be seen as priorities for the democratic international community concerned about the spread of authoritarian influence in Europe and beyond.

The views expressed in this paper represent the opinions and analysis of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

NOTES

¹ Editor’s note: Although the overview essay to this report uses the term “sharp power” to characterize the more malign and manipulative aspects of authoritarian influence, the authors of the individual country reports instead generally use the broader term “soft power.” In the country studies, the authors were asked to inventory and analyze the methods of authoritarian influence applied by China and Russia in democratic settings. The concept of “sharp power” introduced in the overview essay is an outgrowth of their comparative findings.

² Freedom House’s 2017 *Nations in Transit* report identifies downward trends in all of the categories it evaluates, with Poland’s overall score changing from 2.18 in the 2014 report to 2.57 in the 2017 report. (The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.) The steepest declines were observed in Poland’s judicial framework and independence, “due to the far-reaching reform of the Constitutional Tribunal that curbed its ability to function as an effective oversight body, thereby threatening rule of law in Poland,” and in democratic governance, “due to Poland’s descent into total political polarization and lack of consensual decision-making, as well as passing laws without adequate consultation with civil society or the parliament and informal control over political processes.” Piotr Arak and Andrzej Bobiński, *Nations in Transit 2017: The False Promise of Populism—Poland* (Freedom House, April 2017), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/poland>.

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⁸ Poland underwent three territorial divisions (1772, 1793, 1795) perpetrated by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, by which the country’s size progressively diminished until the state of Poland ceased to exist.

⁹ One should add that the legacy of the Solidarity movement remains a fiercely contested political issue and contributes to the current deep political polarization. For a broader discussion of the lasting importance of historical relations between Poland and Russia (as well as Ukraine), Jacek Kucharczyk and Aleksander Fuksiewicz, “The Long Shadow of the Kremlin: Polish Domestic Reactions to the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States’ Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, eds. Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Mesežnikov (Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016), 102–14.

¹⁰ In 2005–2007, Poland was ruled by a PiS-led coalition of three populist and Euroskeptic parties, which strained the country’s relations with Brussels and key EU member states. When the coalition collapsed due to internal conflicts, the PO party defeated PiS. Both in its electoral platform and later on, the PO-led government sought to make European integration central to Poland’s foreign and domestic political agenda.

¹¹ Agnieszka Łada and Łukasz Wenerski, “Back to Basics? Polish Foreign Policy and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States’ Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, eds. Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Mesežnikov (Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016), 155–29.

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- ¹⁰¹ "Song Hongbing wezwał bankierów na pojedynek" [Song Hongbing challenges bankers to a duel], *Polski Portal Informacyjny Geopolityka* Robert Brzoza, 28 April 2016, <https://geopolityka.robertbrzoza.pl/finansjera/ekonomia-zachodu-dolar-derywaty-fed-i-banki-oczami-chin/>.
- ¹⁰² "Rewitalizacja Alei Chińskiej" [Revitalization of the Chinese path], *Sinopol Foundation*, <http://sinopol.pl/pl/kultura/aleja-chinska>.
- ¹⁰³ *Sinopol Foundation*, <http://sinopol.pl/>.
- ¹⁰⁴ "Najbliższe konferencje w Instytucie Konfucjusza," [Upcoming Conferences at the Confucius Institute], *Confucius Institute at the Jagiellonian University*, www.instytutkonfucjusza.uj.edu.pl/nauka/konferencje-naukowe.
- ¹⁰⁵ Hana Umeda, "NIE dla Instytutu Konfucjusza przy UW—piszemy maile do rektora!" [NO to the Confucius Institute at the University of Warsaw—our emails to the rector], Facebook, www.facebook.com/events/825474787529844/?acontext=%7B%22ref%22%3A%22106%22%2C%22action_history%22%3A%22null%22%7D.
- ¹⁰⁶ Wojciech Karpieszuk, "Instytut Konfucjusza. Chiny wchodzą na Uniwersytet Warszawski" [Confucius Institute. China enters Warsaw University], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 May 2015, http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34862,17861079,Instytut_Konfucjusza__Chiny_wchodza_na_Uniwersytet.html.
- ¹⁰⁷ Zhao Xinying, "Sino-Polish University Consortium Launches," *China Daily*, 21 March 2017, www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn_eu/2017-03/21/content_28629073.htm?from=timeline&isappinstalled=0.
- ¹⁰⁸ "Powstało polsko-chińskie konsorcjum akademickie 'One Belt One Road'" [New Polish-Chinese academic consortium "One Belt One Road"], *Perspektywy*, www.perspektywy.pl/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3447:powstalo-polsko-chinskie-konsorcjum-akademickie-one-belt-one-road&catid=24&Itemid=119.

- ¹⁰⁹ The Center for Poland–Asia Studies, www.polska-azja.pl/.
- ¹¹⁰ Interview with an anonymous expert, April 2017.
- ¹¹¹ “Polish Academic Appointed Deputy Head of AIIB,” Radio Poland, 19 July 2016, www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/262580,Polish-academic-appointed-deputy-head-of-AIIB; “CSPA, czyli impossible is nothing—Radosław Pyffel Alternate Director w Azjatyckim Banku Inwestycji Infrastrukturalnych (AIIB)!” [CSPA, impossible is nothing—Radosław Pyffel Alternate Director of the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank] CSPA, 18 July 2016, www.polska-azja.pl/cspa-czyli-impossible-is-nothing-radoslaw-pyffel-alternate-director-w-azjatyckim-banku-inwestycji-infrastrukturalnych-aiib/.
- ¹¹² It is interesting to contrast this initiative with the current limited opportunities for young experts and activists to undertake study visits in the U.S. To the author’s knowledge, the only existing program of this kind available for Polish activists is run by the German Marshall Fund on a highly competitive basis. Some applicants described the recruitment process as “beauty contests,” and said they were discouraged from applying again. The Chinese initiative, on the other hand, invited preselected candidates, which seems to be a much more effective recruitment procedure from the perspective of the applicants.
- ¹¹³ Interview with an anonymous expert, October 2016.
- ¹¹⁴ Quentin Ariès, “Brussels Sets Clock Ticking Again in Showdown with Poland,” *Politico*, 29 July 2017, www.politico.eu/article/poland-rule-of-law-brussels-sets-clock-ticking-again-in-showdown/.
- ¹¹⁵ See Ewa Siedlecka, “PiS chce zrobić z Polski Chiny Europy. Polacy wyżej cenią dobra materialne niż demokrację” [Law and Justice wants to turn Poland into the China of Europe], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4 November 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,22602347,pis-chce-zrobic-z-polski-chiny-europy-polacy-blisko.html>.
- ¹¹⁶ Agnieszka Łada, *Poland in Europe—Regional Leader or Outlier? Poland’s European Policy in View of the Changes on the Continent* (Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2017), www.isp.org.pl/site.php?id=1&pub=935&lang=2.
- ¹¹⁷ Tim Hume, “Poland’s Populist Government Let Far-Right Extremism Explode into the Mainstream,” *Vice News*, 9 May 2017, <https://news.vice.com/story/poland-populist-government-far-right-extremism>.



Testing Democratic Resolve in Slovakia

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This study examines the soft power activities of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China as they relate to Slovakia. The “soft power” mechanisms² of particular states should be examined in a number of contexts, including the nature of the state's political regime; the hierarchy of foreign-policy priorities of that state and the place that soft power promotion occupies in this hierarchy; the nature of bilateral relations between the promoter and the target of soft power; and the internal conditions in the target country.

Russia and China are non-free states with nondemocratic political regimes whose actions are characterized by the illiberal exercise of power. Both are key international players: Each holds the status of permanent member of the UN Security Council, and each is a nuclear power with specific geopolitical interests accompanied by assertive or even aggressive foreign policies that are marked by expansionist practices and rhetoric. To a certain degree, these factors have prompted Russia and China to embrace similar forms of soft power strategies.

At the same time, there are important differences between Russian- and Chinese-style soft power. With regard to Slovakia in particular, these differences spring from the countries' historic relationships with Central Europe and Slovakia, and their objectives in the region. Differences between Russia's and China's respective roles in international trade relations should be taken into account, as should the proportion and manner of their participation in the international division of labor, which affects the interactions of each with the outer world.

Slovakia has its own set of factors that shape its relations with foreign states. It is a democratic country that has completed the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. It is a member of the EU and of NATO, and its foreign policy and bilateral relations with other

international players are influenced by its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Since both Russia and China, as nondemocratic states, act as rivals of the Euro-Atlantic community (though often in different ways), their relations with Slovakia can hardly be based on close partnerships or alliances. However, the situation at a given time can play an important role acting in favor of, or against, the deepening and broadening of cooperation.

Russian state-sponsored and pro-government media, which monopolize information inside Russia and dominate the media market for Russian-speaking communities abroad, represent a pivotal organizational element of the Russian system for exerting soft power.

RUSSIA

Ideological Constructs Behind the Russian Concept of Soft Power

Russia's soft-power efforts rely on an ideological arsenal of narratives that correspond to the main lines of Russian foreign policy. These narratives include certain interpretations of historical events, the circumstances of current developments in different regions of the world, and the actions of individual states. They include, for instance, the assessment of Russia's historical role during events of the twentieth century, especially during the Second World War (liberation of Europe from fascism and Nazism), Russia's exceptional ties with the Slavic nations, or Russia's policy toward and recent events concerning Ukraine.

One important line in the promotion of Russia's influence in Central Europe is support for social conservatism and "traditional values." This narrative presents Russia's moral superiority over the "decadent" West, and resonates with the reactionary and illiberal agendas of some fringe social and political movements, as well as with some segments of the nationalist and conservative establishment that oscillate around the edge of the political mainstream.³ This soft power strategy was recently described in the conceptual document *Strategy for Russia. Russian Foreign Policy: The End of the 2010s—Beginning of the 2020s*, released in 2016 by the Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP).

SVOP serves as a reservoir of policy proposals for the leadership of the Russian state. The document argues that Russia offers an alternative set of values, which are drawn from the past and emphasize "state sovereignty; national dignity; noninterference into internal affairs [of foreign countries]; reliance on traditional social, personal, and family values; support for religion; [and] denial of militant secularism."⁴

Russian state-sponsored and pro-government media, which monopolize information inside Russia and dominate the media market for Russian-speaking communities abroad, represent a pivotal organizational element of the Russian system for exerting soft power.⁵ However, soft power is exerted not only by state-sponsored and pro-government media, but also by specialized Russian organizations active in scientific, professional, and cultural areas. These include a variety of agencies, institutes, funds, foundations, and associations created by the Russian state. These organizations are based in Russia, but some have branches abroad, including in EU member states.⁶

Russian Organizations Operating in Slovakia

A number of Russian organizations are active in Slovakia's cultural and scientific scenes. While some are affiliated with Russian government agencies or receive funding directly from the Russian state, others operate as nongovernmental organizations but are separated by only one degree from the Russian government, and conduct activities that support the objectives of the Russian government's foreign policy agenda.

ORGANIZATION NAME	TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	ACTIVITIES
Rossotrudnichestvo	State-sponsored institution	Funds Russian cultural organizations
Russian Center of Science and Culture (RCSC)	Cultural center (affiliated with the Russian embassy in Slovakia)	Hosts cultural events and marks historical anniversaries
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)	Postgraduate education and research institute (part of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs)	Sends Russian experts to conferences in Slovakia
Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund	Foundation	Sends Russian experts to conferences in Slovakia
Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI)	State research institute	Sends Russian experts to conferences in Slovakia
International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC)	Association	Connects with associations of ethnic Russians living in Slovakia
Valdai Discussion Club	Russian president's discussion forum	Invites Slovak participants to gatherings in Russia
Russkiy Mir Foundation	Foundation	Sponsors cultural events and conferences in Slovakia

The Historical, Political, and Cultural Roots of Russia's Influence in Slovakia

Slovaks' perceptions of Russia are shaped by the complex historical, political, and cultural relationship between the two countries. On the one hand, there are political and social actors in contemporary Slovakia who, in part by drawing on linguistic and cultural affinities with Russia, as well as on the idea of Russia as a protector of small Slavic nations from hostile forces, advocate for stronger Slovak-Russian relations. However, the negative experiences of Slovakia's relationship with the USSR after World War II, and more recently, Russia's resistance to Slovakia's decision to join NATO and the EU following the collapse of communism, give credence to pro-Western political and intellectual circles that are critical of Russia.

