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The Belt and Road Initiative:
China's Rise, America's Balance, and Latin America's Struggle

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History and International Relations
May 4, 2020

Submitted to the Faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the requirements for Distinguished Honors in the History and International Relations Departments.

Abstract

This research attempts to understand the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. Specifically, it explores China's rapid rise as a formidable geopolitical power, the United States' mixed response to that rise, and efforts by two Latin American countries, Ecuador and Argentina, to avoid exploitation by both China and the United States—and, indeed, to even benefit from this mutating relationship. In all cases, historically constructed ideas and strategic interests shape relations among these various actors. Accordingly, this research lays out the historical sources for each of these powers' central ideas. Then, it connects those ideas to the current strategies employed by both China and the United States to promote their military, economic, political, and cultural power. Meanwhile, this research uses two case studies—Ecuador and Argentina—to explore to what extent states have attempted to use investment and trade with China through the Belt and Road Initiative to increase economic growth and expand political autonomy. Ultimately, this analysis informs our understanding of geopolitics, clarifies the role of historic memory in international relations, and lays the groundwork for further research related to the BRI's understudied role in Latin America.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Napoleon Bonaparte once compared China to a “sleeping lion” and observed that “when she wakes, she will shake the world.” Now China the lion has awakened, but it is a peaceful, amicable and civilized lion. - Xi Jinping, Chinese President¹

China wants nothing less than to push the United States of America from the Western Pacific and attempt to prevent us from coming to the aid of our allies. But they will fail. - Mike Pence, American Vice President²

In this world of ours, a world of powerful centers and subjugated outposts, there is no wealth that must not be held in some suspicion. - Eduardo Hughes Galeano, Uruguayan Journalist³

In the summer of 2019, while I was conducting research on the Chinese *Hukou* system in Guangzhou, something very strange happened. I had just walked out of the Haixinsha subway station into a large public square with my close friend and amateur translator Conner. There, we saw this peculiar scene:



¹ Xi Jinping, "Speech by H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at the Meeting Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of China-France Diplomatic Relations" (2014), *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1147894.shtml.

² Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China" (2018), at *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>

³ Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (London: Profile Books, 2009), pp. 267.

Pictured here is a family setting up for a photo shoot with the Mexican flag in a public square. The scene stood out to me because, up until that point, I had only seen American tourists during my time in Guangzhou. I had begun to wonder how common it was for the city to receive tourists from outside of Asia and the United States when the photo shoot was interrupted by two nearby police officers. Specifically, two 民警 (*Minjǐng*) approached the family. These are higher level officials than the typical transportation attendants, so I thought they might be asking the family for their passports. To my surprise, these officers approached the tourists and, in broken English, began requesting they put the flag away. When it became clear to Conner and I that neither group spoke English, Mandarin, or Spanish well enough to communicate with one another, we approached the group. Then, in a bizarre babel of mediocre Spanish, English, and Mandarin, we explained the officers' message to the family, which was that no foreign flags are allowed in a public venue in China. Once the family understood, they thanked us for the help and everyone went on with their day.

That scene stayed with me. There we were, two Americans, a family of Mexican tourists, and two Chinese police officers, all trying to navigate a strange situation. Coincidentally (I cannot overstate the strangeness of this coincidence), I had just spent a summer researching China's implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America. This unexpected event perfectly highlighted the lesser studied connection that is the crux of this research, the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America.

An Evolving Relationship: The Belt and Road Initiative

No development better exemplifies this evolving relationship than China's expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative into Latin America. Initiated in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one of the primary tenets of Chinese president Xi Jinping's "national revitalization"

policy in China.⁴ The BRI is primarily a global infrastructure project funded by the Chinese government. However, President Xi made it clear in his opening remarks at the original 2013 BRI forum (then called “One Belt One Road”, or OBOR) that the BRI is much more than an economic project. Instead, Xi noted that the “New Silk Road,” like the original Silk Road, will spread economic openness and mutual cooperation throughout the world. President Xi subsequently expanded these goals during the 2017 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation to include the sharing of technology, culture, and security.⁵ Importantly, President Xi also clarified that the BRI is divided into two main geographic routes. The first is the Silk Road Economic Belt, which connects Asia, Africa, and Europe through land-based infrastructure development. The second is the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which connects Asia, Africa, Europe, and Pacific Island countries through maritime infrastructure development. While these are the main routes under development as part of the BRI, other countries “off-route” in places like Latin America have received BRI funding.⁶ Thus, the BRI is a truly global project, impacting more than the “Silk Road” misnomer implies.

The international response to this global project has been mixed. Although President Xi claims the purpose of the BRI is to achieve “friendship, shared development, peace, harmony and a better future,” many international observers suspect China has less altruistic intentions.⁷ Indeed, many argue that the BRI’s purpose is to enhance China’s geopolitical power through

⁴ Xi Jinping, “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future” (2013), *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1078088.shtml

⁵ Xi Jinping, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (2017), *Xinhua*, at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm

⁶ Fermín Koop, “Belt and Road: The New Face of China in Latin America,” *Dialogo Chino* (blog), April 25, 2019, <https://dialogochino.net/26121-belt-and-road-the-new-face-of-china-in-latin-america/>; Kristin Huang, “Xi Signs up Senegal for Belt and Road Plan, Pledges Closer Africa Ties,” *South China Morning Post*, July 22, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2156327/president-xi-jinping-pledges-closer-africa-ties-during>.

⁷ Xi, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.”

economic opportunism. These arguments conform to a particular interpretation of international relations which posits that great powers seek to become more powerful than their rivals by expanding their military and economic power. However, other scholars evaluate the evolving relationship between China and the United States, as well as their respective relations with Latin American countries that receive BRI funding like Ecuador and Argentina, differently. To understand the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America, it is vital to evaluate these competing interpretations of China's rise as a global power and the driving forces behind the BRI.

Competing Interpretations of China's Rise and the BRI

Put simply, Realists see China's outreach to the world as a power move. Realism originated with thinkers like Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes and generally asserts that conflict between states is inevitable due to the inherently anarchic state of international relations, human nature, or a combination of the two.⁸ To generalize—there are competing theories within realism itself—Realists primarily interpret the BRI as China's attempt to expand its economic power. Following Realist thinking, this economic expansion, when coupled with China's growing military aggression in places like the South China Sea, demonstrate the emerging power's desire to become a global superpower. Realists argue that as rival powers and concerned neighbors attempt to preserve their interests and respond to the BRI and China's rise, international conflict becomes inevitable.⁹

⁸ W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, "Political Realism in International Relations," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/realism-intl-relations/>.

⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?," *The National Interest*, October 25, 2014, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>; Aaron L. Friedberg, "Bucking Beijing: An Alternative U.S. China Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 5 (2012): 48–58; Stephen Kotkin, "Realist World," *Foreign Affairs*, December 7, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/realist-world>.

Meanwhile, Liberal Institutionalists take a more optimistic perspective, envisioning China's rise as compatible with the current liberal international order, which was formed following the Second World War. Unlike Realists, Liberal Institutionalists generally see cooperation rather than conflict as inevitable. They predict that as China grows in power, it will become more integrated into international institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund. From the perspective of Liberal Institutionalists, the Belt and Road Initiative constitutes China's attempt to contribute to the missions of these international institutions, albeit through an alternative channel. Certainly, Liberal Institutionalists, like Realists, note that the BRI is meant to promote China's self-interest. However, they argue that states can simultaneously pursue their own self-interest and cooperate with other states to promote collective interests. From this perspective, in order to continue expanding its economic and political power, China must inevitably integrate into existing, United States-dominated international institutions. Liberal Institutionalists argue that since other members of the international order will seek to accommodate China's rise, international cooperation is inevitable.¹⁰

Constructivists, on the other hand, do not see conflict or cooperation as inevitable. Instead, they see an array of options from which states can choose. For Constructivists, these choices are driven by underlying ideas and interests. In this way, Constructivists contradict the rationalism that undergirds both Realist and Liberal Institutionalist analyses. As Constructivist scholar Alexander Went explained, "self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential

¹⁰ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal World: The Resilient Order," *Foreign Affairs* 97 (July/August, 2018): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/liberal-world>; also see Kori Schake, "Back to Basics," *Foreign Affairs*, (May/June 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-04-16/back-basics>.

features of anarchy. *Anarchy is what states make of it.*¹¹ Thus, China's gravitation towards conflict or cooperation is determined by its choices, which are entrenched in constructed ideas and interests, not purely rational calculations. Meanwhile, the United States and Latin American states respond to China's rise based on how they *perceive* China's intentions. That perception of the BRI (and China's general growing presence on the world stage) is also guided by choice, ideas, and interests. This means that the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America is somewhat unpredictable: neither international conflict nor cooperation are inevitable, leaving the future uncertain.

Which of these arguments best depicts the changing relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America? While it would be naive to dismiss any of these arguments in their entirety, the Constructivist perspective, with important qualifications, is the most compelling for a few reasons. First, arguing for the "inevitability" of any outcome is too deterministic and distorts our understanding of this evolving relationship. Even for those Realists and Liberal Institutionalists who argue that conflict or cooperation are, if not inevitable, at least the international tendency, there are ample historical periods that can be used to "prove" either argument and, consequently, "disprove" the opposing argument. For instance, Realists invoke the First World War and Liberal Institutionalists refer to the Cold War in an attempt to use history to discredit opposing theories of international relations. While it is important to analyze these histories in order to understand how states act, they cannot be used as predictive models of certainty. In contrast, Constructivists best take into account the only truly inevitable variable in international relations: uncertainty.¹² By noting that states make choices based on

¹¹ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 395.

¹² Wesley W. Widmaier, "Constructing Foreign Policy Crises: Interpretive Leadership in the Cold War and War on Terrorism," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2007): 782.

ideas and interests, Constructivists recognize that states do not always act in a calculating or “rational” manner. This makes their actions difficult to predict and exposes the limitations of historical analogies. For this reason, Constructivists best capture the incalculable chaos that confounds Realist/Liberal Institutionalist predictive models, thereby avoiding determinism.

Second, beyond recognizing uncertainty, Constructivists correctly identify the drivers of decision makers: ideas and interests. While Realists and Liberal Institutionalists certainly take these two factors into account, they manifest differently in Constructivist thought. While Realists and Liberal Institutionalists assert that ideas emerge from interests, Constructivists argue the opposite. For Constructivists, ideas shape interests, and a state’s ideas about international relations are entrenched in that state’s historically constructed identity. These ideas then inform that state’s understanding both of how to achieve the state’s interests and what those interests actually are. Instead of relying on conventional understandings of “reason” and “logic” to define a state’s interests like Realists and Liberal Institutionalists do, Constructivists rightly consider the role of a state’s historically constructed identity, social relations, and collective beliefs in shaping interests and preferences. Because interests and institutions are shaped by actors’ shared understandings, expectations, and collective knowledge, state behavior is not determined by objective forces but reflects interaction among multiple actors.¹³ This socially and historically based analysis reflects the fact that states are very complex systems—each with many different political and bureaucratic actors that are influenced by private actors and public opinion alike. This understanding avoids the oversimplification of Realists and Liberal Institutionalists, who often boil states’ choices down to a few notable leaders (e.g. Kissinger).

¹³ Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” 398.

Adopting a Constructivist perspective should not dismiss compelling arguments made by Realists and Liberal Institutionalists. Indeed, Realists are right to note that states often advocate for their own interests in ways that invite conflict. Similarly, Liberal Institutionalists correctly identify trends which suggest cooperation will win out over conflict internationally.

Constructivism does not refute either of these points. Instead, it suggests that socially and historically constructed ideas and interests (rather than “rational” interests) drive states to act in ways that can result in conflict, cooperation, or both simultaneously. Therefore, taking this Constructivist perspective allows us to understand the ever-changing relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America without haphazardly suggesting that conflict or cooperation is the most likely outcome.

A Constructivist Perspective: Ideas, Interests, and Choices

Applying the aforementioned Constructivist perspective, this research analyzes the complex, evolving relationship between China, the United States, and two Latin American countries, Ecuador and Argentina, through the BRI. Specifically, it explores China’s rapid rise as a formidable geopolitical power, the United States’ mixed response to that rise, and these two Latin American states’ struggle to avoid exploitation and benefit from this evolving relationship. In all these cases, states’ socially and historically constructed ideas and interests drive the choices made by these international actors. For this research, ideas are defined as collective historic memories that have created stable understandings of a particular state’s role and its relations with other global actors. State leaders may draw on this sense of shared identity to build support for preferred policies. Collective ideas and identities also influence how leaders pursue their state’s interests, which may be broadly defined in military, economic, political, and cultural

terms.¹⁴ While this categorization is imperfect, relating interests to these four axes of power clarifies the relationship between these states' socially and historically constructed ideas and their overarching geopolitical goals. This research ultimately establishes these ideas and interests in order to analyze each state's choices, which shape the evolving relationship between China, the United States, Ecuador, and Argentina. The BRI serves as a key focal point in this relationship and illustrates these complicated decision-making processes.

In order to analyze these complicated ideas, interests, and choices, this research first lays out the historical sources for each of these state's central ideas. China, the United States, Ecuador, and Argentina have complicated historical, political, and social relations that influence their choices when navigating this relationship. Exploring these histories and relations helps clarify the way in which each state constructs its ideas and interests. To see how collective identities are constructed and expressed, this research relies on a wealth of primary and secondary sources that highlight the ideological importance of historic memory in the decision-making process of states. As these historic ideas are highlighted, they are connected to the central categories of power listed above in order to illustrate how each state has historically defined and pursued its interests. After the sources of these ideas and interests have been identified, this research analyzes the choices made by China, the United States, Ecuador, and Argentina. These complicated choices are expressed through economic investment, policy statements, political forums, editorials, the writings of personal leaders, etc. By aggregating these materials and relating them back to each state's socially and historically constructed ideas and interests, this research describes the complicated decision-making process of each state.

¹⁴ Alice Lyman Miller, "SJIR: China an Emerging Superpower?," *Stanford Journal of International Relations*, May 4, 2006, https://web.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.03_miller.html.

This process looks slightly different for Latin American countries, however. While China and the United States are massive geopolitical forces with the ability to exercise extensive military, economic, political, and cultural power, Latin American states are comparatively weaker. In fact, these states are often described as caught between China and the United States in this evolving relationship, operating with a far more limited spectrum of choices. As each great power vies for influence in Latin America, Latin American states' ability to make choices unimpaired by either power dwindles. Nevertheless, the choices of Latin American states still shape this relationship significantly. Thus, this research frames Latin American states' choices in relation to their ability to pursue greater autonomy and to avoid exploitation at the hands of both China and the United States. Ultimately, as with China and the United States, this research explores Latin American decision-making processes. Understanding these processes sheds light on the evolving relationships between China, the United States, Ecuador, and Argentina and helps determine whether these relationships will be mutually beneficial or zero-sum, resulting in conflict or cooperation.

Humiliation, Exceptionalism, and Autonomy

For China, one of the central, historically constructed ideas that Communist Party leaders use to guide and rationalize foreign policy decisions is the need to assuage national humiliation. This idea originates in the infamous Century of Humiliation (roughly 1848-1949). During this time, China experienced colonial occupation, imperial exploitation, and various bloody conflicts that undermined its immense geopolitical power. Importantly, these events also challenged the Chinese population's historic understanding of China as a dominant force in global politics or, more precisely, as 中国 (*Zhōngguó*), "the Middle Kingdom." Today, China's leaders see restoring this actual and understood power as essential to assuaging national humiliation.

Specifically, Chinese leaders see “National Rejuvenation” as key to restoring China’s historic status as a superpower and the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rule as paramount to pursuing that rejuvenation. Because of this historically constructed desire to assuage national humiliation, Chinese leaders attempt to expand China’s military, economic, political, and cultural power through the BRI and seek to make China a superpower.

Meanwhile, for the United States, the historically constructed idea of American Exceptionalism continues to have a powerful influence on collective identity and foreign policy decision-making. For centuries, American leaders have described the nation as a “city on a hill,” a model of civilization. However, American leaders consistently feared that an alternative model could undermine the ideal American way of life, which was white, Christian, democratic, and capitalist. During the Cold War, this alternative model was Soviet-style Communism, which was generally considered the antithesis of American values. The United States lost various battles in its struggle against Communism, each leaving scars upon its historic memory (e.g. Vietnam), but the loss of China had particular importance. As a massive country with critical geopolitical significance, the Communist victory over the United States-backed Nationalists left a scar on the historically constructed idea of American exceptionalism. The resulting “Loss of China” complex constituted a reminder that America’s “exceptional” model was once beat out by another. Accordingly, American leaders attempt to assuage this historically constructed failure and prove that China does not represent a viable alternative to America’s model. Indeed, even though Communism has been replaced by China’s new model—“market authoritarianism”—American foreign policy makers still attempt to leverage military, economic, political, and cultural power in order to alleviate this historic failure, quash an ostensible threat to the

American creed, and defend American hegemony.¹⁵ This has led the United States to act aggressively within the evolving relationship with China and Latin America, seeking to undermine China's political system and protect its historic "backyard."

Lastly, the foreign policies of Latin American countries are likewise driven by historical ideas. However, Latin America is unique in this relationship. Unlike China and the United States, Latin America is not made up of one central government with a relatively cohesive self-conceptualization. Instead, it is composed of dozens of countries with individual histories and national identities. Nevertheless, there is a shared history between all of these countries which has shaped their core understanding of their role in geopolitics: oppression under European colonialism and American imperialism. As most Latin American countries began to gain independence from European imperial powers in the 19th century, the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine—"the American continents... are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers"—effectively initiated the process through which the United States would supplant European powers as the dominant interloper in Latin America.¹⁶ Since then, the United States has continuously infringed upon Latin American countries' autonomy through economic exploitation, the Condor Plan, and modern drug wars. As China now begins to make investments in Latin America through the BRI, Latin American leaders must reconcile with their own nation's historically constructed desire to achieve autonomy, which is rooted in the legacy of European and American meddling. Thus, after centuries of European colonialism and American imperialism, Latin American leaders must now struggle to find

¹⁵ Whether "market-authoritarianism" is truly a model is up for debate. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that American foreign policy makers see it that way. Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time* (Basic Books, 2012); Mark Beeson and Fujian Li, "What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States," *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (2015).