Recent opinion polls have shown that Slovaks are less critical of Russia and less pro-American than are Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles.⁷ Additionally, the 2017 *Vulnerability Index*,⁸ produced by the Bratislava-based GLOBSEC Policy Institute with other think tanks from the Visegrád 4 countries, surveyed the extent of each Visegrád country's vulnerability to subversive foreign—in this case, Russian—influence; it ranked Slovakia the second most vulnerable, after Hungary. The survey's results suggested a reluctance among many Slovaks to align with either Russia or the West, instead preferring an “in-between” position. This reflects persisting geopolitical ideas about Slovakia as a bridge between East and West, and about neutrality as an option for foreign

policy orientation. The survey also found a lack of effective state countermeasures to hostile foreign influences. The *Vulnerability Index's* findings on Slovakia would seem to indicate Slovaks' underestimation of the existent risks of Russian state subversion, and a careless approach of Slovak institutions toward the issue.⁹ This provides Russia with fertile ground upon which to employ its tools of influence.

Indoctrination via the spread of Russian narratives through instruments of Russian influence is harmful for the value orientations of the population—it can weaken adherence to democratic values, decrease trust in the democratic system, and indirectly strengthen the positions of antisystem, extremist, Europhobic, and populist political forces.

Why is Slovakia so vulnerable in the areas in which Russia uses soft power tools in order to reach its goals? A significant factor is a historical Russophilia in Slovakia. In a country with a predominantly ethnic Slavic population, Slovak sociopolitical and intellectual circles have traditionally held the view that Slovakia maintains a special relationship with Russia on the basis of linguistic and cultural closeness. Additionally, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these circles imagined Russia as a defender of small Slavic nations in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe from nations that were considered their historical enemies or oppressors, including Germans, Hungarians, and Turks. This narrative is still relevant in the country's public discourse in the twenty-first century. It is often used by opinion-shaping figures, including politicians and public intellectuals, and is shared by certain segments of the population. Given the close historical relationship between Slovakia and Russia, Russophilia continues to have a significant presence within Slovakia's domestic political and cultural discourse.

Historical Events Shaping Modern Slovakia–Russia Relations:

1914–18	1917	1939–45	1944	1948	1968–91	1989	1993	2004
World War I	The Communist Revolution in Russia	World War II	Slovak National Uprising	Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia	Prague Spring, USSR Invasion of Czechoslovakia, and Soviet Occupation	Collapse of Communism	Foundation of the Slovak Republic	EU and NATO Membership for Slovakia

Moreover, historical personalities who represented favorable attitudes toward the Russian state can still be found today throughout Slovakia's national cultural landscape.¹⁰ Among them is the nineteenth-century thinker Ľudovít Štúr, the codifier of the modern Slovak language and a proponent of the Russophile pan-Slavic concept in Slovakia, who is considered a formative influence on the linguistic and cultural identity of the Slovak nation. In his work *Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti* (Slavdom and the World of the Future), published in Russia in 1867, he concluded that the optimal and only meaningful option for all Slavs—including Slovaks, who in the nineteenth century did not have their own independent state—was unification with Russia and the accompanying dissolution of Slovak identity within the Russian nation. This involved the adoption of the Russian language and the conversion of all Slavs to Orthodox Christianity. Štúr's views have been cited frequently by others over time who promote convergence with Russia.¹¹ It is a paradox that Štúr—who during his life and more than century and a half after

his death is considered the epitome of Slovaks' efforts to sustain their independent national existence—proposed for his nation a solution which, if implemented, would mean its gradual disappearance as a separate ethnic entity with a specific language, culture, and other historically inherited characteristics. The state of affairs nowadays is, however, absolutely different: Slovakia is an independent democratic state, a free society, and an active part of Europe's multinational democratic community.

Attitudes toward Russia and Russians are also affected by the complicated social experience of Slovakia's population after World War II, when a communist regime backed by the Soviet Union took power in Czechoslovakia. Under this regime, the Slovak population benefited from a modernization process that equalized socioeconomic inequalities between the Czech and Slovak regions, somewhat softening the resentment of the Slovak population for being subjected to an undemocratic regime imposed from outside the country.

The Basic Framework of Bilateral Slovak-Russian Relations

Being an EU and NATO member state, Slovakia generally engages with Russia on a multilateral level, with the influence of these supranational bodies shaping the framework of Slovakia's cooperation in particular areas. However, Prime Minister Robert Fico has signaled an openness to developing deeper relations with Russia—particularly through economic and energy partnerships—on a bilateral basis if such opportunities emerge.

Slovak-Russian bilateral relations since 1993 have been dependent on the varying foreign-policy approaches of the dominant political forces in each; Slovakia's energy dependence on Russia has also played a notable role. Political parties that promoted Slovakia's pro-Western orientation, represented by its eventual accession to NATO and the EU, tried to build Slovak-Russian relations in a manner that would not complicate or negatively affect implementation of this basic pro-Western course. Essentially, these parties tried to separate economic cooperation with Russia on the one hand from the main priorities of a pro-Western political agenda on the other, in order to sidestep ideological differences and minimize their possible impact on domestic political development. Parties that were not the main drivers of the country's pro-Western line handled bilateral relations with Russia in a manner that—as they argued—did not contravene Slovakia's overall pro-Western course. They promoted, however, the unsustainable idea of participation in Euro-Atlantic integration and friendship with the Russian Federation.

This latter attitude was represented, and still is represented, by Fico's Direction–Social Democracy (Smer–SD) party. While Smer–SD representatives have characterized this approach as a sign of pragmatism, it is in fact inconsistent, and in its basic points unrealistic. It underestimates the fact that the Russian side always sought to prevent the deeper integration of former communist countries in Central Europe, including Slovakia, into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

During the administration of populist Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar (1994–98) Slovakia effectively disqualified itself from joining the EU and NATO due to growing autocratic tendencies and internal political instability. Russia welcomed this development because it precluded Slovakia's closer cooperation with the West. In contrast to the reforms being implemented elsewhere in Central Europe, Mečiar's use of state media for propaganda, corrupt privatization ploys, and authoritarian political practices made Slovakia more closely resemble Russia than a Euro-Atlantic aspirant.¹²

Two important events that have influenced the Slovak-Russian relationship in recent years are Russia's annexation of Crimea, part of Ukraine's territory, and the Russian-inspired war in eastern Ukraine. As an EU member state, Slovakia abides by the common policy of sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia in response to its aggression. However, Prime Minister Fico many times has expressed support for lifting them.¹³ During an August 2016 visit to Moscow—just weeks after the EU voted to renew sanctions against Russia—Fico told Russian president Vladimir Putin that he did not see any reason for decreasing trade between Russia and Slovakia.¹⁴

A new element in bilateral Slovak-Russian relations that Slovak political actors should take into account when they define their approach to Russia is the recent rise of populist and extremist political forces, directly or indirectly supported by Russia, and the spread of toxic content via “alternative” pro-Russian media and social networks. The right-wing, neofascist People's Party—Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) grouping, which won representation in the Slovak parliament in 2016, expresses clearly pro-Russian foreign policy stances combined with fierce anti-EU and anti-NATO views. Formations such as ĽSNS became an unexpected—albeit problematic—ally of Russia on Slovakia's domestic political scene.

The Russian Community in Slovakia

Persons of Russian origin constitute a natural audience targeted by Russian soft power or propaganda tools. Due to historical circumstances in some countries, such as the Baltic states and Germany, this part of the population is relatively robust, and allows Russia some opportunity to transmit information through the Russian minority to a country's broader society. However, Slovakia's Russian population—meaning persons of Russian origin with Slovak citizenship, citizens of the Russian Federation living in Slovakia, as well as ethnic Russians with citizenship of other states—is very small, comprising 0.1% of the country's total population of 5.4 million.¹⁵ According to Slovakia's 2011 census, 1,997 ethnic Russians lived in Slovakia.¹⁶ The number of Russian citizens with permanent residence in the Slovak Republic in 2015 was 3,532.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Russian actors do try to engage this population, both on an individual and organizational level. Presumably, there are considerations behind these efforts, such as that in smaller countries like Slovakia, even a small number of people and organizations can make a meaningful impact. This is relevant not only for ethnic minority organizations, but also for other types of associations and initiatives.

One organization that presents itself as a representative of ethnic Russians living in the Slovak Republic is the Union of Russians in Slovakia (ZRS),¹⁸ which has been registered as a civic association with the Slovak Ministry of Interior since 1997 and counts among its early achievements a successful drive to see Russians formally recognized as an ethnic minority in Slovakia.¹⁹ It is a member of the International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC), a grouping established by the Russian government in 2001.²⁰ In 2003, the Slovak Government Council for Ethnic Minorities recognized ZRS as a representative of Russians in Slovakia, and thus ethnic Russians were officially counted by the state as one of Slovakia's ethnic minorities. ZRS consists of eight formally independent regional organizations of “compatriots” (expats) that operate under different names.²¹ All Russian expatriate organizations in Slovakia cooperate closely with ZRS, even those which are not formal members of the association. According to the Russian Embassy's website, ZRS has 1,500 members. ZRS's activities are marked by an apparent discrepancy between its mission as defined in its statute and its actual activities. Formally, ZRS is a domestic civic association established for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of Slovak citizens of Russian origin and fostering cooperation with other ethnic minority associations, both in Slovakia and abroad.²²

But in recent years, the organization has grown closer to the Russian government, including various state organs such as the Russian embassy in Bratislava. This shift corresponded with the consolidation of the current political regime in Russia, especially in the years after Russia annexed Crimea and initiated a separatist rebellion and military conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Although ZRS's statute claims it is an apolitical organization, some of its major events, as well as the public appearances of its representatives, reflect political views close to the positions and policies of the Russian government. Moreover, the Russian embassy in Bratislava supports the activities of the ZRS, and embassy representatives, including the ambassador, take part in ZRS events, which include concerts, exhibitions, and lectures. ZRS meetings are held on the premises of the Russian Center for Science and Culture (RCSC), which is part of the embassy and sometimes formally co-organizes events with the ZRS. Participants of events organized with the involvement of the RCSC generally represent the official positions of the Russian state on various historical narratives, as well as on the interpretation of Russia's relations with other states.

Although ZRS's statute claims it is an apolitical organization, some of its major events, as well as the public appearances of its representatives, reflect political views close to the positions and policies of the Russian government.

Beginning in 1999, ZRS has produced a bimonthly magazine, *Vmeste* (Together), for its members; it is jointly funded by Moscow's municipal government and the Slovak government.²³ Although print circulation is quite small, at only 350 copies, the way the magazine describes itself is remarkable. While the Slovak-language subtitle on the cover page defines it as a "Journal of the Russian ethnic minority in Slovakia," the Russian subtitle on the same page defines the magazine as a "Journal of the Russian-speaking community of Slovakia." The content of its articles reveals clear ideological inclinations, including criticism of "liberal" values, "immoralism," and "cosmopolitanism" being imported from the West, versus support for "traditional" and "national" values. EU policies in some areas, including its policies on refugee resettlement, are sharply criticized. Although the circulation of the journal is too low to meaningfully influence public discourse, its content is illustrative of how some Russian-speaking citizens are involved in activities of Russian soft-power projection.

The ZRS also closely cooperates with the Slovak-Russian Society (SRS), another formally registered Slovak civic association.²⁴ The SRS is known for its strong anti-NATO, anti-American, and anti-Western stance; it is today the most committed supporter among Slovak NGOs of Russia, Russian foreign policy, and Slovak-Russian cooperation. Its members include Slovakia's citizens of Russian origin as well as ethnic Slovaks who share critical attitudes toward liberal democracy and integration with NATO and the EU. In effect, the organization challenges the official foreign-policy priorities of the Slovak Republic.

ZRS and SRS co-organize some public events, and their representatives take similar stances concerning domestic and international affairs. SRS chairman Ján Čarnogurský—the former anti-Communist dissident, chairman of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH, 1990–2000), and prime minister (1991–92) and minister of justice (1998–2002)—is the author of numerous articles, and frequently appears in interviews during which he advocates for Russian foreign, security, and defense policies. Speaking in his capacity as the head of SRS, Čarnogurský criticizes Western countries for their alleged anti-Russian policies, expresses his objections to the EU as a "non-Slavic" project, and blames NATO and the U.S. for aggressive, warmongering rhetoric.

For a long time, SRS's website has served as an aggregator of reports produced by Russian officials, the Russian Embassy in Bratislava, and pro-Russian media in Slovakia and other countries (especially in the Czech Republic), with a clear intention of justifying the foreign policy line of the current Russian leadership and questioning Western policies.

The SRS (among others) has invoked the concept of "Russophobia" in order to discredit liberal democracy and Slovakia's pro-Western agenda. The term Russophobia was invented by Russian Slavophile writers of the nineteenth century to label negative attitudes toward Russians. For many years it was primarily used as a tool of extreme Russian nationalists. It is now used by official representatives of the Russian Federation to describe any critical stance toward Russia or its foreign or domestic policies, as well as events unfavorable to the current Russian regime's illiberal paradigm, such as the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, sanctions imposed by Western states against Russia for its incursions into Ukraine, NATO and EU enlargement, and Western support for dissidents in the former USSR. In early 2015, the SRS conducted a survey asking its members and supporters to identify the "worst Russophobes" in Slovakia from several categories including individual politicians, organizations, and media outlets.²⁵ The SRS's employment of this concept of Russophobia offers local supporters an opportunity to claim that proponents of liberal democracy and Slovakia's pro-Western orientation oppose Russia and Russians on the basis of ethnic prejudice. This SRS initiative aligned with the stance of Russia's Ministry of Culture, which in 2016 announced a public tender for a study titled "Russophobia and de-Russification," the purpose of which would be to identify tools for the fight against Russophobia, which was characterized as a growing trend that threatened Russia's national security.²⁶

Media

Slovak media outlets are to a large degree divided by their attitudes toward political and socioeconomic reforms, with debates over the foundations of Slovakia's current liberal-democratic regime and pro-Western foreign-policy orientation common. These debates, including over membership in the EU and NATO, trace their origins to Slovakia's democratic transition in 1990. Usually, media outlets and journalists that have favorable attitudes toward the process of democratization have also demonstrated positive attitudes towards Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO. Such outlets have thus taken critical stances toward internal and external forces that oppose democratic reforms and Slovak participation in the two organizations.

The Russian government has been the primary external force opposing Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO.²⁷ Russia's position has duly evoked negative responses from the part of the Slovak political and media scene that favors liberal democracy and a pro-Western orientation in Slovakia, but a positive response from Slovak media that oppose a pro-Western trajectory. It was therefore quite expected that after Russia's aggression toward Ukraine, the Slovak media became polarized according to each outlet's approach to Russian policies.

After Russia's annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas, the Russian state launched a massive propaganda campaign in Europe and across the world to justify its aggressive policies, discredit Ukraine, and confront the West. The main actors of this campaign were Russian state-sponsored media, which target news consumers in Russia, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states, as well as the Russian-speaking diaspora in Europe. Slovakia, too, has become the focus of Russia's propaganda machine, with both Russian state media outlets and some local Slovak media involved in processes aimed at shaping opinions to favor Russian policies.

Russian Media in Slovakia

Selected Russian television channels are available in Slovakia through nationwide and local subscription-based cable networks. Russian channels, and notably RT, a news channel run by the Russian government, are available through four of Slovakia's seven nationwide cable and satellite networks.²⁸ RT is among Slovakia's "free-to-air" channels that may be included with cable packages at no extra cost; cable operators determine whether to include free-to-air channels in their packages. In contrast, CNN and BBC belong to another category of news channels that offer their broadcasting to cable operators in exchange for payment. As one anonymous source at a cable network mentioned, "CNN is quite expensive."

Sources working in cable television indicated that they perceive RT to be a standard international television news channel, either failing to recognize or choosing to ignore the fact that it can be a source of disinformation. However, at the same time, operators do not ascribe high importance to RT and consider its reach minimal. Indeed, according to studies of television audiences in Slovakia, Russian channels have very low viewership.²⁹ Media analyst Miroslava Kernová, editor of the *Omediach* web portal, argues that "RT's rating is definitely below 0.1 percent; It can be watched by only a few thousand people. In general, the average Slovak viewer has little interest in foreign news channels."³⁰



In recent years, the mainstream Slovak television channels have paid less attention to international events, focusing news reports mostly on domestic agendas. It is thus likely that some viewers who seek out alternative sources of information about international affairs watch Russian television channels, either via cable or online. Such viewers may include those with positive perceptions of the previous communist regime, and those who combine resistance to liberal reforms and Slovakia's pro-Western orientation with pan-Slavic sentiments and Russophilia. Viewing Russian television channels can potentially strengthen these ideological patterns and inclinations.

Slovak Media Coverage of Russia

Slovak independent media have played a crucial role promoting democratic values and endorsing Slovakia's integration with the European community, and mainstream outlets generally

take a pro-Western line and are critical of Russian foreign policy, especially since Russia's incursion into Ukraine.

The opinion-making mainstream print media of liberal (or liberal-conservative) orientation—the daily *Sme* (We), daily *Denník N* (Daily N) and weekly *.týždeň* (Week), known for their pro-reform and pro-Western orientation—harshly criticized ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine. They condemn Russia's propaganda war against the West. The content of articles published in these outlets reflects the values that these periodicals have supported over the long-term: Slovakia's pro-Western foreign policy orientation, socio-economic reforms, membership in the Atlantic community, liberal democracy, an open society, and civic principles.

However, there are some exceptions among mainstream outlets. The pro-government, left-leaning daily newspaper *Pravda* publishes articles manifesting understanding for some of Russia's foreign policy steps. At the same time, *Pravda* also publishes articles that correspond with Slovakia's general pro-Western orientation. The inconsistency of views here is a consequence of personal preferences of individual journalists and editors.

Ambivalent (and sometimes camouflaged) pro-Russian stances are manifested to some extent by the private television channel TA3. Pro-Russian attitudes and criticism of the EU, U.S., NATO, and Ukraine are commonly found in the pro-government, biweekly periodical *Slovenský rozhľad*, which is close to Smer–SD. Its articles also offer support for Fico's initiatives aimed at strengthening cooperation with Russia.

Other outlets taking a pro-Russian, anti-Western stance include the web portal *Slovo*, the biweekly periodical *Literárny týždenník*, and the monthly Extra Plus. The Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters, a group representing those who fought in the antifascist uprising of 1944 and members of their families, publishes the periodical *Bojovník*, which prints materials taken directly from Russian sources, and has openly supported separatist rebels in Donbas.

The relatively new cultural and social magazine *Pontes* is devoted almost exclusively to Russia and issues related to Russia, and publishes articles on culture, art, travel, and science. It also carries articles on historical and political topics, which generally reflect positive attitudes toward the policies of Russia's current leadership. The magazine's publisher, Izdatelstvo Ltd., registered in Slovakia in August 2014 as a private company co-owned by several Slovak citizens and another limited company registered to Russian citizens under a residential address in Moscow.³¹ (The company's name, "Izdatelstvo," is the Russian word for "publishing house.") Unusually for a culture magazine, it also offers commercial services including recommendations for trustworthy business partners in Russia, as well as professional assistance in establishing entities in both Slovak and Russian markets.

Pro-Russian programming is also found in public media, including on the public Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS). The broadcaster's second television channel, which shows educational programs and documentaries, has screened a number of Soviet and Russian films and programs that contain ideologically motivated narratives. One notable example was the three-part documentary *Russian Secrets of World War I*, which featured the Russian radical nationalist historian Natalia Narochnitskaya. The documentary's screening suggests that among those within RTVS management responsible for purchasing programs from abroad are persons who at a minimum appear to underestimate the risk of toxic ideological influence, if

they do not directly support such ideas. Pro-Western Slovak journalists characterized this as a “spreading of Russian lies, undermining our democracy.”³² The aired Russian documentary programs emphasize distrust of the West and of democracy, and are often based on misleading interpretations of history.

Slovakia’s largest public news agency, TASR, has only a few of its own reporters working abroad, and consequently carries reports from foreign media on international affairs. Among the organizations with which it has cooperation and exchange agreements is Russia’s TASS agency; TASR often disseminates reports taken from TASS’s service.³³ TASR does not noticeably differentiate foreign reports from its own, and true sources of information may not be clear to Slovak recipients. Moreover, for many Slovak local media, TASR is one of the most readily available sources of information; In this manner, Russian state news can be inadvertently packaged as being from TASR and distributed by Slovak media.

In March 2017, the Russian media agency Sputnik announced that it had reached a cooperation agreement with TASR. The report prompted an immediate outcry, as Sputnik in November 2016 had been included in the European Parliament’s list of media and other organizations taking part in Russian information warfare against the EU.³⁴ The pressure from civil society, independent media, and some opposition figures was so strong that TASR cancelled its contract with Sputnik days after its initial announcement.

Slovakia is also home to a variety of conspiracy-minded fringe outlets that typically combine a direct approval of Russia’s state policies with criticism of the West. Such outlets include the web portals *Hlavné správy*, *Medzičas*, and the online radio station *Slobodný vysielateľ*. In 2014, Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine, its annexation of Crimea, and the separatist rebellion in the Donbas—inspired, organized, and supported by Russia—gave pro-Russian media outlets in Slovakia an opportunity to be engaged in a propaganda campaign related to the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and to particular events in this context.³⁵ All of the fringe media outlets unambiguously support Russia’s policies, and they demonstrate it openly, without hesitation. There is no open evidence (or disclosed information) about Russia’s direct material support for these outlets, either from public or from private sources. However, there have been a few documented attempts of fringe Slovak outlets attempting to seek support from the Russian government.

Among these is the monthly *Zem a Vek*, which praises the current Russian regime and the separatist rebellion in Donbas, while weaving anti-Semitic conspiracy theories into its criticism of liberal democratic values, the EU, and NATO. In May 2015, the magazine’s editors, Tibor Rostás and Dušan Budzák, met with the Russian ambassador to Slovakia, Pavel Kuznetsov, and asked him to consider backing their media activities, including a planned online television channel, as well as an unidentified “new political force.” The conversation during the meeting was taped, probably by the participants themselves, and later leaked and posted on YouTube. The Russian ambassador avoided direct promises of support during the meeting, but said he could provide assistance finding helpful contacts in Moscow.³⁶ At the beginning of 2015, *Zem a Vek* announced the start of a petition for Slovakia’s withdrawal from NATO, a clear step supporting Russia’s foreign policy line.³⁷

In 2016, a group of people with links to *Slobodný vysielateľ* and *Zem a Vek* established INTV, a pro-Russian television channel in Slovakia which broadcasts pro-Russian, anti-Western,

and radical-nationalist content.³⁸ The founders were previously engaged in the radio program *Slobodný vysielateľ* (Free Broadcaster) and were also close to the *Zem a Vek* magazine. The establishment of INTV represented an attempt to build a broader complex of pro-Russian conspiracy and disinformation media outlets (a periodical, radio station, and TV channel). The channel formally emerged as a result of the renaming of a pre-existing TV channel, *Karpaty* (Carpathians). A company of the same name became INTV's owner, but with new co-owners. The Broadcasting and Retransmission Council, Slovakia's licensing authority, extended the broadcast licenses to rename TV *Karpaty* as INTV. Subsequently, INTV was included at no extra cost within the packages of several cable operators. The station requested to be included in satellite broadcasting, too, which indicates that the owners had sufficient funding to operate their TV without needing to solicit extra broadcasting fees from satellite and cable providers. However, the channel's television broadcasting stopped only a short time after it was launched, reportedly because of personal conflicts between the channel's founders as well as difficulties attracting qualified staff.³⁹ INTV representatives then failed to notify the licensing authority and cable operators that broadcasting had stopped, placing the channel in violation of the law. Its license was subsequently cancelled, and cable companies withdrew INTV from their offerings. The project's failure appears to be related to personal conflicts among the new channel's founding staff, a low level of professionalism among its employees, and the inability of the channel owners to hire credible, qualified editors. According to one trustworthy source, INTV was given a broadcasting license—despite the dubious credibility of its founders—because some members of the licensing authority were convinced that such “alternative” media would serve as a counterbalance to the pro-Western mainstream media.⁴⁰

Undeterred by INTV's failure and united by their pro-Russian, nationalist, anti-Western, and conspiracy-minded views, in November 2016 the operators of *Zem a Vek* and *Slobodný vysielateľ*, along with those of the *Hlavné správy* and *Medzičas* web portals, formed the Association of Independent Media (ANM), a union apparently formed to boost the outlets' public profiles. In July 2017, Rostás of *Zem a Vek* announced plans to create a pan-Slavic media holding, claiming that he was in negotiations with Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and deputy of State Duma Viacheslav Nikonov to that end.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the presence of outright Russian propaganda in Slovakia exploded in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea and incursion into eastern Ukraine. Dozens of Slovak- and Czech-language websites emerged following these events, offering support for the Russian position alongside nationalist, xenophobic, and anti-Western views.⁴² The websites, which frequently cite the same positions, often feature Russian sources and personalities and present themselves as the holders of “real truth,” independent of the interests and money of powerful globalist elites. Many of them were founded before the Ukrainian crisis but only began publishing after these events, suggesting that this network may have been established with some degree of planning.⁴³

Academia

In 1995, the Slovak and Russian governments formed the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation. Its statutes outline the basic framework for bilateral cooperation in those areas, with partners typically including the countries' respective governments, ministries of culture and education, and national academies of science. This commission lays out the standard conditions for educational and academic cooperation between the two countries, and has provided avenues for bilateral, mutually-beneficial cooperation in the areas within its scope.