¹⁶ James Monroe, "Message of President James Monroe at the commencement of the first session of the 18th Congress (The Monroe Doctrine), 12/02/1823," *Presidential Messages of the 18th Congress, ca. 12/02/1823-ca. 03/03/1825*, Record Group 46, Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990, National Archives, [Archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov).

autonomy between China and the United States in this evolving relationship, either by picking between the two powers or pursuing a third, alternative path towards self-determination.

In summation, China's rapid rise as a formidable geopolitical power, the United States' mixed response to that rise, and Latin American states' struggle to avoid exploitation and benefit from this evolving relationship are all guided by these central historic ideas. National humiliation, American exceptionalism, and the struggle for autonomy shape the interests of these states, creating a broad spectrum of choice within which each actor may pursue its goals. Despite this array of choices, however, the current state of this relationship and the antagonistic nature of these historically constructed ideas suggest that these states are leaning towards policies which favor conflict over cooperation. Although this may seem to vindicate Realists, this combative outcome is hardly due to the inevitability of conflict, and it is important to note that cooperation places a key role in this relationship as well. However, because these historic memories construct external actors as dangerous adversaries not to be trusted, the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America has been characterized by antagonism.

The Belt and Road Initiative: A Cause for War?

This propensity for conflict does not mean that war is destined, as some scholars suggest. In fact, this relationship can even be reoriented towards cooperation. As suggested above, these states are *choosing* conflict, not falling into the inevitable outcome of a fixed struggle for power. This means that states within this evolving relationship can also choose cooperation, thereby turning geopolitical challenges into international opportunities. Therefore, despite the BRI's appearance as a point of contention, it exists as a powerful example through which each state could cooperate to achieve shared goals like the reduction of poverty, protection of the environment, or prevention of terrorism. However, this shift in attitude would require a dramatic

reconstruction of each state's historic ideas. Such reflection would require powerful reinterpretations of the past, national self-reconceptualization, and widespread educational reforms. This type of counter-historical reflection is difficult and unlikely. Nevertheless, as the Belt and Road Initiative continues to further connect China, the United States, and Latin America, such reflection becomes increasingly important. Without this change, this global struggle will remain self-defeating for all involved. As China and the United States compete for global dominance and Latin American countries are continuously drawn into the conflict, international peace is jeopardized, social justice within all of these states is undermined, and the environment is ravaged.

The following work is written with the hope that such crises are still preventable. By exploring the complicated history between China, the United States, Ecuador, and Argentina, this research applies a Constructivist perspective to the Belt and Road Initiative in order to highlight the real dangers of the continuation of this global struggle and interrogate the foundation of geopolitical theory. Without understanding these dangers and reevaluating international relations, we risk succumbing to, and therefore becoming, history.

Re-conceptualizing Geopolitics, History, and International Relations

To end at this point would ignore the important questions and claims of this research. One such claim is, despite each power's best attempts, this global struggle is self-defeating for all involved: there are no winners. As China and the United States jockey for global dominance and Latin American countries are continuously drawn into the conflict, international peace is jeopardized, social justice within all of these states is undermined, and the environment is ravaged potentially beyond repair. These are issues exacerbated by conflict that could be resolved through cooperation. The advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only

highlighted this need for cooperation in a world in which crises, and hopefully solutions, transcend borders.

Moreover, this research interrogates the foundation of geopolitical theory, history, and international relations by addressing various limitations and conventions within each field. For example, our conventional understandings are often limited by language, metaphor, and incomplete knowledge. We often describe international relations with problematic or limiting language; Civilization, the West, the First, Second, and Third Worlds, and the Global South are all terms created to help us better describe the economic and political position of peoples and states, but each carries a connotation that generalizes or systematizes bias and prejudice. Metaphors likewise misconstrue our understanding of the world. For example, after making the remark quoted at the beginning of this work, President Xi faced international backlash that capitalized on a rhetorical weakness of his metaphor—“Who has ever seen a peaceful lion?”—and raised concerns about China’s rise.¹⁷ Although unintentional, Xi’s metaphor distorted perspectives of China’s foreign policy for the worse. Other famous metaphors—Clash of Civilizations, Axis of Evil, Iron Curtain—have similarly distorted perceptions of history and international relations through oversimplification. Other rhetorical devices, like historical analogies, are no less distorting.¹⁸ Even when our understanding of the world is minimally distorted, it is always incomplete: unaccounted variables/conditions are inevitable. This means that all fields which seek to empirically describe our world—geopolitics, history, international relations, even science—are using incomplete observations to make inaccurate descriptions.

¹⁷ Interestingly, it is unclear that Napoleon ever even said this. Isaac Stone Fish, “Crouching Tiger, Sleeping Giant,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed July 17, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/19/china_shakes_the_world_cliche/.

¹⁸ Yuen Foong Khong, “Seduction by Analogy in Vietnam: The Malaya and Korea Analogies” in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (New York: Longman, 2002): 506-516.

This is not to say that we can make no observations about the world. Instead, it is important to keep these limitations in mind to avoid reductionism and recognize the inevitability of our somewhat arbitrary epistemological conclusions.

Recognizing the deficiency of empiricism and impossibility of certainty are especially important when approaching the fields of history and international relations since both are marred with examples of this reductionism. Scholars are often tempted to over-zealously describe a fast-approaching “Clash of Civilizations” or a utopian “End of History,” but these metaphors distort our understanding of global history.¹⁹ They are predicated on some unbalanced form of pessimism and optimism and are grounded in nonexistent certainty. These examples are not hyperbolic either. Similar theatrical rhetoric characterizes the discourse surrounding China’s rise in the 21st Century. Whether “Sleeping Giant”, “Dragon in the Room”, or “Paper Tiger”, scholars have not hesitated to refer to China as the opponent to the United States in the “New Cold War.”²⁰ However eye-catching these titles may be, it is important for scholars to distance themselves from rhetorical devices (in this case metaphors and historical analogy) in order to more accurately describe the world.

This research demonstrates an alternative approach to history and international relations that takes into account the inevitability of uncertainty and recognizes the reality of choice in geopolitics. By analyzing historically constructed ideas and the BRI, it explores China’s rise, the America’s balance, and Latin America’s struggle. This research also challenges the belief that this evolving relationship will result in conflict. Most importantly, it deconstructs the many metaphors that distort our understanding of history, international relations, and geopolitics.

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: And the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2002); Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012).

²⁰ Robert D. Kaplan, “A New Cold War Has Begun,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed July 17, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/07/a-new-cold-war-has-begun/>.

Chapter 2. China's Rise: National Humiliation and The Sleeping Lion

Is China a superpower? After half a century of establishing a strong international military presence, thriving economic growth, domestic/international political authority, and considerable cultural “soft power”, China has reemerged as a great power.²¹ Nevertheless, the question remains whether China will become a superpower and what impact this would have on international relations. This chapter explores China’s rapid rise over the past 70 years and examines whether China will become a superpower capable of matching the United States. Furthermore, despite President Xi’s insistence that China is a “peaceful” lion, China’s expansionist policies and pursuit of superpower status threaten to antagonize relations with the United States, especially if China continues to expand its influence in Latin America. With the Belt and Road Initiative especially, China now challenges the once “unipolar” power (the United States) in its own historic “backyard” (Latin America) through investment, diplomacy, and cultural projection. China’s implementation of the BRI within Latin America is a key representation of China’s challenge to the United States and continuing emergence as a 21st-century superpower. China’s rise does not necessitate conflict but China’s expansionist foreign policy raises concerns on the part of the United States and other countries.

To explain this expansionist foreign policy making, this research explores China’s socially and historically constructed ideas and interests. Illustrating these ideas and interests, this research analyzes China’s historic rise since 1949 and assesses the debate surrounding China’s superpower status. The chapter analyzes China’s efforts to expand its military, economic,

²¹ Prior to the Century of Humiliation, China was undoubtedly a global power. Mark Beeson and Fujian Li, "What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States," *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (2015), pp. 94.

political, and cultural power and connects this to Communist Party leaders' discourse on the need to overcome China's "Century of Humiliation." This desire to assuage national humiliation is at the core of China's pursuit of superpower status and explains how Chinese leaders understand China's interests and make foreign policy choices. In this way, this chapter argues that China's rise and the BRI are driven by the historic desire to assuage national humiliation. This leads China to strive for superpower status and pursue expansionist policies. This combination drives the evolving relationship between China, the United States and Latin America largely towards conflict despite ample opportunities for cooperation within this relationship.

What is a Superpower?

In order to evaluate the nature of China's relations with the United States and other countries, it is important to clearly define what it means to be a superpower. Competing theories of international relations define superpower differently. For instance, realist John J. Mearsheimer, a renowned international relations scholar from the University of Chicago, focuses on material power. He suggests that states' levels of power "are determined largely on the basis of their relative military capability."²² Correspondingly, regional hegemony—the military domination of a geographic region—belongs to the state that can field the most powerful economy and military (the former is necessary to maintain the latter). Mearsheimer argues that while there could theoretically be a global hegemon, vast bodies of water inhibit regional hegemony from dominating other regions, making global dominance unlikely.²³ While Mearsheimer makes a convincing argument that material power (i.e. military and economic power) is essential for a great power to become a hegemon, his definition of hegemony falls

²² John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 5.

²³ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 40-42.

short of describing crucial aspects of a superpower. Namely, he minimizes the role of a state's ability to exert political and cultural influence over states outside its region. This ability is essential for any superpower.

Other scholars agree, rejecting the view that a state is powerful merely because of its ability to fund and flex military might. Neoliberal institutionalist scholars suggest that a state must also exhibit political control over international institutions in order to become a dominant power. G. John Ikenberry, neoliberal institutionalist from Princeton University, writes that a superpower is a state that "can create and enforce the rules and institutions of a stable global order in which to pursue its interests and security."²⁴ Essentially, leadership positions in international financial institutions (IFIs), the United Nations, or various regional security organizations like NATO strengthen a state's ability to both coerce and co-opt other states into its political agenda.²⁵ For instance, decision-making within the International Monetary Fund (IMF), reflects the relative power of its members, giving the United States and leading European countries disproportionate influence over the organization's decisions so that it generally mirrors U.S. preferences. Similarly, if a state is a part of a regional security organization like NATO, it can potentially co-opt other nations into supporting its military interests. While participation in an institution empowers a state, Ikenberry argues that a state can only be a superpower if these institutions are in accordance with its own values and ideology.²⁶

This institutional, political power is not sufficient for a state to become a superpower: a state needs to have an international cultural influence too. This cultural influencing is a part of

²⁴ John G. Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," *Foreign Affairs*, September 15, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west>.

²⁵ Brian Schmidt, "Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis," *Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute*, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://doc-research.org/2018/08/hegemony-conceptual-theoretical-analysis/>.

²⁶ Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West."

what American political scientist and former Clinton administration official Joseph S. Nye has labeled “Soft Power,” or “getting others to want the outcomes that you want.” Nye goes on to break cultural influence down into components, including “the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideas, and policies” among other state’s and their populations.²⁷ Neoliberal institutionalists support a similar view, noting the significance of socialization, which “enables the hegemon to get others to acquiesce without the use of coercive power.”²⁸ This definition of power pushes beyond Mearsheimer’s material definition and better reflects the complex type of influence a state must have to become a superpower. For instance, speaking to political ideas, the globalization of American popular culture projects political values and ideas (e.g. democracy) that may be enticing to foreign audiences. According to Nye, this dissemination of political values gives the superpower more co-opting (rather than coercive) power, allowing it to attract other states into supporting its global agenda.²⁹ Convincing leaders and the public that the superpower’s way of life is valuable by disseminating cultural practices (i.e. customs) is also a source of soft power that can win a state allies. Meanwhile, the foreign and domestic policies of a superpower can give it “soft power” as well, and Nye cites cases in which policies have made states allies and enemies.³⁰ These components, political ideas, culture, policies, and (as mentioned above) institutional influence, comprise the cultural, soft power vital to a superpower.

Constructivists likewise believe in the importance of cultural power, but they argue neoliberal institutionalists wrongly attribute the target of this power. For instance, while

²⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2012), pp. x.

²⁸ Schmidt, “Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis.”

²⁹ Importantly, although a government’s ability to control soft power is limited, “that does not diminish its importance”: a state can still encourage or assist the spread of its culture through policy. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, pp. 8.

³⁰ For example, American support for human rights in Argentina during the 1980s aided the United States once the politically persecuted Peronists came to power. Conversely, African nations criticized American racial segregation in the 1950s. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, pp. 13.

neoliberal institutionalists do include the public in their considerations, constructivist scholars like Ted Hopf argue that neoliberal institutionalists focus too much on the politics of the elite. Accordingly, constructivists believe that existing literature fails to take into account “mass public common sense, not just elite ideologies.”³¹ This means that “Soft Power” cannot come solely from political elites adopting a foreign ideology or political system (e.g. democracy). Instead, if the superpower is to gain cultural power from that state, the broader public must adopt the cultural values that support that ideology or political system. Hopf essentially argues that “hegemonic power is maximized to the extent that these ideas become taken for granted by the dominated population.”³² Noting the role of the public and institutions that disseminate culture (even when that effect is auxiliary) better scaffolds the cultural element of being a superpower.

Whether the school downplays material power or non-material powers, each has its faults. For this reason, in order to balance the strengths and weaknesses of each school’s focus, a critical definition of a superpower should be synthesized from these competing schools of thought. While this means balancing many components, such a synthesis is obtainable. For instance, Alice Lyman Miller already argues that “the basic components of superpower stature may be measured along four axes of power: military, economic, political, and cultural.”³³ This simple statement roughly comprises the same power components noted by Realists, Liberal Institutionalists, and Constructivists alike. In fact, as I maintain throughout this work, a

³¹ Ted Hopf, “Common-Sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics,” *International Organization* 67, no. 2 (April 2013): 317–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818313000040>.

³² Hopf, “Common-Sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics.”

³³ As shown above in the discussion of the public’s role in cultural power, it is important to note that all of these axes have their own quirks and complexities in both measurement and significance. For example, a country’s economic power can be measured in relation to its GDP share, its level of industrialization, or even its population size, making the term “economic power” relatively vague. Despite the amorphous nature of each axis, they nonetheless comprise the basis of a state’s power. Alice Lyman Miller, “SJIR: China an Emerging Superpower?,” *Stanford Journal of International Relations*, accessed May 6, 2019, https://web.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.03_miller.html.

superpower is a state that is regionally dominant and globally influential in all four axes of power. This definition synthesizes the military, economic, political, and cultural perspectives of realists, neoliberal institutionalists, and constructivists. It also retains Mearsheimer's core realist belief that the state must be "so powerful that it dominates all the other states in [its regional] system."³⁴ However, this definition extends Mearsheimer's concept of a regional hegemon. To be a superpower, a dominant regional power must be able to influence external systems not just through military and economic power, but also through political and cultural power. This extends the superpower definition to include power derived from institutions and "Soft Power," even if that regional hegemon cannot completely dominant the global system.

Is China a Superpower?

With this definition in mind, although there is an overwhelming consensus that China's growth over the past half a century has been incredible, there is much debate whether China is on its way to becoming a superpower. In hope of better answering this question, the following sections attempt to assess whether China is "so powerful that it dominates all the other states in [its regional] system" through Miller's military, economic, political, and cultural axes of power. In other words, the following sections assess whether China is emerging as a superpower.³⁵ The first section contextualizes China's historical rise and evaluates to what extent China has strengthened each axis of power. The subsequent section explores current scholarship surrounding the China-as-superpower debate, which (interestingly) has already self-compartmentalized into these four categories of power. The final section takes a stance in this debate, ultimately arguing that despite the great ambivalence surrounding its rise to power, China

³⁴ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 40.

³⁵ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 40.

is capable of overcoming the existing structural hurdles of each axis of power through the BRI. This not only means that China is becoming a superpower, but also that the BRI is essential to this transformation. This means that as China continues to exert influence in Latin America through the BRI, successfully navigating and cultivating the evolving Pacific relationship at the core of this research becomes increasingly important. However, Chinese leaders and private actors, guided by the historic desire to assuage national humiliation, focus narrowly on maximizing short-term self-interests. This narrow focus inadvertently risks triggering an increasingly negative backlash against China's rise and the BRI that ultimately undermines China's long-term interests. In this way, China paradoxically jeopardizes its rise as a superpower.

China's Rise

While the full history of what Chinese historians call "The Century of Humiliation" cannot be described here, it is important to provide some background on the People's Republic of China's (PRC). Beginning in 1842 with the Opium Wars, the century of humiliation, 1842-1949 C.E., marks a time when China was subject to repeated military defeats and economic exploitation at the hands of European, American, and Japanese forces. Whether committed by outsiders—the 1860 destruction of the Summer Palace and the 1938 Nanjing Massacre are important examples—or by insiders—Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-shek's) brutality during the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949) is well documented—the physical, cultural, social, and economic violence of the century plagued China for generations.³⁶ When the Communist Party emerged from the "Century of Humiliation" in 1949, the future of the country was uncertain.

³⁶ David Scott, *China and the International System, 1840-1949: Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 2008, pp. x.
<http://spectacled.ursinus.edu:3035/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=256905&site=ehost-live>.