However, this more formal framework is less conducive to Russian soft-power efforts that seek to justify more illiberal or aggressive state policies, such as its annexation of Crimea and incursion into eastern Ukraine. Therefore, in recent years, Russian institutions in Slovakia have greatly stepped up their efforts to organize events that use an academic pretense to promote views reflecting the Russian government's perspectives on history, global development, and international relations in Europe and beyond.

Frequently, Russian institutions will seek out partnerships with local, private educational or academic institutions in order to boost an event's profile and confer legitimacy upon it. Cooperation with private partners is easier for the Russian organizers than is cooperation with public universities, as the former tend to be "independent" of official pro-Western policies, as well as smaller and more flexible in their decision-making processes.

Framework Agreements Between Slovakia and Russia

Agreements made since the establishment of the 1995 Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation include:

The agreement between the governments of Slovakia and the Russian Federation on cooperation in the areas of culture, education, and science (signed in 1995, valid without time limitation).

The agreement between the ministries of education of Slovakia and the Russian Federation on cooperation in the area of education (signed in 2006, valid without time limitation).

The agreement between the Slovak Education Ministry and the Russian Science Ministry on cooperation in the areas of science and technology (signed in 1995, valid without time limitation).

The memorandum on mutual cooperation between the Slovak Education Ministry and the Committee for Informatization of the president of the Russian Federation (signed in 1995, valid without time limitation).

The program of cooperation between the ministries of culture of Slovakia and the Russian Federation (signed in 2013, valid between 2013 and 2017).

The agreement on scientific cooperation between the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of Sciences (signed in 1993, renewable every 5 years).

For example, in April 2016, the Russian Embassy in Bratislava organized a conference called "Russia's Geopolitics" in cooperation with the Educational and Consulting Institute in Bratislava (a branch of the High School of International and Public Relations in Prague), as well as the Central European Education Institute. Attendees included the Russian ambassador, the rector of the Prague-based high school, representatives of several Russian academic institutions, representatives of academic institutions from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and, notably, the well-known Russian nationalist author Nikolay Starikov. Despite the partnership with local academic institutions, the conference was held in the hall of a private hotel, and its

discussion panels generally served not as platforms for genuine expert discussion, but justified the positions of the Russian government on topics including the development of the Russian state, common challenges for Russia and the EU, Russia's role in global institutions, and Russia's view on its military and political situation in the world.

In September 2016, the Russian journal *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, or International Affairs,⁴⁴ in cooperation with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized in Bratislava the international conference, "Russia and Europe: Topical Issues of Contemporary International Journalism." The conference's primary goal was "to cover the issues of interaction between Russian and European media." Attendees included the Russian ambassador, the deputy head of Russia's Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communication, Ján Čarnogurský of the SRS, and representatives of several Russian state institutions, including MFA, MGIMO, Foundation "Russian World"), and Russian media.

In September 2015, the Russian embassy in Slovakia arranged for a lecture tour by the Russian historian Sviatoslav Rybas, whose views are closely aligned with the current Russian government. He visited several secondary schools and universities in Košice, Banská Bystrica, and Bratislava. In his lectures, he claimed that Czechoslovak leader Alexander Dubček, whose attempts to introduce liberal reforms during the communist period led to the 1968 Soviet-backed invasion of Czechoslovakia, had telephoned Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to request the invasion. The Russian embassy posted a report on Rybas's lectures on its Facebook page, which sparked outrage among Slovak readers angered by the portrayal of Dubček as a traitor. The embassy later withdrew the report.⁴⁵

In February 2016, Sergej Chelemendik, a nationalist Russian writer living in Slovakia, invited the Russian Stalinist and nationalist political scientist Nikolay Starikov to lecture in Bratislava. Starikov counts among his books *Russia's Main Enemy: All Evil Comes from the West*, and through that lens, during his Slovak lecture series, offered his views on U.S. foreign policy, the situation in Ukraine, and NATO bases in Slovakia.⁴⁶ Among the groups that hosted Starikov was a club associated with the pro-Russian *Nové slovo* web portal.⁴⁷ The visit came after the publishing house of the nationalist-oriented Society of Slovak Writers had published Starikov's book, *Geopolitics*, the previous year.⁴⁸

In March 2017, the Russian embassy organized a lecture tour in Slovakia for Andranik Migranyan, a Kremlin-backed author and political science professor, and a strong supporter of Russia's foreign policy, particularly in Ukraine. Matej Bel University of Banská Bystrica, which had signed a cooperation agreement with the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) in December 2016, declined the embassy's request to organize Migranyan's lecture for students—probably given that hosting such a controversial figure could damage the university's credibility. However, two other institutes—the public University of Economics in Bratislava, and the private Central European High School in Skalica—agreed to host Migranyan. His lectures there provoked critical responses in the Slovak media and among politicians, who expressed concern that the facilities had helped to amplify Russian propaganda.⁴⁹

In April 2017, the Russian embassy proposed that another controversial Russian scholar, Vladimir Kozin, lecture at Slovak universities on Russia's policy in Syria. Kozin, an expert at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI), is known for his anti-American stances and his attacks on NATO and the West. Matej Bel University once again declined the embassy's

request, as it had turned down the request to host Migranyan. Kozin ended up lecturing at a conference organized by a local Armenian association and an organization called the Pan-European Center for Political and Economic Analyses and Prognoses (PANAP). The event was supported by Russia's embassy and attended by local pro-Russian activists including Čarnogurský, as well as by Štefan Harabin, the former minister of justice and former chairman of Supreme Court. Kozin then lectured in Bratislava at a local branch of the Czech High School of International and Public Relations, and was invited to participate in a discussion program on the private television channel TA3.

In May 2017, at the invitation of the Russian embassy in Bratislava, Alexey Podberezkin, a former Russian lawmaker and current director of the Center for Military and Political Studies at MGIMO, delivered lectures at the Czech High School of International and Public Relations and the Central European High School in Skalica, during which he promoted the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led military alliance intended as a counterweight to NATO.⁵⁰ He too was invited to appear on TA3.

In addition to organizing lectures in Slovakia, the Russian government also promotes its foreign policy and values through exchange programs. Some aspects of these programs do provide Slovak students with educational opportunities. However, they also give the Russian government the opportunity to expose Slovak students to its preferred narratives that promote ostensibly traditional values over liberal-democratic ones, and justify Russia's aggressive foreign policy in Ukraine.

In December 2016, the political science faculty at Matej Bel University concluded a cooperation and exchange agreement with MGIMO. In accordance with the agreement, Slovak students can spend summers at a camp in Odintsovo, near Moscow. As UMB rector Vladimír Hiadlovský said in an interview for the Russian-language online resource svk360.com, after his appointment as head of the university in 2014, he focused on "broadening cooperation with China and [the] Russian Federation." As justification for the cooperation between UMB and MGIMO, he emphasized that "MGIMO is one the most prestigious universities in the world."⁵¹

The Institute for Russian-Slovak Cultural Studies operates at the Catholic University in Ružomberok, in northern Slovakia, and focuses on past and present Russian-Slovak cultural links. Its partner organizations include the Russkiy Mir Foundation, an influential Russian soft power organization that propagates Kremlin-approved views on history and culture through its Russian-language classes and other programs.

Until recently, Russkiy Mir also funded the Russian Center at the private Pan-European High School located in Bratislava, though it was not a formal part of the school. Čarnogurský, the head of the pro-Russian SRS and one of the founders of this school, was linked to the Russian Center's establishment, and for a time the body held joint public events with the RCSC, SRS, and ZRS. The Russian Center closed in 2015, after a new Czech owner took over the school's management from the previous Russian owner.

Among public Slovak universities, it seems that the most favorable conditions for cooperation with Russian actors exist at the Institute of Economy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, which regularly hosts representatives from the Russian embassy and visiting scholars from Russian state universities. Several scholars either working at the Institute or in close cooperation with it hold

critical attitudes toward liberal democracy and globalization (which they consider a harmful U.S.-led phenomenon), and hold that an aggressive West works to diminish the role of other actors, including Russia. Figures with similar profiles also teach at the Economic University in Bratislava. Such figures from the two mentioned public institutions have participated in events organized by Russian institutions and their local partners.

Slovak academics who favor Russian policies are offered attractive opportunities to travel to Russia in order to participate in “prestigious” events, such as meetings of the Valdai Club or to lecture at Russian universities, publish articles in Russian scholarly periodicals, and generally partake in activities through which they may earn professional recognition in Russia.

According to some experts monitoring the issue of Russia's influence in Slovakia, Slovak academics who favor Russian policies are offered attractive opportunities to travel to Russia in order to participate in “prestigious” events, such as meetings of the Valdai Club—an academic conference backed by the Russian government that typically draws high-profile members of the Russian administration and the country's academic elite—or to lecture at Russian universities, publish articles in Russian scholarly periodicals, and generally partake in activities through which they may earn professional recognition in Russia. Such figures may also enjoy private trips to more remote, tourist-oriented locations on invitation from Russian organizations.⁵²

Think Tanks

Russian efforts to infiltrate the space of independent policy analysis in Slovakia have been extremely limited, as the community of Slovak independent scholars working at think tanks is strongly pro-Western and pro-Atlanticist. Therefore, Russian actors with pro-Russian viewpoints have found it easier to cooperate with Slovak public (state-backed) academic institutions.

Slovakia's think-tank community emerged in the second half of the 1990s, when various institutes were formed as part of the struggle to establish a democratic political system, implement liberal socioeconomic reforms, and participate in Euro-Atlantic integration. Their partners and donors were mostly foundations, funds, and other think tanks operating in the U.S. and Western Europe, or independent centers of analysis in other transitioning countries including the Baltic states and other members of the group of Central European countries comprising the Visegrád 4. Without exception,

these think tanks supported Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO, the values of liberal democracy, and the overall pro-Western line of the post-communist government.

The pro-democratic and pro-Western orientation of Slovak think tanks is as strong today as it was during the previous two decades. Think tanks constitute an inseparable part of the community seeking to ensure Slovakia's embeddedness in Euro-Atlantic groupings. Moreover, representatives of these think tanks—which include the GLOBSEC Policy Institute, the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO), the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), the Strategic Policy Institute (STRATPOL), the Center for European and North Atlantic Affairs (CENAA), the Slovak Security Policy Institute (SSPI), and the Euro-Atlantic Center (EAC)—in recent years have begun to warn the Slovak public about the risks created by Russia's efforts to influence the country's domestic politics, media scene, public discourse, and foreign policy, and have urged the Slovak government to intensify its countermeasures.

Because the pro-Western orientation of Slovakia's think tanks is essentially fixed, the probability of pro-Russian infiltration of think tanks and subsequent indoctrination of public space by

disseminating pro-Russian content through them is close to zero. Given the Slovak think tank community's robust support for liberal values, there have been no known attempts by Russia to establish analytical centers that would influence public discourse in favor of Russia. There is no space within Slovakia's independent analytical centers for Russia to promote illiberal or anti-Western narratives.

As an example of the strength and independence of Slovakia's think tank community, efforts by several Russian state-backed research institutes to engage in a series of dialogues with their Slovak counterparts were discontinued, after a first attempt at organizing one such meeting was met with skepticism and even resistance from the Slovak side. In May 2016, SFPA organized an expert roundtable, "Slovak-Russian Discussion Forum I" with the stated goal of establishing working relations between Slovak and Russia experts and providing a space for the exchange of opinions; it included representatives from the Russian embassy, as well as from Russian bodies including the Gorchakov Fund, the Center for International and Regional Policy, MGIMO, RISI, the National Energy Security Fund, the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Science, Saint Petersburg State University, and the Russian news agency REGNUM. In the end, several Slovak participants took clearly critical stances toward Russia's foreign policy, and the Russian partners dropped their requests to hold future meetings.