Nevertheless, the fledgling Communist party managed to establish a relatively stable political system and regain control over most of the Qing's former land acquisitions.³⁷ Even more impressively, over the course of the following 70 years, the People's Republic of China emerged from this humbled position as one of the most important actors in geopolitics. Despite these important victories for the CCP, the traumatic historical memory of the "Century of Humiliation" continued to weigh on Chinese politicians, intellectuals, and people. That traumatic legacy continues today.³⁸

This section explores China's rise to power since 1949. Each sub-section focuses how the historic memory of national humiliation guided CCP leaders' policy choices within one of Miller's four axes of power. China's historic memory of national humiliation is highlighted in this research because of the pivotal role historic memory plays in a state's construction of foreign policy. As Zheng Wang, a professor of international relations at Seton Hall University, writes, "historical memory is the prime 'raw material' for constructing ethnicity and national identity."³⁹ The construction of ethnic and national identity impacts how CCP leaders understand and pursue China's interests.⁴⁰ As these leaders strengthen China's axes of power, the historical memory of national humiliation has guided their decisions. This has resulted in China's impressive yet qualified rise to international power over the past 70 years.

Military

³⁷ This is with the large exceptions of modern-day Mongolia and Taiwan. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, vol. 3 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), pp. 470.

³⁸ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, *Contemporary Asia in the World* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 221-222.

³⁹ Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, *Contemporary Asia in the World*, pp. xiii.

⁴⁰ Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation : Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, pp. 7.

One source of modern China's rise is its powerful military, which has its origins in the end of the Chinese Civil War. After the near-defeat of the Nationalists (or KMT) in 1949, the military leaders of the CCP emerged as battle-hardened veterans tasked with converting the People's Liberation Army (PLA), a guerrilla force, into a national army. These men, like Peng Dehuai, were professional military elites who, although highly integrated with the party, usually were focused on strategic rather than political success.⁴¹ Accordingly, after emerging from the conflict of 1949, the PLA's primary objectives were to establish a modern, capable military, and to restore the territory China lost following the collapse of the Qing dynasty.⁴² These goals were driven by China's determination to assuage the historic trauma of national humiliation through the dramatic strengthening of its military capabilities.⁴³

The first goal, modernization, began with the Korean War (1950-1953). Tactically speaking, during the Chinese Civil War, the PLA had relied on waging the "People's War". This essentially meant the PLA used a combination of guerrilla tactics and overwhelming numbers to make up for its dated equipment and limited training.⁴⁴ While these tactics proved effective in driving out the Japanese in the Second World War and the KMT during the Chinese Civil War, the warfare of the Korean War—in which Chinese soldiers would confront U.S. and allied on unfamiliar, open land—made this type of fighting more difficult. Moreover, the U.S. forces had dramatically superior technology compared to the PLA.⁴⁵ For this reason, although Peng Dehuai

⁴¹ Although technically a military leader, Mao was hardly a professional or technically skilled strategist. Dennis J. Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," in *A Military History of China*, edited by Graff David A. and Higham Robin, 249-50. University Press of Kentucky, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcqw6.20>.

⁴² Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 251; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 471.

⁴³ Importantly, attempts to assuage this historical memory "have, at times, served to activate, not assuage, people's historical memory of past humiliation." Thus, despite leaders' intentions, policies can revitalize a feeling of national humiliation rather than assuage it. Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, pp. 11.

⁴⁴ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 250.

⁴⁵ This situation was historically familiar to the Chinese. At the outbreak of the Opium War, Lin Zexu, a commissioner tasked with quelling the opium trade, described the superiority of British cannons, writing "Our

was successful in driving back the UN forces, the Chinese faced massive casualties, potentially reaching over a million.⁴⁶ Although the Korean War can certainly be noted as a victory for China—the once “humiliated” nation was able to drive back a coalition of Western powers—waging such a costly war was not sustainable. Correspondingly, PLA leaders noted the imperative need to modernize China’s military.

To overcome this technological and strategic deficit, the PLA’s leaders turned to the Soviet Union for equipment and expertise.⁴⁷ With an initial loan of around \$300 million, the PLA adopted Soviet military structures, trained with Soviet weapons and vehicles, and established domestic military factories.⁴⁸ These developments fueled the modernization of Chinese conventional military power. Even after CCP paramount leader Mao Zedong initiated a demobilization of millions of PLA troops, the PLA remained an over-two-million-strong fighting force trained with Soviet weaponry.⁴⁹ Post-world-war modernization meant more than advanced conventional troops, however. The Korean War had only ended in the face of President Eisenhower’s nuclear “diplomacy” in 1953, causing the Chinese government to recognize that nuclear weapons had changed the face of warfare. CCP leaders also realized that any nation seeking a modern military that could ward off invading powers needed a nuclear weapon.⁵⁰

technology was backward. Many of our generals and soldiers were experienced servicemen, but a battle like this in which the two sides engaged in a war without seeing each other, that was what they have never experienced before.” Blasko, “Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989,” pp. 251; Jiang Tingfu, *Zhongguo jinsaiishi* [Modern History of China]. (Changsha: Shangwu) 1938, Reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2001, pp. 17.

⁴⁶ While the PRC’s estimate was never released, some suggest that losses reached nearly a million. More conservative estimates favor 600,000. Regardless, the war was costly. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 475-476.

⁴⁷ Blasko, “Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989,” pp. 251.

⁴⁸ Prior to this the Chinese navy and airforce had been made out of stolen and salvaged Japanese fighters and Nationalist warships. Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea, 2nd Edition: China’s Navy in the Twenty-First Century*. Vol. 2nd ed. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press) 2010, pp. 8.

⁴⁹ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 500.

⁵⁰ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 475, 494.

These lessons only became clearer as Eisenhower continued to use nuclear threats during the ensuing Taiwan crises in 1954 and 1958.⁵¹

Consequently, again with the aid of Soviet technology, training, and scientists, the PRC began pursuing the development of a nuclear weapon. While development of an atomic weapon was delayed during the Sino-Soviet split, China nonetheless entered the “Nuclear Club” in 1964 after its first successful detonation. This development is crucial in China’s military history not only because it reflects the PLA’s general shift towards modernization, but also because it marks China’s growing desire to be independent of both Soviet and American influence. Nuclear technology continued to advance in the following decades, and China proceeded to develop hydrogen bombs, nuclear submarines, and nuclear warheads.⁵²

This modernization was driven by the need to assuage the historic memory of national humiliation, a sentiment which is well reflected in statements by the leaders of the PLA. The words of Lin Biao, for instance, appeared in *The People’s Daily* in 1965, praising the glory of the “People’s War” and its victory over Japan in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Lin argued that international politics was characterized by a “fierce struggle between the people of the world on one side and U.S. imperialism and its lackeys on the other.”⁵³ The underlying belief in Lin Biao’s writing is imperialists, especially the United States, will always attempt to humiliate weaker states. Although the era of “ping-pong” diplomacy and Nixon’s visit to China would improve relations, the United States remained the primary imperial antagonist in the eyes of the Chinese public. This remained true even after border conflicts with India and the Soviet Union ensued. This was reflected not just by the rhetoric of elites, but also in the choices of

⁵¹ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 252.

⁵² Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 252-254.

⁵³ Lin Biao, “Long Live the Victory of People’s War!,” accessed July 8, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/ch08.htm.

everyday Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution. Americans remaining in the country during the Cultural Revolution were detained as spies, effigies of Uncle Sam were burned in the streets, and students attacked Chinese officials who had any previous connection with the United States.⁵⁴ Such cultural rejections carried on into the 1990s, when Chinese intellectuals vehemently responded to American intellectuals such as Samuel Huntington who painted China as a threat to America. Books like *China Can Say No* reflected the persistent urge to reject American authority and culture.⁵⁵

While this popular rejection of all things American may seem tangentially related to military action, the connection is strong. This is because “historical memory often serves as a major motivating factor in international conflict, especially when the confrontation is perceived by the Chinese as an assault on the nation’s fundamental identity.”⁵⁶ Running through just a few examples, this connection becomes clearer. During the Korean War, the PLA’s high demand for grain, meat, and cotton drew resources away the general Chinese population, which was still reeling from the destruction of the Second World and Civil War.⁵⁷ In order to maintain popular support for the war despite this burden on the public, the CCP launched massive anti-American propaganda campaigns. These campaigns focused on the need to ward off American imperialism and avoid the same humiliation from which China had just escaped.⁵⁸ Similarly, during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government used America as a scapegoat to justify

⁵⁴ David L. Shambaugh, “Anti-Americanism in China” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 497 (1988), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1045767>, pp. 148.

⁵⁵ Klaus Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2019, pp. 545-546.

⁵⁶ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* pp. 15.

⁵⁷ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp., 379.

⁵⁸ Andrew Kuech, “The Dangerous Reprise of Chinese Korean War Propaganda,” in *The Diplomat*, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/the-dangerous-reprise-of-chinese-korean-war-propaganda/>.

the CCP's violent, militant suppression of the population.⁵⁹ Lastly, in the 1990s, surges of nationalism that rejected American media portrayal of China most likely influenced the government's decision to lay claims to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.⁶⁰ These popular nationalist movements, like the government-driven campaigns before them, had the goal of emboldening and justifying military action in the name of avenging the nation's previous suffering. Each of these movements demanded greater military action, which, in turn, demanded modernization. Therefore, the modernization of China's military was framed as necessary in order to shake off the "Century of Humiliation."

As with modernization, national humiliation drove the PLA's campaign to restore various territories lost during the Qing dynasty. These territories originally included Tibet, Taiwan, Mongolia, and various islands and waterways in the East and South China Seas. While China was able to obtain control over some of these territories and waterways, the United States continually thwarted important acquisitions. This further established the United States as the main antagonist for the PRC and kept the memory of national humiliation fresh in the minds of CCP leaders. In Tibet, for example, the PLA had subdued most local resistance by 1950, but the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) continued to train Tibetan rebels to resist PRC authority until 1959.⁶¹ In Tibet's case, the United States only managed to make China's territorial authority less stable. Meanwhile, the United States completely negated the PRC's attempt to retake Taiwan from Nationalists by sending its Seventh Fleet to patrol the Strait of Formosa in 1950.⁶² Additionally, the United States planted "nuclear-capable Matador surface-to-surface missiles on Taiwan," putting American nuclear weapons on China's doorstep and

⁵⁹ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 549-550.

⁶⁰ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 544-546.

⁶¹ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 527.

⁶² Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 473.

rendering an assault on the island strategically impossible.⁶³ Other territories remained outside of China's grasp for other reasons. The most important example of this is Mongolia, which became an independent republic in the 1950s. Although Mao had made numerous claims that Mongolia would once again become a part of China, the Soviet Union ensured Mongolia would retain its independence (within the Soviet sphere of influence).⁶⁴

In relation to maritime territory, the PRC was able to periodically retake many of the islands controlled by the Nationalists off the coast of Taiwan. Reclaiming disputed territories in the East and South China Seas proved far more challenging.⁶⁵ In the East China Sea, China looked to regain the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, and, in the South China Sea, the Prata and Spratly Islands, all of which had been lost to Japan in either the Sino-Japanese war (Diaoyu/Senkaku) or Second World War (Prata and Spratly). Reclaiming these islands and all other islands bound between the "nine dash line"—an arbitrary line drawn around the South China Sea by the Nationalists and later adopted by the PRC—became a clear policy goal in 1953. Nevertheless, the PRC took little action in relation to these islands until 1970 (conveniently the year after it was reported that there was most likely large deposits of oil in the South China Sea), when it began to make claims on the Diaoyu Islands and forcibly occupied the Paracel Islands, the latter of which were owned by Vietnam.⁶⁶ Conflict over these islands would continue to escalate, and China continues to make claims over the area bound within the "nine dash line" today.

As with the PRC's desire to restore the Qing's continental territory, the desire to restore maritime control was similarly driven by the need to assuage national humiliation. Hong Kong is

⁶³ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 252.

⁶⁴ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 470.

⁶⁵ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 471-472.

⁶⁶ Originally, it was the "eleven dash line" and included the Gulf of Tonkin. "China's Maritime Disputes," *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/chinasea>.

perhaps the most well-known example of this desire. In 1997, the Chinese Government's formal acquisition of Hong Kong—a crucial maritime port and symbol of national humiliation—marked another point in which the Chinese leaders believed they were “wiping out the century-old humiliation caused by its occupation.”⁶⁷ This fierce battle over Hong Kong as a point of assuaging national humiliation continues today. As pro-democratic protests erupted in Hong Kong in 2019, government officials once again pointed to the legacy of national humiliation. Specifically, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang denounced Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and, the United States for meddling in Hong Kong's affairs. These criticisms have focused on the United States, using the threat of foreign interference to justify the violent suppression of protesters.⁶⁸ Thus, as China expands its military power into the South China Sea and over Hong Kong, it continues to invoke the rhetoric of national humiliation.

How have these historical developments strengthened China's military axis of power? From a modernization standpoint, China's transformation has been dramatic: the PLA began as a guerrilla army in the 1930s and 1940s and emerged as a nuclear power with advanced weaponry and tactics by the turn of the century. In relation to territorial acquisitions, China's forceful occupation of various lands has facilitated numerous success—easier access to oil in the South China Sea, more comprehensive trade routes through western China, etc. Even the background presence of the need to push against humiliation has strengthened China's military power,

⁶⁷ Jiang Zemin, “Speech by President Jiang Zemin of The People's Republic of China,” *Asia Society*, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://asiasociety.org/speech-president-jiang-zemin-peoples-republic-china>.

⁶⁸ It is important to note that American companies have meddled in these protests by *denouncing* individual supporters of the protests inside and outside Hong Kong. For examples of both, see Daniel Victor, “Hong Kong Protests Put N.B.A. on Edge in China,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 2019, sec. Sports, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/07/sports/basketball/nba-china-hong-kong.html>; and Cindy Boren, “An Esports Player Spoke out in Support of Hong Kong Protests. He Was Suspended for a Year.,” *Washington Post*, accessed April 24, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/10/08/an-esports-player-spoke-out-support-hong-kong-protests-he-was-suspended-year/>; Steven Lee Myers, “In Hong Kong Protests, China Angrily Connects Dots Back to U.S.,” *The New York Times*, September 5, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/05/world/asia/china-hong-kong-protests.html>.

enabling its aggressive, outright rejections of American authority. With these historical developments in mind, China's military rise is evident.

Economy

Running parallel and intertwined with military strengthening is China's international rise as a formidable economic force. While many people suffered horribly under Maoist economic reforms—20 million people are estimated to have died as a result of a famine caused by the Great Leap Forward—many of his earlier reforms kick-started the transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy.⁶⁹ By both extending and revising Mao's policies, the PRC leaders that came to power following his death brought extensive changes to the structure of the Chinese economy. Deng Xiaoping, in particular, championed the economic reforms that laid the groundwork for China's rapid economic growth and its continuing economic problems. Both China's opening as a global market and its transition to an industrial economy facilitated rapid growth. Meanwhile, demographic imbalances and environmental degradation proved to be persistent hurdles to China's economic independence and stability. Importantly, similar to its impressive military growth, China's economic miracle was driven by a desire to leave its "backwardness" (a source of its national humiliation) in the past.

Speaking first to China's shift to an industrial economy, it was actually the economic reforms under Mao Zedong, not Deng Xiaoping, that pulled China's agrarian workers into an industrial labor force. During Mao's reign over the PRC (1949-1976), industrial output increased more than 30-fold, the urban proletariat grew from three million to 18 million, and China slowly began to produce heavy tractors, railway locomotives, and other important infrastructure

⁶⁹ Maurice J. Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), pp. 523.

technology.⁷⁰ While this industrial revolution came at a heavy price (namely in human lives) and had uneven success (“backyard” furnaces produced extremely low quality steel), the push for industry under Mao kicked-off China’s mission to become the world’s factory. For Mao, these reforms were meant “to make [their] economically and culturally *backward* country a prosperous and powerful one” (Emphasis added).⁷¹ Although Mao saw China as a great nation with the ability to become powerful, he believed that China’s economy needed to modernize and industrialize before that could happen. The historic memory of national humiliation makes an appearance through the word “backwards” in Mao’s language. Mao, like the Qing scholars of the “Self-Strengthening” movement, believed that China succumbed to imperial powers because of its antiquated economic practices (basically, agrarianism) and that only through economic modernization could China escape humiliation.⁷²

After the economic disaster of the Great Leap Forward, Deng Xiaoping introduced a new economic policy once he gained control over the CCP in 1978, calling for “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.”⁷³ From a pragmatic perspective, this merely meant that China needed “to pursue the policy of opening up to the outside world” economically and pursue free-market reforms. However, due to the persisting euphoria surrounding Maoism, Deng reaffirmed that such reforms would fit within the framework of Marxist-Leninist teleology: China would “advocate communism” but operate at “the socialist stage... to develop the productive forces” of

⁷⁰ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 189-190.

⁷¹ Mao Zedong, “Speech at the Chinese Communist Party’s National Conference on Propaganda Work,” (1957), https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_59.htm

⁷² “Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation.” Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” (1957), Section XI, found at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm#v5_99; Yan Fu, “On Strength” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 258-259; Mao Zedong, “The Chinese People Have Stood Up!” (1949), <https://china.usc.edu/Mao-declares-founding-of-peoples-republic-of-china-chinese-people-have-stood-up>

⁷³ The Great Leap Forward dramatically reduced the grain available to the average peasant, resulting in the death of 20 million. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 522-523.

the economy. Ultimately, Deng's goal was to figure out "how China, which is still backward, is to develop the productive forces and improve the people's living standard."⁷⁴

To do this, Deng and the leaders of the CCP continued the transition to an industrial economy and opened up China to international investors. For instance, industrial reforms carried out in urban centers from 1979-1980 decentralized capital and increased productivity. One way in which this was done was through incentivizing light industry, since Maoist reforms had created an imbalance of heavy industry. This allowed for more efficient production and higher quality products since Chinese capital was more capable of producing light goods than products like heavy steel.⁷⁵ Additionally, the CCP turned to breaking the "iron rice bowl," a Mao-era job-security program that was deemed to create inefficiency and paternalistic dependence by the party: "If a man does not come to work, cross his name off the payroll!"⁷⁶ This led reformers to empower industrial bosses with the ability to punish or fire workers they found to be underperforming.⁷⁷ This empowering of individual enterprises was matched at the national level, and factory managers increasingly gained the ability to operate in accordance with market (rather than government) demands.⁷⁸ Such reforms had limited success in urban centers, but rural industry responded much more favorably to reforms, especially once township and village enterprises (TVEs) were established. These small industrial conglomerates were owned mostly by private owners or local governments, and their rapid success led to further deregulation and decollectivization in urban industry by 1984.⁷⁹ Importantly, these reforms carried on after Deng

⁷⁴ Theodore De Bary Wm. and Richard Lufano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 2: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 507-510.