Culture

Established through a bilateral agreement in 2001, the Russian Center of Science and Culture, or RCSC, which is part of Russia's official diplomatic mission in Slovakia, is the main actor promoting Russian culture in Slovakia.⁵³ Since its establishment, RCSC has organized hundreds of concerts, art and photography shows, book exhibits, and other cultural events, as well as dozens of scientific conferences, symposia, and roundtable discussions.

RCSC tries to present itself as a peer among state cultural institutes of established democracies, such as the Czech Republic's Czech Centers, Germany's Goethe Institutes, France's Alliance Française institutes, Poland's Polish Institutes, or Spain's Cervantes Institutes. However, there are several key differences in the way RCSC operates that distinguish it from traditional state-funded cultural institutes. First, the RCSC is more formally integrated within the Russian government as a unit of Russia's diplomatic mission in Slovakia. Second, rather than offering cultural activities that promote and represent Russian civil society, its activities since its founding have corresponded quite closely with Russia's foreign policy. Events organized by RCSC often carry a clear ideological message aimed at influencing Slovak domestic public discourse in favor of views shared by the Russian government. This stands in contrast to the public diplomacy of states whose cultural events offer opportunities for local people to view performances or artifacts without ideological accompaniments designed to influence domestic public discourse. Especially after 2014, when Russia came into a sharp confrontation with the West over events that have undermined democracy in Ukraine, RCSC's cultural events have focused on Russian state patriotism; the uniqueness of Russia's history; the legacy of its military victories, especially in the "Great Patriotic War"; cooperation with Slovakia and other Central European countries based on common Slavic linguistic and cultural roots; the spiritual role of Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Orthodox Church; and the values of "social conservatism," including family, tradition, and religion. Russia's independent or critically engaged artists are not usually invited to participate in cultural and educational events at the RCSC.

The RCSC also serves as a hub that connects Russian state, academic, cultural, and other institutions and organizations with Slovak partners, including local agencies and governments, business groups, and associations of Russians in Slovakia. By facilitating these connections and organizing cultural events that involve these groups, the RCSC has an opportunity to preside over cultural events that combine arts with its preferred sociopolitical message and Russian patriotic narratives. While some of these events attracted relatively limited audiences, others have drawn many participants.

Analysis

The Russian government leverages an array of soft power tools to project authoritarian influence in Slovakia. These include local pro-Russian organizations that frequently cooperate with Russian government institutions; fringe conspiratorial media; lecture programs, conferences and academic exchanges that promote a particular ideological agenda; and politicized cultural events. Many of these activities are coordinated with assistance from the Russian embassy and the RCSC.

The ultimate goal of Russian influence efforts in Slovakia is to weaken the country's ties with EU and NATO, and, if the situation would allow it, to achieve Slovakia's withdrawal from both groupings and instead see the country's alignment with Russia. The second apparent goal of Russia's soft power operations in Slovakia is to weaken the population's support for universal liberal values, democratic norms and principles, human rights, and trust in democratic institutions. Russia's influence efforts aim to displace societal values that emphasize democratic standards and individual freedoms. They do so by supporting alternative ideas such as "traditional values" of religious fundamentalism, ethno-nationalism, and Slavic solidarity.

Another important goal of Russia's soft power activities is to neutralize the negative impact its aggressive and expansionist steps have had on its own image in the international arena, and to instead project an image of the regime's strong credibility. To this end, the Russian regime collaborates with Russian groups in Slovakia that present pro-Russian, anti-Western views. The key element in working toward this goal is supporting the spread of narratives that justify and legitimize Russia's foreign and domestic policies.

Efforts to weaken Western pressure on Russia in response to its aggressive foreign policy and subversive activities inside the West are also a target of Russia's soft power efforts, including those carried out in Slovakia in last three years. As an EU member state, Slovakia is a part of the EU's common political decision-making mechanisms; It has supported all EU decisions concerning sanctions against Russia, and abides by the sanctions regime. However, some Slovak officials including Prime Minister Fico have cast doubt on the necessity and effectiveness of sanctions. He has instead offered a "pragmatic" view of the benefits of economic cooperation with Russia, characterizing Russia as an inevitable, unavoidable partner upon which Slovakia's economic development is dependent. Such statements, combined with Russia's observed soft power efforts, have the worrying potential to encourage skepticism toward the West and to diminish support for democratic assistance in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, including Ukraine. A shift toward a pro-Russian trajectory in Slovakia—which already views Russia more favorably than some of its neighbors—could lead to disunity within the EU and NATO, and ultimately contribute to growing internal disputes and conflicts within the international democratic community.



CHINA

China's Foreign Policy Priorities in Central Europe

Central Europe has not historically been a priority in Chinese foreign policy. Moreover, China has had somewhat fraught relations with some countries in the region, notably the Czech Republic and Poland, which used to be leading critics of the Chinese regime and maintained high-level contacts with Taiwan. Central European countries are now of increasing interest to China due to the countries' membership in the EU, with China viewing them as an avenue through which it might influence EU decision making. Since 2004—when the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, among others, joined the EU—there has been intensified diplomatic activity from China targeting the Central European region. At the same time, China's growing economic and political significance has also prompted these states to adopt a more pragmatic China policy.

Chinese foreign policy toward Central European countries has three main priorities. As elsewhere in the world, the first priority is securing adherence to the One China principle. As the sinologist Martin Slobodník has observed, for China this not only means that states should maintain diplomatic relations with Beijing and not Taipei: The Chinese government recently broadened the principle to imply that government representatives should also avoid contact with the Dalai Lama.⁵⁴ In addition, China pressures Central European states to minimize interactions with Taiwan on cultural and economic matters, as well as to refrain from meeting with Chinese dissidents and representatives of Uyghur associations that are independent from the Chinese government.

Second, since initiating the 16+1 platform in 2012, China expects each state to be an active contributor to the forum, through which it seeks to foster cooperation with sixteen Central and Eastern European countries. This involves, above all, sending a highest-level delegate—either a prime minister or president—to attend the annual 16+1 summit and to sign a joint document that outlines activities for the forthcoming period. The forum allows China to propagate its landmark enterprises, notably the Belt and Road Initiative and the investment deals that are part of it, such as the reconstruction of Belgrade-Budapest railway. (The Belt and Road Initiative aims to create a Chinese-dominated trade network that counters the U.S.-led transatlantic one.) Moreover, the 16+1 forum helps China foster new relationships and partnerships in

Central and Eastern Europe at various levels. As the most developed part of the region from which 16+1 participants are drawn, the Central European countries claim the lion's share of China's trade and investment in the area, and play an important role in the 16+1 forum.

The third priority for Chinese foreign policy in the region is less tangible than the previous two. In the CCP's framing, China is working to achieve commitments from individual states to build a partnership with it based on mutual respect, shared interests, and win-win cooperation. If countries adopt the language China uses to describe the partnerships, China then pressures their representatives to adjust foreign policy more to China's interest, including, for example, avoiding criticism of China for its human rights record, or supporting China in territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In recent years, China has used different formal and informal tools and channels, including soft power, to achieve this kind of commitment from Central European countries.

Aside from these goals, China also has a stake in fostering its exports to the region and using regional infrastructure to reach markets in Western Europe. However, with the exception of its engagement on the Belgrade-Budapest railway project, the Chinese government does not exert major influence over trade flows, as Central European economies remain very open in terms of international trade.

Slovak-Chinese Bilateral Relations

For more than twenty years, Slovakia's foreign policy toward China avoided any major deviation from the course established following independence. Slovakia has adhered to the One China principle and has prioritized developing economic relations with China, mainly to facilitate exports and to attract Chinese investment. In the interest of advancing economic relations, official Slovak policy tended to avoid engaging in behavior that could potentially irritate China, such as criticizing its human rights record or meeting with Taiwanese representatives, the Dalai Lama, or Chinese dissidents. This courtesy has not always been extended by Slovak intellectuals, activists, individual policymakers, and others who have criticized China on issues including the One China principle, its policies in Tibet, its repression of the Falun Gong spiritual group, and the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square.

However, recent developments have signaled a slow change. The Slovak government openly admits dissatisfaction with the outcomes of its China policy and has been more confident taking actions that China views as controversial or in contravention of its interests.⁵⁵ This disappointment over past foreign policy outcomes rests on hard data on economic relations with China. According to Slovakia's Statistical Office, the value of Slovak exports to China was 1.6 percent of Slovakia's total exports in 2016, a similar figure to that reported over the past seven years.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, overall Chinese investment in the country comprised less than 1 percent of all foreign direct investment in Slovakia.⁵⁷ This is despite Slovakia having signed a number of economic agreements and memoranda with China. Probably, this lack of economic activity prompted Prime Minister Robert Fico to say in late 2014 that he would only visit China again if such a visit would bring tangible results.⁵⁸ More importantly, Slovakia has adopted policies that can be considered unusual in the wider European context. In 2013, it admitted Uyghur prisoners from the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba,⁵⁹ and in 2016, Slovak President Andrej Kiska met the Dalai Lama in Bratislava.⁶⁰

However, when the first major investor from China showed interest in Slovakia, Slovak government representatives tried to make use of this opportunity. In August 2016, Fico secretly met

in Bratislava with the president of the Chinese energy holding company China Energy Company Limited (CEFC), which claims to be the sixth largest private company in China, is known for investing in energy and financial sectors, and is considered the flagship of Chinese economic penetration of Central Europe.⁶¹ News of the meeting only appeared in Slovak media after CEFC posted pictures of the talks on its website. Negotiations reportedly concerned investments in tourism, aviation companies, finance, and infrastructure. Slovak Finance Minister Peter Kažimír also met with the CEFC chief twice, in July and September of 2016, but disclosed the meetings.⁶²

While Slovakia is hardly economically dependent on China, and Chinese soft power activities in Slovakia are limited compared to Russian ones, the Chinese government does project its own brand of influence aimed at creating support within Slovakia for its positions and activities.

Chinese Influence Efforts in Slovakia

Unlike Russia, China does not need to expend effort trying to improve its perception among the public in Slovakia, as it does not suffer from a negative image there. Instead, it finds in Slovakia a general lack of interest in China that only changes temporarily on the occasion of some notable event such as a high-level meeting between Slovak and Chinese officials, or news of a potential Chinese-backed investment project. And unlike media in the neighboring Czech Republic, which have been critical of China and have sometimes presented the country as a security threat,⁶³ Slovak coverage of China has been fairly neutral.⁶⁴ Critical reports have appeared only occasionally, such as in 2009 when Chinese supporters of the visiting Chinese president Hu Jintao—apparently including a few members of his security detail—attacked a handful of protesting Slovak human rights activists, as well as some journalists.⁶⁵

Against this background, a survey of Chinese soft power activities in Slovakia suggests that China focuses such efforts on creating groups within the Slovak public that would feel interested in or attached to China and would thus be receptive to the Chinese government's narratives, and on establishing and strengthening channels through which the Chinese government may communicate its key messages to the Slovak public.

Currently, there are two principal actors that work to implement China's soft power initiatives in Slovakia: the Chinese embassy, and the Confucius Institutes. They strive to reach out to four spheres, namely the media, academia, think tanks, and culture, in order to create the desired impact.

Unlike Russia, which generally seeks to encourage or place pro-Russian "talking heads" in Slovakia, China's efforts to foster pro-Chinese narratives focus heavily on educational programs, many of which include opportunities to visit China. These activities may appear less ideological and more pragmatic. But in the long term, they create favorable conditions for bonding the involved individuals to the promoters of such activities: state-controlled Chinese institutions.

There are three categories of local actors shaping public discourse on China in Slovakia. The first are openly pro-Chinese individuals, who seek to create a positive image of China by actively promoting Chinese culture, praising China's social and economic model and its achievements, and defending China's policies. They include politicians, especially representatives of the Communist Party of Slovakia (a minor, non-parliamentary party), but also members of other left-wing parties and groupings including the governing Smer-SD;⁶⁶ public figures,

such as the economist Peter Staněk, who predicts the economic victory of China over the U.S.; businessmen, such as Marián Farkaš, chairman of the Slovak-Chinese chamber of commerce SINACO; and voices in the media scene, including from the mainstream media as well as fringe outlets, such as *Zem a Vek*.

Second, there are those who promote China less overtly by disseminating positive information about select aspects of China's development, while avoiding mention of politically sensitive issues such as its human rights record and authoritarian system. These actors include some politicians and media outlets.