⁷⁵ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 221-222.

⁷⁶ Deng Xiaoping, "Some Problems Outstanding in the Iron and Steel Industry," (1975) in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), pp 21.

⁷⁷ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 259

⁷⁸ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 261.

⁷⁹ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 509-510.

Xiaoping. During the 1990s, a stronger environment of healthy economic competition grew in Chinese industrial centers, the *hukou* system (which restricted Chinese citizens from migrating within the country) was relaxed to facilitate better movements of labor force, and tax reform strengthened the central government's profit from domestic industry.⁸⁰ Subsequently, the extensive infrastructure projects of the 2000s better integrated the TVEs into China's economy, furthering China's successful transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy.⁸¹

This transition was made possible by extensive external investments, which were an outcome of China's opening to foreign markets. These reforms are based framed in the words of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978: the CCP was now "actively expanding economic cooperation on terms of equality and mutual benefit with other countries on the basis of self-reliance."⁸² Essentially, the leaders of the reform movement recognized the importance of Chinese integration with the global economy to avoid "backwardness", and Deng's own rhetoric expresses the lingering historic memory of national humiliation. In a speech to the Twelfth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1982, Deng said:

No foreign Country can expect China to be its vassal, nor can it expect China to accept anything harmful to China's interests. [China] will unswervingly follow a policy of opening to the outside world and actively increase exchanges with foreign countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.⁸³

This sentiment runs parallel with a desire to assuage national humiliation and has driven China's cautious opening to investments and the global economy.

⁸⁰ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 533-535.

⁸¹ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 556.

⁸² "Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 489-490.

⁸³ Deng Xiaoping, "Opening Speech at the Twelfth National Congress of the CPC," (1982) in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), pp 396.

To balance this process of opening and independence, rather than open all of China to foreign investment, reformers created the Special Economic Zones (SEZs).⁸⁴ These four zones, which were designated in parts of Guangdong and Fujian provinces in 1979, mimicked roles of Canton and Macao during the Qing dynasty. Like those cities, each SEZ was a deregulated zone in which domestic and foreign investment can flow relatively freely, functioning as controlled enclaves in which China could participate in global trade. Importantly, unlike their predecessors, these zones followed Chinese law, were managed by Chinese officials, and greatly benefited the Chinese economy.⁸⁵ In fact, the SEZs were so successful that were later complemented by the CCP's sweeping Coastal Development Strategy (CDS) in 1988, which further opened up China's industrial bases to foreign capital and investment.⁸⁶ The SEZ in Shenzhen was perhaps the most striking example of this success: its GDP increased from 4 million U.S. dollars in 1980 to 114.7 billion U.S. dollars in 2008.⁸⁷

These "opening" reforms of the 1980s would carry into the 1990s, and reformers doubled down on transitioning to a market economy. Much of this involved making investing in China easier. For instance, China's confusing dual-currency rate—one for foreigners and one for Chinese companies—was reformed to create a more hospitable trading system. The two rates were set at essentially equal levels, resulting in a devaluation of China's currency and a massive uptick in foreign investments and exports.⁸⁸ Similarly, in order to qualify as a member of the

⁸⁴ Maurice J. Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism: 1978-1994*, pp. 235.

⁸⁵ This is, of course, in contrast to the economic ruin caused by foreign opium trade during the 19th Century, the start of the Century of Humiliation. Michael Osborne, *China's Special Economic Zones* (Paris: OECD Development Center, 1986), pp. 35.

⁸⁶ Dali L. Yang, "China Adjusts to the World Economy: The Political Economy of China's Coastal Development Strategy," *Pacific Affairs* 64, no. 1 (1991), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760362>, pp. 42.

⁸⁷ Douglas Zhihua Zeng, ed., *Building Engines for Growth and Competitiveness in China: Experience with Special Economic Zones and Industrial Clusters*, (Herndon: World Bank Publications, 2010), accessed July 11, 2019, ProQuest Ebook Central, pp. 68.

⁸⁸ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 534.

World Trade Organization (which would greatly facilitate international China's trade), state-owned enterprises and wages were reformed to increase productivity.⁸⁹ When China became a WTO member in 2001, it further opened to investment, but there are important limitations to this "opening". First, China has often been criticized for not following all the WTO's rules and regulations. This has prevented China's designation as a market economy, which would allow China to continue to sell its low-cost goods without the threat of foreign protectionism. This status would also make it far more difficult for other WTO countries to formally accuse China of manipulating its currency, which China has come under fire for recently.⁹⁰ Additionally, China has required companies that want to do business within its borders to relinquish business secrets and advanced technology to Chinese companies.⁹¹ While this casts doubt on the idea that China is "open" in the sense of a free-market, it certainly has aided the growth of Chinese companies like Huawei, Alibaba, and Baidu.⁹² This historical opening at a measured pace is likely to continue under President Xi Jinping, who claimed at The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017, "opening up brings progress while isolation results in backwardness."⁹³

⁸⁹ Linda Y. Yueh, "Wage Reforms in China During the 1990s," *Asian Economic Journal* 18, no. 2 (June 2004): 150-151, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8381.2004.00187.x>.

⁹⁰ Bryce Baschuk, "China Loses Market-Economy Trade Case in Win for EU and U.S., Sources Say," *Bloomberg*, April 18, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-18/china-is-said-to-lose-market-economy-trade-case-in-eu-u-s-win>.

⁹¹ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 536-537.

⁹² This practice has not only brought international critique upon China, but also a number of very recent bans and tariffs in 2019 from the United States. As of this writing, major tariffs meant to punish China for violating international financial laws and norms have not been lifted, but the ban on Huawei has been relaxed. Jim Tankersley and Ana Swanson, "Trump Administration Will Allow Some Companies to Sell to Huawei," *The New York Times*, July 9, 2019, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/09/business/huawei-donald-trump.html>. Paul Mozur and Edmund Lee, "Huawei Is Said to Demand Patent Fees From Verizon," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2019, sec. Technology, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/technology/huawei-verizon-patent-license-fees.html>. "How China Walled Off the Internet," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/18/world/asia/china-internet.html>.

⁹³ Xi Jinping, "Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," (2017) at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm.

China's economic growth was not painless. Such rapid expansion brought new demographic pressures and environmental degradation. As China grew tremendously in population and dramatically reshaped its economic structure, the demographic imbalances between rural and urban populations increased. This is largely due to the CCP's official reinstatement of the *hukou* system in 1958. The *hukou* system was a household registration system that divided China's urban and rural workers by region that had existed in China for centuries and indeed is still used today.⁹⁴ While this system has helped China's economy in many ways—namely it allowed the government to control the flow of labor and guarantee a mixed agricultural/industrial economy—the inequality created by the *hukou* system has started to take its toll on China's economy. Large, extremely underpaid migrant populations are revolting more frequently in urban centers, and rural populations are likewise protesting as their land is seized by local authorities in the name of urbanization.⁹⁵ Worse yet, unemployment is a growing concern for the country, which often relies on “bridge to nowhere” infrastructure projects to create employment and maintain growth.⁹⁶ While Chinese leaders are aware of this growing danger to social stability, their attempts to remedy the issue have had limited success. In reality, the options of China's leaders are limited: simple repeal of the *hukou* system would likely result in a flood of migrants in coastal and urban zones, overwhelming infrastructure, sanitation, and general order.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Kam Wing Chan, "The Chinese hukou system at 50." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50, no. 2 (2009), pp. 198.

⁹⁵ Kam Wing Chan, "The Chinese hukou system at 50," pp. 216; James Griffiths CNN, "China on Strike," CNN, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/28/asia/china-strike-worker-protest-trade-union/index.html>.

⁹⁶ "China: The Road to Nowhere," *Financial Times*, July 16, 2012, <https://www.ft.com/content/4f232cdc-cf45-11e1-bfd9-00144feabdc0>.

⁹⁷ Jian Chen, "Regional Income Inequality and Economic Growth in China," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 22, (1996), accessed July 16, 2019, pp. 157. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jcec.1996.0015>.