Finally, there are actors with critical stances towards China, who bring forward information about China's human rights abuses, elements of China's expansionist foreign policy in East Asia, and the rise of Chinese military power. These include liberal media outlets, think tanks, academics, nongovernmental organizations, and prodemocratic politicians, mostly from the center-right parties. Some of these personalities are quite proactive, organizing public events and civic initiatives and releasing critical statements.

Cooperation Agreements between Slovakia and China

Slovakia and China have concluded several cooperation agreements in areas that can be considered relevant to China's soft-power activities. These agreements include:

The agreement on cultural cooperation between the governments of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 1991, and since 2001 valid without time limitation).

The program of cultural cooperation between the ministries of culture of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 2014, and valid from 2015–19).

The agreement on scientific and technical cooperation between the governments of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 1997 without time limitation).

The program of cooperation between the ministries of education of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 2015 and valid from 2016–19).

The agreement on cooperation in sport between the Ministry of Education of Slovakia and the State Committee for Sports of the People's Republic of China (signed in 1994 without time limitation).

The agreement between the Slovak Academy of Science and Chinese Academy of Science (implementation protocol signed in 2015 and valid from 2015–17).

Culture

Confucius Institutes (CIs) are the main tool the Chinese government uses to popularize Chinese culture beyond the country's borders.⁶⁷ As of April 2017, there were eleven established Confucius Institutes in Central Europe: five in Poland, three in Hungary, two in Slovakia, and one in the Czech Republic. Both of the institutes in Slovakia are located in Bratislava, but they host some activities outside the capital city.

The older of the two institutes is affiliated with the Slovak University of Technology, which opened in 2007. Three other major Slovak universities were among its founding partners, together with China's Tianjin University.⁶⁸ In the years following its establishment, this CI focused on introducing Chinese language courses in Bratislava and other cities, and only organized about five Chinese culture-related events a year, to which prominent guests were typically invited.⁶⁹ Since appointing a new Slovak director in the second half of 2015, this institute has become far more active. In 2016, it prepared eleven events, including a dance performance, a Chinese cuisine workshop, a Chinese language summer camp, and presentations at a book fair and folk crafts festival. It offers Chinese language courses on its premises, and manages language classes at four elementary and high schools in Bratislava, as well as at two universities outside of Bratislava. It has also contributed to the opening of the first Slovak-Chinese five-year bilingual program for high-school students in Banská Bystrica.⁷⁰

The Confucius Institute affiliated with Comenius University in Bratislava was established in 2015. It is led by the chair of the University's Department of East Asian Studies, and a number of departmental staff members and China experts from the Slovak Academy of Science contribute to its activities. The institute offers five language courses a year, in addition to two culture-related courses and sporadic events, such as expert lectures, concerts, and a Dragon Boat festival.⁷¹

Initially, the bulk of activity carried out by both institutes seemed to be unrelated to politics. However, recent initiatives of the Bratislava Confucius Institutes demonstrate that they can also serve broader, political goals of the Chinese government through cultural events. The main impetus for this change came in 2016 when Slovak President Kiska chose to invite the Dalai Lama for a meeting, which—in addition to irking the Chinese government—also prompted media articles critical of China's Tibet policies. Soon afterward, the older Bratislava Confucius Institute co-organized with the Chinese embassy an exhibition entitled “A Chinese Story: Chinese Tibet,” which supported China's claim to Tibet and was displayed in the cities of Trnava, Banská Bystrica, Nitra, and Nové Zámky.⁷² The newer Bratislava Confucius Institute also organized the exhibition at Comenius University,⁷³ which had hosted the Dalai Lama only six months earlier for his third visit to the university. This sent a signal that China has a particular stake in winning back the institutions sympathetic to issues other than those consistent with the official Chinese narratives. To support this campaign, the Chinese embassy in Bratislava distributed to academics and journalists on various occasions a publication called *What Do You Know About Tibet: Questions and Answers*, which sought to justify Chinese claims to the region.

Additionally, the embassy has reintroduced Bratislava's Chinese film festival. The festival first took place in 2004, became dormant, and was reestablished as an annual event in 2014. In November 2016, the film festival was held at the Bratislava art cinema theater, Kino Lumiér, in cooperation with the Slovak Ministry of Culture. At least two of the movies could be identified as stories with a pro-Chinese sociopolitical message. The first was *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*, about China's civil war in 1946. The movie's heroic central character hails from the Chinese People's Liberation Army—the armed forces of the People's Republic of China. The second was *Phurbu and Tenzin*, a movie set in Tibet depicting social changes in the region through the lives of two boys over the period from the end of British rule until China's opening in the 1980s.

A larger event, prepared in part for interested members of the Slovak political and cultural elite, is the annual reception on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. Over 600 guests attended the 2017 event at the Slovak National Theatre, including the chairman of the Committee of Slovak National Defense and Security; the state secretary of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport; and the mayor of Nové Zámky.⁷⁴ While Slovakia has yet to see large-scale outdoor celebrations of the Lunar New Year, as take place in some neighboring countries, in recent years the Chinese embassy has made efforts to include more people, such as influential politicians, journalists, academics, businesspeople, artists, and athletes, as well as members of the general public.

China's CEFC is also rumored to be in negotiations to acquire a share of as much as 50 percent in the Central European investment group Penta, which holds controlling shares in countrywide Slovak media outlets.

As part of its efforts to promote the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese embassy organized an art exhibition entitled "Silk Road 2017" on the premises of Radio Slovakia. The exhibition's opening ceremony was attended by more than 300 influential guests, including the vice-president of Slovakia's Supreme Court.⁷⁵

Media

Chinese state-backed media, such as CCTV, Xinhua, and China Radio International are not particularly visible in Slovakia. However, in recent years, Chinese ambassadors to Slovakia have begun to appear more frequently in the Slovak media. Interviews with the Chinese ambassadors have been published, for example, in the dailies *Sme* and *TASR*, and the weekly *Slovenka*, and have appeared on the television channel JOJ.⁷⁶ Aside from appearing in the national media, the Chinese embassy publishes editorials on the *Nové slovo* and *Hlavné správy* online news portals. These editorials defend China's claims over Tibet and the South China Sea; explain its vision for the Belt and Road Initiative; and call attention to its opposition to Slovak President Kiska's meeting with the Dalai Lama.⁷⁷ It is notable that

Nové slovo and *Hlavné správy* also serve as two of the main channels for Russian propaganda in Slovakia.⁷⁸ The embassy's tactic is understandable: The editorial staff at such outlets, known for their criticism of liberal democracy and the West, would be more open to cooperation with the Chinese government than many mainstream media outlets. Their audiences are also more receptive to the Chinese point of view.

Separately, China's CEFC is also rumored to be in negotiations to acquire a share of as much as 50 percent in the Central European investment group Penta, which holds controlling shares in countrywide Slovak media outlets, including the dailies *Sme* and *Plus 1 deň*; the weeklies *Trend* and *Plus 7 dní*; and the *Aktuálne* web portal.⁷⁹ Such a deal could extend CEFC a certain level of control over the media in Slovakia, or at least over reporting about China, including on its human rights record, Tibet, Taiwan, and other topics China considers sensitive. In April 2017, Penta denied that it was negotiating with CEFC specifically about a Chinese entry into Penta.⁸⁰

An illustrative example of the consequences related to the Chinese purchase of assets in the Central European media market is CEFC's 2015 takeover of shares of the Czech media conglomerate Empresa. Following the deal, Empresa's popular political weekly *Týden* began to publish articles that favored Chinese government policies, while pieces critical of China became noticeably absent. Toward the end of 2016, a number of people on *Týden's* editorial

staff were fired.⁸¹ In 2017, CEFC announced that it was leaving the publishing company and would be replaced by a Czech owner. Meanwhile, the activities of CEFC in the Czech Republic have raised concerns there, in connection with the company's alleged links to the Chinese military.⁸²

Academia

China's activities in the Slovak academic realm have thus far not stirred any major controversies connected to infringements on academic freedom. Recent adaptations in the way that Chinese government initiatives collaborate with Slovakia's academic sector seem to suggest that the regime is trying to introduce its perspective through a subtler approach.

Currently, Chinese officials focus on facilitating and strengthening contacts with Slovak university students and professors. This includes bringing Chinese students to Slovak universities, arranging for the Chinese ambassador to give lectures at various universities,⁸³ and offering scholarships for university students and academics (fifteen per year) to study and undertake research in China. However, whereas China has a tradition of awarding one-year scholarships for Slovak university students that goes back to Czechoslovakia's times, in the past few years, the Chinese Ministry of Education has introduced scholarships that allow Slovak students to complete their entire graduate studies in China. Last year, one third of graduates from Comenius University's bachelor's program in Sinology chose to continue their master's degree in China. This program opens the door for China to access and influence young Slovak individuals that already speak Chinese and are interested in Chinese culture, history, and other dimensions.

While delivering presentations and discussing various topics with university students and lecturers, the Chinese ambassador usually adopts a non-confrontational style, explaining where the Chinese government sees international issues differently than Western countries. This approach gives the presentation certain credibility, contrary to practices in the past when Chinese diplomats issued harsh statements, such as one in 2003 that directly denounced the opening of the Taipei Representative Office in Bratislava.⁸⁴

Simply reaching out to collaborate with Slovakia's academic sector also enables the Chinese embassy to introduce the government's policy perspectives in a more credible way to educated elites. In May 2017, the Chinese embassy in Bratislava, in cooperation with *Nové Slovo's Club*, organized a scholarly seminar entitled "The Story of Chinese Tibet" that was hosted by the leading research institution in Slovakia, the Slovak Academy of Science. Almost one hundred people attended this unprecedented event, including the academy's researchers, university professors, think tank representatives, and politicians. Most notable among this group were Ľuboš Blaha, chair of the Slovak Parliament's European Affairs Committee, and Branislav Fábry, an academic known for his strongly pro-Russian stances. Chinese presenters included the head of China's Tibetology Research Center, representatives of the Chinese government's Tibetan region administration, and a lama who described in positive terms the advancements that Tibet has made as a part of the People's Republic of China. The delegation was officially admitted to separate meetings in the Slovak Parliament and the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs.⁸⁵ In cooperating with academia, the Chinese embassy strives to present its Tibet-related campaign as rooted in scientific knowledge.

Think Tanks

Whereas think tanks in democratic countries usually enjoy independence from government, political parties, and interest groups, official Chinese policy-advising institutions work as actors of government policy.⁸⁶ To this end, Chinese think tanks seek to establish and strengthen links with policy advisors in democratic countries, including in the EU. For Slovakia, contacts with representatives of Chinese think tanks have also been limited because Slovakia only has a very small number of China experts working for non-university institutes. Researchers from Chinese think tanks have instead concentrated on establishing contacts that could allow them to reach out to the Slovak policy community through universities, the business sector, local government bodies, and nongovernmental organizations. The individuals they connect with are then invited by their Chinese counterparts to meetings, conferences, and other events, including activities that take place in China. During these meetings, Chinese academics typically try to appeal to their Slovak colleagues by asking them to recall the decades of cooperation between scholars from both countries as a basis to continue cooperation through future meetings and joint publications.

Aside from one-off initiatives, China created in 2013 a specialized forum for facilitating contact with experts from Central and Eastern Europe: the High-Level Symposium of Think Tanks of China and Central and Eastern European Countries. However, after organizing three conferences, this forum's level of activity dropped to only occasional meetings in individual countries, usually coinciding with a high-level visit from a Chinese official.⁸⁷ This could be due to scarce funding: At one of the symposium meetings held in Beijing, the conveners announced that they expected their Central and Eastern European partners to financially support the forum. The partners, however, have not met such an expectation, due to a lack of public funding available for researching relations with China.

Representatives from Chinese research institutes have rarely participated in public discussions, seminars, and roundtables in Slovakia. A likely reason for this is that most Slovak scholars of China work at universities, rather than in the think tank community. However, China tries to create a sort of competition among experts studying China by attempting to foster circles or researchers who may publish studies that are in line with China's official policies and are uncritical of China's regime. One of the most visible examples of outreach to Slovak think tanks concerns an academic journal published by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association on the topic of the Belt and Road Initiative, which was sponsored in part by the Chinese embassy in Bratislava.⁸⁸ However, the journal's editor, Peter Brezáni, saw no evidence of attempts by the Chinese embassy to influence the content of contributions to this issue. When the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague announced in June 2016 its ruling rejecting China's claims in the South China Sea, the Chinese embassy approached Brezáni with a request to publish a rebuttal on the issue, which he refused.⁸⁹

Analysis

When comparing the functioning of soft power mechanisms of Russia and China in Slovakia, it is worth noting that Slovak relations with Russia are influenced by centuries of historical, cultural, linguistic, and other ties, which are absent as far as Slovakia's relations with China are concerned. In Slovakia, China is primarily perceived as an important external actor with low levels of involvement in domestic affairs. China is valued for its potential to bring benefits through future economic cooperation, although political elites in Slovakia are growing increasingly skeptical of this prospect. China's enhanced involvement in Slovakia's media sector is not

likely to change this perception. However, China's image as a state possessing an efficient and successful socioeconomic model could be strengthened. Chinese soft-power efforts could also influence the views of the part of the population that may consider an authoritarian system a legitimate alternative to liberal democracy.

For a variety of reasons, there are distinctions between the Chinese and Russian influence efforts. China's approach tends to be more pragmatic and is focused on creating networks of influential individuals and institutions that would be supportive of China's economic expansion into Central Europe. China also aims to leverage its history, culture, and economic and technological achievements in such a way that the Slovak public would perceive China as nothing more than a non-threatening country of mild fascination.

Although the scope of Chinese activity in Slovakia has been more limited than in some other Central European countries, Chinese soft power activities have increased during the past five years. This is in large part a result of the work of the two Confucius Institutes in Bratislava and the Chinese embassy. The institutes have introduced new culture-promotion activities, such as regular courses on Chinese culture, as well as events, including China-related lectures, performances, culinary events, exhibitions, and presentations. All of these are organized for the broader public, including schoolchildren, students, and various adult groups. While the scope of these events is limited due to the institutes' small staff, the Confucius Institutes have the potential to attract wider audiences in the future. China's presence in Slovakia's public life may also grow through the development of economic ties between the two countries via the multilateral 16+1 format, and through particular projects within the Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese soft power activities can create certain challenges for the country's pro-democracy community, though they pose less of a threat to Slovakia's established democratic institutions than they do to civil society. Unlike Russia, China is not seeking to back domestic partners who are openly destabilizing and undermining democratic mechanisms from the inside, such as right-wing populists, extremists, and reactionary social conservatives. It is probable that many civil society actors, representatives of NGOs and think tanks, independent journalists, and scholars will stand as committed defenders of democratic institutions, norms, and values.

However, in the societal realm of general values, norms, ideas, stances, and public activities, it may be necessary to react to the ideological contents Chinese soft-power initiatives seek to spread that are incompatible with democracy, ideas of human rights, and civil liberties. The primary variable here is the public positions of politicians and representatives of business circles whose interests can be dependent on economic deals with China. Executives remain an important target audience for China's embassy, which actively seeks to bring them to events such as the Chinese New Year reception. China's main agenda in Slovakia is similar to its agenda in other countries: present a strong, united China, its traditional culture and achievements, and convey that China is undergoing a transformation through which it will become equal to Western powers.

China's soft-power campaign appears to be targeting many recipients, with an expectation that some will be receptive to this outreach and could be included in a wider network of contacts favorable to China. Aside from this, China employs soft power tools to support its policy aims, including minimizing the influence of the Dalai Lama or Taiwan's representatives. The fact that the Chinese ambassador has published material on the pro-Russian web portal *Hlavné správy*

indicates that China may in the future share more communication tools with Russia that are aimed at the same audiences: people distrustful of the West and its democratic values, and who are instead admirers of authoritarian regimes.

The views expressed in this paper represent the opinions and analysis of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

NOTES

- ¹ Acknowledgement: the authors would like to thank Martin Slobodník for his comments on the draft of this study.
- ² Editor's note: Although the overview essay to this report uses the term "sharp power" to characterize the more malign and manipulative aspects of authoritarian influence, the authors of the individual country reports instead generally use the broader term "soft power." In the country studies, the authors were asked to inventory and analyze the methods of authoritarian influence applied by China and Russia in democratic settings. The concept of "sharp power" introduced in the overview essay is an outgrowth of their comparative findings.
- ³ Peter Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe* (Budapest: Political Capital Institute, August 2016), www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=66.
- ⁴ Sergey Karaganov et al. *Strategiya dlya Rossii. Rossiyskaya vneshnyaya politika: konec 2010-kh – nachalo 2020-kh godov* [Strategy for Russia. Russian foreign policy: the end of 2010s—beginning of 2020s], Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (Moscow: SVOP, 2016). http://svop.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%8B_23%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%8F_sm.pdf.
- ⁵ Salome Samadashvili, *Muzzling the Bear. Strategic Defence for Russia's Undeclared Information War on Europe* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2015), <http://stratcomcoe.org/salome-samadashvili-muzzling-bear-strategic-defence-russias-undeclared-information-war-europe>.
- ⁶ For more about institutions involved in activities of Russia's "soft power," their profiles, representatives, main characteristics see Orysia Lutsevych, *Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood* (London: Chatham House, April 2016), www.chathamhouse.org/publication/agents-russian-world-proxy-groups-contested-neighbourhood; Vladislava Vojtíšková et al., *The Bear in Sheep's Clothing: Russia's Government-Funded Organisations in the EU* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2016), www.martenscentre.eu/publications/bear-sheeps-clothing-russias-government-funded-organisations-eu.
- ⁷ *GLOBSEC Trends: Central Europe Under the Fire of Propaganda: Public Opinion Poll Analysis in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia* (Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute, September 2016), www.martenscentre.eu/publications/bear-sheeps-clothing-russias-government-funded-organisations-eu.
- ⁸ The Index's methodology was based on a measurable set of societal and political indicators, including analyses of opinion poll data and the political landscape, as well as the structure of the media and the state of civil society. Five areas were analyzed: public perception, political landscape, media, state countermeasures, and civil society.
- ⁹ *Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence in Central Europe* (Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 2017).
- ¹⁰ On some aspects of political Russophilia in contemporary Slovakia see: Juraj Mesík, "Kde sa vzala naša nekritickejšť k Rusku," [Where did our uncritical attitude to Russia come from?] *Sme*, 12 April 2017, <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/20507534/sme-okupovani-rusofilmi.html>.
- ¹¹ Ľudovít Štúr, "Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti" [Slavdom and the world of the future]. Bratislava: Slovenský inštitút medzinárodných štúdií, 1993.
- ¹² See more: Alexander Duleba: *Slepý pragmatizmus slovenskej východnej politiky: aktuálna agenda slovensko-ruských bilaterálnych vzťahov*. [Blind Pragmatism of Slovak Eastern Policy: Current Agenda of Slovak-Russian Bilateral relations]. Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava 1996.
- ¹³ Jakub Groszkowski, "Prime Minister Fico's Russian Card," *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich* [Center for Eastern Studies], 1 July 2015, www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-07-01/prime-minister-ficos-russian-card.
- ¹⁴ "Putin: Tovaroborot mezhdu Rossiey i Slovakiey mozhет byt vosstanovlen." [Putin: Trade Turnover Between Russia and Slovakia Can Be Restored] *Vzgliad*, 25 August 2016. <http://vz.ru/news/2016/8/25/828867.html>.

- ¹⁵ This includes persons of Russian origin with Slovak citizenship, citizens of the Russian Federation living in Slovakia, as well as ethnic Russians with citizenship of other states. “Tab. 10 Obyvateľstvo SR podľa národnosti – sčítanie 2011, 2001, 1991” [Table 10: Population of the Slovak Republic by Nationality, Census 2011, 2001, 1991], Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. 2011. Zuzana Bargerová, “Migrácia ako spoločenský fenomén: historické, sociálne a právne aspekty,” [Migration as societal phenomenon: historical, social and legal aspects] in Miroslava Hlinčíková and Grigorij Mesežnikov, eds., *Otvorená krajina alebo nedobytná pevnosť? Slovensko, migranti a utečenci* [Open Country or Impenetrable Fortress? Slovakia, Migrants and Refugees]. (Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky–Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016): 32, https://cz.boell.org/sites/default/files/otvorena_krajina_alebo_nedobytna_pevnost_slovensko_migranti_a_utecenci_e.pdf.
- ¹⁶ “Tab. 10 Obyvateľstvo SR podľa národnosti – sčítanie 2011, 2001, 1991” [Table 10: Population of the Slovak Republic by Nationality, Census 2011, 2001, 1991], Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. 2011. https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/wcm/connect/1f62189f-cc70-454d-9eab-17bdf5e1dc4a/Tab_10_Obyvateľstvo_SR_podľa_národnosti_sčítanie_2011_2001_1991.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=knLHmhe.
- ¹⁷ Zuzana Bargerová, “Migrácia ako spoločenský fenomén: historické, sociálne a právne aspekty,” [Migration as societal phenomenon: historical, social and legal aspects] in Miroslava Hlinčíková and Grigorij Mesežnikov, eds., *Otvorená krajina alebo nedobytná pevnosť? Slovensko, migranti a utečenci* [Open Country or Impenetrable Fortress? Slovakia, Migrants and Refugees]. (Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky–Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016): 32, https://cz.boell.org/sites/default/files/otvorena_krajina_alebo_nedobytna_pevnost_slovensko_migranti_a_utecenci_e.pdf.
- ¹⁸ Zväz Rusov na Slovensku [Union of Russians in Slovakia] (ZRS), <http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/>.
- ¹⁹ “O Nás” [About Us], Union of Russians in Slovakia (ZRS), http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/?page_id=114.
- ²⁰ The International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC) established in 2001, presents itself as “the only global association of organizations of Russian compatriots,” with membership of 137 organizations from 52 countries. See International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC), <http://www.msrs.ru/about-us>.
- ²¹ “Unions of Russians” in Bratislava, Košice and Poprad, “Ruslana” in Martin, “Russophiles” in Žilina, “Obshchina” in Nitra, “Považan” in Považská Bystrica, and the youth organization Initiative 21. Several other Russian “expats” organizations exist in Slovakia; “Russia” (Rossiya), “Young Russia” (Rossiya Molodaya), “Chapayev,” “Teremok,” “Kalinka.”
- ²² “Stanovy OZ Zväz Rusov na Slovensku,” [Statute of Civic Association Union of Russians in Slovakia] 2007 *Union of Russians in Slovakia (ZRS)*, last modified 26 February 2016, <http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/?p=503>.
- ²³ http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/?page_id=447.
- ²⁴ Slovensko-ruská spoločnosť [Slovak–Russian Society] (SRS), www.srspol.sk/.
- ²⁵ Politicians who were declared “the worst Russophobes” included President Andrej Kiska, MP František Šebej and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák; individual personalities included political scientists Alexander Duleba and Ivo Samson (both from the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, SFPA) and sociologist Martin Bútorá; organizations included SFPA, IVO and MFA; media included daily *Sme*, weekly *Týždeň* and the public Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS); and political parties included SDKÚ-DS, SaS and Most-Híd. See “Definitívne výsledky ankety—Najhorší rusofóbi Slovenska,” [Definitive results of the survey—The worst Russophobes in Slovakia] Slovak-Russian Society, 18 February 2015, www.srspol.sk/clanky/clanek?navez=&id_clanek=10545.
- ²⁶ “Rusko chce zakročiť proti rusofóbi vo svete, ktorú vraj zneužíva NATO.” [Russia wants to intervene against Russophobia in the world that is allegedly misused by NATO] *Parlamentné listy*, 11 July 2016, www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/monitor/Rusko-chce-zakrocit-proti-rusofobii-vo-svete-ktoru-vraj-zneuzyva-NATO-272284.
- ²⁷ The Slovak Republic became a member-state of the EU and NATO in 2004 after the country had overcome the consequences of turbulent internal developments during the government of populist Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. Russia sympathized with Mečiar’s policies.
- ²⁸ UPC offers in its enhanced cable subscription packages two Russian television channels, RT and the First Channel. SWAN offers two Russian channels, RT and RTD, in all its packages. Skylink offers three Russian stations, RT, RT en Español, and the First Channel. Antik offers four Russian channels: RT, RTD, RTR, and Rossiya 24.
- ²⁹ “Trhový podiel TV” [TV Market Share], *Mediálne*, <https://medialne.etrend.sk/grafy-a-tabulky.html>; “TAM výskum na Slovensku,” *PMT*, www.pmt.sk.
- ³⁰ For comparison, viewership of the domestic Slovak TV news channel TA3 is 1.5%. Author’s interview with Mirka Kernová, 21 July 2017.
- ³¹ Pontes, www.pontes.sk/index.php/sk/.
- ³² Peter Morvay, “Prečo konšpirátori potrebujú profesorov,” [Why do conspiracists need professors] *Denník N*, 7 March 2017.
- ³³ Author’s interview with Mirek Toda, reporter of the daily *Denník N*, 2 February 2017.

- ³⁴ On November 23, 2016, the European Parliament approved the resolution “EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties,” which defines the Russian Federation (together with ISIL) as the main source of disinformation and propaganda. See more: “European Parliament Resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU Strategic Communication to Counteract Propaganda Against it by Third Parties,” *European Parliament*, last modified 11 April 2017, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2016-0441&format=XML&language=EN; “EU Parliament Urges Fight against Russia’s ‘Fake News.’” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 23 November 2016. www.rferl.org/a/eu-fight-russia-fake-news-rt-sputnik/28135752.html.
- ³⁵ For more, see Dušan Fischer, “The Channels and Distinguishing Elements of Russian Propaganda in Slovakia,” in Katri Pynnöniemi and András Rácz, eds., *Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2016): 295–305, <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/fog-of-falsehood>.
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- ³⁹ Author’s interview with Miroslava Kernová, 21 July 2017.
- ⁴⁰ Author’s interview with anonymous source.
- ⁴¹ “Video záznam: Prejav Tibor Eliot Rostas/Slovanský mediálny dom,” [Video record: Tibor Eliot Rostas’ speech/Slavic Media House] Rostas News video, 8 July 2017.
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- ⁴⁷ “Nikolaj Starikov o geopolitike v Bratislave,” [Nikolaj Starikov on geopolitics in Bratislava] Association of Slovak Writers, 6 February 2016, www.spolok-slovenskych-spisovatelov.sk/news/nikolaj-starikov-o-geopolitike-v-bratislave/.
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- ⁵⁰ The Collective Security Treaty Organization (“Tashkent Treaty,” signed in 1992) is a military alliance formed by six post-Soviet states (Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).

- ⁵¹ Варгова, Ленка. "Интервью: Ректор УМБ Хиадловски о сотрудничестве с МГИМО, иностранных студентах и роли возраста в менеджменте." [Interview: Rector of Matej Bel University Hiadlovsky about cooperation with MGIMO, foreign students and the role of age in management] Slovakia 360, 27 December 2016. <https://svk360.com/intervyu-rektor-umb-hiadlovski-o-sotrudnichestve-s-mgimo-inostrannyh-studentah-i-rol-i-vozrasta-v-menedzhmente/>.
- ⁵² Author's interview with Juraj Mesik, writer and civic activist, 8 December 2016.
- ⁵³ "15th anniversary of Russian Center of Science and Culture in Bratislava," Rossotrudnichestvo, 22 January 2016, available at <http://prev.rs.gov.ru/de/node/11602>.
- ⁵⁴ Following the Dalai Lama's visit in Slovakia in October 2016, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said that the meeting between the Slovak President Andrej Kiska and the Dalai Lama was not in line with Slovakia's adherence to the One China principle. See Martin Slobodník, "Ze slovenského tisku: Čína pri dalajlámových cestách testuje, kam až môže zájsť" [China uses the Dalai Lama's trips as a test for where it can go], Sinopsis, 25 October 2016, <https://sinopsis.cz/ze-slovenskeho-tisku-cina-pri-dalajlamovych-cestach-testuje-kam-az-moze-zajst>.
- ⁵⁵ Gabriela Pleschová, "The Slovak and Hungarian Partnerships with China: High Hopes that Did Not Come True." In *China's Comeback in Former Eastern Europe: No Longer Comrades, Not Yet Strategic Partners*, edited by Rudolf Fürst and Filip Tesař. Prague: Institute of International Relations, 2013.
- ⁵⁶ See the website of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic: www.statistics.sk.
- ⁵⁷ "Počet čínskych investorov na Slovensku klesá, ich investície ale rastú" [The number of Chinese investors in Slovakia is falling but the amount of investment is on rise]. TERAZ, 29 October 2016. www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/pocet-cinskych-investorov-na-slovensku/225394-clanok.html. The rumored purchase by Chinese He Steel of the steel mill in Košice from the American corporation U.S. Steel could profoundly change this. However, if this deal materializes, it would contravene the earlier intentions of the Slovak government, which included a binding memorandum with U.S. Steel that puts a financial penalty on the factory's current owner for selling or transferring the Košice plant earlier than 26 March 2018. See Liptáková, Jana. "Speculations About the Sale of USSK Continue." Slovak Spectator, 7 December 2016. <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20404031/speculations-about-the-sale-of-ussk-continue.html>; and "Memorandum of Understanding [Between the Slovak Republic and the United States Steel Corporation]," Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 26 March 2016, www.vlada.gov.sk/memorandum-o-porozumeni-medzi-slovenskou-republikou-a-us-steel-corporation/.
- ⁵⁸ "Fico plánuje navštíviť Čínu, chce prehĺbiť spoluprácu" [Fico plans to visit China, wants to deepen cooperation]. Sme, 16 December 2014. www.sme.sk/c/7551232/fico-planuje-navstivit-cinu-chce-prehlibit-spolupracu.html#ixzz3M5yyTtX.
- ⁵⁹ Shannon Tiezzi. "US Releases Last Uyghur Chinese Prisoners from Guantanamo Bay." Diplomat, 3 January 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/u-s-releases-last-uyghur-chinese-prisoners-from-guantanamo-bay/>.
- ⁶⁰ "China Says to Retaliate After Slovak President Meets Dalai Lama." Reuters, 17 October 2016. www.reuters.com/article/us-china-slovakia-dalailama-idUSKBN12H0UO. Prime Minister Fico distanced himself from this meeting and sharply criticised President Kiska for it, events that occurred in the context of broader political competition between the two leaders. The Dalai Lama delivered a speech at a public event attended by thousands of citizens in Bratislava. He met with three MPs and one MEP, one of whom represented one of the ruling parties and three who represented the opposition, including the vice-speaker of parliament. President Kiska met with the Dalai Lama as a private person in a Bratislava restaurant. Before the meeting, Kiska met with the Chinese ambassador and explained to him his "purely personal" motivation for the meeting. China's government protested and warned that the situation could impede the further development of bilateral relations. President Kiska was criticized by Prime Minister Fico and Foreign Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajčák, who both argued that Kiska's actions undermined economic cooperation between the two states. China then suspended bilateral negotiations with Fico that had been planned to take place before a 16+1 meeting in Riga in November 2016. Minister Lajčák said that after Kiska's meeting with the Dalai Lama, Slovak-Chinese relations grew colder.
- ⁶¹ Adam Valček, "Penta je na predaj. Chcú ju Číňania," [Penta is going to be sold. China wants it] Sme, 17 March 2017; Michaela Kušnírová, "Čína skupuje svet, Slovensko ju neláka" [China buys the world, Slovakia does not attract it] Sme, 3 January 2017, <https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/20423344/cinania-skupuju-svet-ich-investicie-vytvorili-novy-rekord.html>; Tomáš Němeček, "Český týždeň Tomáša Němečka," [Czech week of Tomáš Němeček] .týžden, No. 11, 13 March 2017.
- ⁶² "Fico silently met with CEFC representatives," *Slovak Spectator*, 11 October 2016, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20351628/fico-silently-met-with-cefc-representatives.html>.

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- ⁶⁴ Two Slovak daily newspapers, *Sme* and *Denník N*, and the weekly *.týžden*, stand out as more vocal critics of China.
- ⁶⁵ Gabriela Pleschová and Rudolf Fürst. “Mobilizing Overseas Chinese to Back Up Chinese Diplomacy: The Case of President Hu Jintao’s Visit to Slovakia in 2009.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 1 (2015): 55–65.
- ⁶⁶ MP Ľuboš Blaha (Smer–SD), chairman of the Slovak parliamentary committee for European affairs, wrote the following: “I have received the Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China. It was a very friendly meeting. I respect China, and I am convinced that the U.S. or the EU have no bigger right to impose upon China their liberal model than China has the right to impose its Chinese model upon the Western countries. Like the Chinese, I believe in sovereignty, cultural diversity, mutual respect, and balance. By the way, most statistics on globalization are boosted by the fact that over the past decades, poverty has been greatly reduced in the world. In neoliberal studies, however, it is rare to add that it was only thanks to the fact that China has pulled half a billion people out of poverty. China did not surrender to the neoliberal regime, retains state control over the economy, and controls capital flows, and the state retains decisive property rights. I think that China can be more of an inspiration in many economic decisions for the neoliberal states in the West.” [Author’s translation]. “Blaha (SMER–SD): Rešpektujem Čínu,” [Blaha (Smer–SD): I respect China] *Parlamentné listy*, 15 December 2016, www.parlamentnelisty.sk/politika/politici-volicom/Blaha-SMER-SD-Respektujem-Cinu-281879. In addition, Smer–SD’s chairman Robert Fico has made several positive references to China in recent years.
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- ⁶⁸ See Confucius Institute in Bratislava, accessed 30 March 2017, <http://konfuciovinstitut.sk>.
- ⁶⁹ See, for example, Annual report of the institute for 2014. Information was supplemented though personal interview with Alena Malíčková, institute secretary (Bratislava, 20 August 2015).
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- ⁷¹ See Confucius Institute at the Comenius University in Bratislava, accessed 30 March 2017, <http://konfuciovinstitut.sk>.
- ⁷² See the website of Confucius Institute in Bratislava: <http://konfucius.sk/aktuality>.
- ⁷³ See Čínsky príbeh–Čínsky Tibet [Chinese Story–Chinese Tibet], Confucius Institute at the Comenius University in Bratislava, 27 April 2017, <http://konfuciovinstitut.sk/2017/04/cinsky-pribeh-cinsky-tibet/>.
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- ⁷⁵ See “Otvorenie spoločnej čínsko-slovenskej výstavy Hodvábna cesta 2017” [Opening of the Joint Chinese-Slovak Exhibition Silk Road 2017], Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Slovak Republic, 5 September 2017, <http://sk.china-embassy.org/slo/xwdt/t1493216.htm>.
- ⁷⁶ See, for example, Michaela Kušnířová, “Obchody medzi Čínou a Slovenskom ešte len štartujú (rozhovor)” [Business between China and Slovakia is only starting (An interview)], *Sme*, 6 April 2016, <http://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/20131802/obchody-medzi-cinou-a-slovenskom-este-len-startuju-rozhovor.html#ixzz4BS3uXBI9>; “21-ročné Slovensko oslavuje 65 rokov diplomatických vzťahov s ČLR” [21-year Slovakia Celebrates 65 Years of Diplomatic Relations with the PRC], *Tablet.TV*, 23 October 2014, http://tv.teraz.sk/cd-klub/141043-004-009_cd_klub_20141023mp45448c79f9473995dd0b4eaa8/1596; “Tanečný súbor Pekinskej tanečnej akadémie sa predstavil na Slovensku pri príležitosti čínskeho nového roku Sviatky jari” [The ensemble of the Beijing Academy of Dancing presented the Spring Festival at the occasion of the Chinese New Year]; “Čínsky veľvyslanec Lin Lin: Na Slovensku sa citim veľmi príjemne” [Chinese Ambassador Lin: I feel very well in Slovakia], *Slovenka*, 6 August 2016, <http://slovenka.zenskyweb.sk/clanok/33358-cinsky-velvyslanec-lin-lin-na-slovensku-sa-citim-velmi-prijemne>.

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- ⁷⁸ See, for example, Vladimír Šnidl, “Kto riadi proruský web Hlavné správy? Muž, ktorý neodmieta ani eurofondy” [Who Manages the Pro-Russian website Hlavné správy? A man who does not refuse the Eurofunds], *Denník N*, 2 August 2016, <https://dennikn.sk/521950/kto-riadi-prorusky-web-hlavne-spravy-muz-ktory-neodmieta-ani-eurofondy-2> (Accessed 7 April 2017).
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- ⁸² Martin Hála, “Puzzle jménem CEFC: čínský a světový tisk o tajemné společnosti (a jejím vlivu v ČR)” [Puzzle Entitled CEFC: Chinese and World Press on a Mysterious Company and its Impact in the Czech Republic], *Sinopsis*, 23 January 2017, <https://sinopsis.cz/puzzle-jmenem-cefc-cinsky-a-svetovy-tisk-o-tajemne-spolecnosti-a-jejim-vlivu-v-cr>; Olga Lomová, “Czech-Chinese Honeymoon: Will it Bring Economic Advantage or End in Security Risk?” *V4 Revue*, 9 February 2016, <http://visegradrevue.eu/czech-chinese-honeymoon-part-i-will-it-bring-economic-advantage-or-end-in-security-risk>.
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