Another self-invented demographic imbalance is gendered. Perhaps one of the CCP's most internationally infamous policies of the 20th century was the one-child policy, in which the government limited Chinese families to having one child per parental couple (with limited exceptions).⁹⁸ Initiated in 1980 with "the goal of holding the total population in [the] country under 1.2 billion by the end of the century," the policy led to a dramatic imbalance between Chinese men and women, with the sex ratio, defined as the proportion of male live births to female live births, reaching as high as 1.17 in 2001.⁹⁹ Compared to industrialized countries, which typically have a ratio of 1.03-1.07, this is a severe imbalance.¹⁰⁰ This is largely a result of the cultural devaluation of women, who are seen as less financially beneficial than sons. Indeed, mothers in China were often fearful of bearing daughters due to the intense social stigma surrounding having a daughter instead of a son, especially in rural communities.¹⁰¹ Beyond compounding an already deteriorating situation for women in China—who were rapidly being moved from classrooms to factories¹⁰²—the overbalance of men presented (and continues to present) a social challenge to China. This is because the increasing population of young, unmarried Chinese men are more likely to act violently, commit crimes, and be generally unlawful. While the Chinese government has recognized this issue and announced plans to normalize the birth-sex ratio by 2010, it is unlikely that these reforms could reverse the

⁹⁸ Therese Hesketh, Li Lu, and Zhu Wei Xing, "The Effect of China's One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years," *New England Journal of Medicine* 353, no. 11 (September 15, 2005): pp. 1171, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMhpr051833>

⁹⁹ Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "Open Letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the General Membership of the Communist Party and the Membership of the Chinese Communist Youth League on the Problem of Controlling Population Growth in Our Country" (September 25, 1980), *Chinese Sociology & Anthropology*, 24:3, 11-16, DOI: 10.2753/CSA0009-4625240311

¹⁰⁰ Hesketh, "The Effect of China's One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years," pp. 1172.

¹⁰¹ Nü qingnian 7 (1986): 29-30, trans. From *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 20:3 (Spring 1988), pp. 93 and 98-100, in *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (New York: New York, 1993), pp. 480-481.

¹⁰² Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Kwang-Ching Liu, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 324-325.

imbalance created by over thirty years of anti-daughter birthing practices.¹⁰³ Although the social issues created by rural and urban/gender imbalances may seem tangential to economic stability, the two are closely related. As China's demographic structure continues to promote domestic unrest, the government will have to further divert funds towards damage control and investors will become increasingly uncertain.

China also has experienced rapid environmental degradation, water contamination, and air pollution over the course of its industrialization, all of which further sap China's economic progress and persist as sizable economic hurdles. Many of these problems are in no way new to China—China's unsustainable agricultural practices were taking a toll on the environment as early as the Han Dynasty—but China's miraculous growth over the past seventy years have put destructive processes into overdrive. For example, in relation to land degradation, the policies of the Great Leap Forward, which focused almost entirely on industrialization and the exclusive agricultural production of grain, irreparably damaged China's soils and forests.¹⁰⁴ Reforms in the 1980s introduced more sustainable farming and industrial techniques to combat land degradation, but it is impossible to undo the damage done by the rapid industrialization of the 1950s. The infrastructure projects of the 21st century have also limited historic flooding and energy shortages in an attempt to slow land degradation. However, mass urbanization has severely damaged China's potable water supply. In fact, the World Bank noted in 2002 that China had just a quarter of the global average for freshwater per capita due to the excess amounts of sewage

¹⁰³ While it is impossible to tell exactly how these practices have materialized, selective abortion is anecdotally known to be widespread in China. Femicide is also a likely possibility. Valerie Hudson and Andrea M. Den Boer, "Missing Women and Bare Branches: Gender Balance and Conflict," *Environmental Change and Security Program Report*, Issue 11 (2005), pp. 20-24; Hesketh, "The Effect of China's One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years," pp. 1172.

¹⁰⁴ Peter C. Perdue, *The Environmental History of China: Past, Present, and Future*, in Michael Szonyi, ed., *A Companion to Chinese History* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2017), pp. 258-261.

and industrial dumping.¹⁰⁵ Beyond water, perhaps the most visible environmental problem for China is smog: carcinogens cause up to 1.6 million deaths in China every year, 17 percent of the mortality rate.¹⁰⁶ Combined, these pollutants siphon significant growth from the Chinese economy—air pollutants alone cost China’s economy US \$38 billion a year—and threaten to destabilize the “output legitimacy” the CCP relies on.¹⁰⁷

Do these historical developments reflect China’s status as a superpower? As mentioned before, demographic imbalances and environmental degradation proved to be persistent hurdles to China’s economic independence and stability. Thus, in contrast with its military rise, the strengthening of China’s economic axis of power has had mixed success. However, while demographic imbalances and environmental degradation are clear troubles for China, for the time being, its transformation into the “world’s factory” and opening to global investment have enabled its economic axis to become far stronger. China’s survival of the 2008 global financial crisis via massive stimulus spending reflects this strength, especially when compared to other world powers caught up in the crisis.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, China’s growth is not preordained. Whether China’s economic axis will continue to become more powerful depends largely on the CCP’s ability to evolve to address the complicated economic challenges of the 21st century. Since the 11th Five-Year Plan (2016-2021) specifically aims to address those challenges, it seems like China can overcome the hurdles which restrain its growth. Regardless of the outcome,

¹⁰⁵ Min Shao et al., “City Clusters in China: Air and Surface Water Pollution,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 4, no. 7 (2006): 353–61, [https://doi.org/10.1890/1540-9295\(2006\)004\[0353:CCICAA\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1890/1540-9295(2006)004[0353:CCICAA]2.0.CO;2).

¹⁰⁶ For an extremely visual representation, see the 2015 documentary “Under the Dome”. Perdue, *The Environmental History of China: Past, Present, and Future*, pp. 261.

¹⁰⁷ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping* pp. 542; Ernest Kao, “1 Million Dead and US\$38 Billion Lost: The Price of China’s Air Pollution,” *South China Morning Post*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/2166542/air-pollution-killing-1-million-people-and-costing-chinese>.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Nolan, *Re-balancing China: Essays on the Global Financial Crisis, Industrial Policy and International Relations* (London: New York: Delhi: Anthem Press, 2014) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gxpdm1>, pp. 2.

the choices made by CCP leaders will certainly be driven by a desire to assuage national humiliation and escape so-called “backwardness.”

Politics

Although military empowerment and economic growth were at the forefront of Chinese policymakers’ minds, China’s political axis of power still changed dramatically during China’s rise. In fact, China’s transformation into a major player in international politics has been facilitated not just by economic and military growth, but by its entry into international institutions. These institutions have paradoxically facilitated the empowerment of China’s political axis of power through the formal allocation of voting rights (e.g. the United Nations Security Council) and, concurrently, limited its political axis by pushing China to conform to Western practices (e.g. the World Trade Organization). Consequently, when Western institutions proved too hostile, China has been willing to participate in alternative international initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This mixed approach to international integration is driven by China’s desire to avoid the same choices which caused the Century of Humiliation: instead of attempting isolation and over relying on the outside world economically, China would practice “self-reliance” and (cautious) integration.

While China did not practice isolation during the 1950s and 1960s—it held and participated in various regional conferences like the Bandung Conference and the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of the World Peace Council—China’s integration into international institutions formally began with the United Nations in 1971.¹⁰⁹ Since the end of the World War

¹⁰⁹ George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), pp. 5; "Report, Zhou Enlai to the Chairman [Mao Zedong] and the Central Committee," September 22, 1952, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (CPC Central Historical Documents Research Office) and Zhongyang dang'anguan (Central Archives), eds., *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao (Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC)*, vol. 7 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2018), 160-161. Translated by David Cowhig. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208225>

II, the government in Taiwan, not mainland China, held one of the five permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council. Accordingly, the PRC advocated relentlessly for a position on the UNSC by rallying other nonaligned voting nations. This process began in 1950 at the recommendation of Soviet advisors, and, despite strong resistance from the United States, China eventually replaced Taiwan as the fifth permanent member of the Security Council via a two-thirds vote in the General Assembly.¹¹⁰

This was a pivotal change for two reasons. First, China was able to win over veto power in the Security Council, which was supplied to each permanent member of the UNSC. While China's use of the veto has been historically limited, that institutional power has strengthened China's political axis greatly, allowing it to punish countries that oppose its mission or sovereignty, as it did in 1999 against Macedonia for refusing to recognize Beijing as the capital of China (as opposed to Taipei).¹¹¹ Second, China's ascension to the UNSC marked China's first entrance into institutions created by great powers as an equal. China's ability to rise to this level was credited to its successful "self-reliance" by domestic and foreign observers alike.

Domestically, the Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China stated that China was now actively establishing "cooperation on terms of equality and mutual benefit with other countries on the basis of self-reliance."¹¹²

Those terms, of course, stand in juxtaposition to the "cooperation" forced upon China during the

¹¹⁰ "Telegram, Mao Zedong to Zhou Enlai and CCP CC," January 07, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the People's Republic of China), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987), 219-20; translation from Shuguang Zhang and Jian Chen, eds., *Chinese Communist Foreign Policy and the Cold War in Asia: New Documentary Evidence, 1944-1950* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1996), 134-135. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112667>; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 566.

¹¹¹ Paul Lewis, "Continuation of U.N. Force in Macedonia Faces a Chinese Veto," *The New York Times*, February 25, 1999, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/25/world/continuation-of-un-force-in-macedonia-faces-a-chinese-veto.html>.

¹¹² "Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 489-490.

Opium War. In this way, “self-reliance” is closely linked with the historic memory of national humiliation.

Foreign observers likewise recognized China’s self-reliance. In 1981, the UN Secretary-General made a toast to the Chinese Vice-Premier, stating: “Considering the formidable difficulties which China has to face in this endeavour, the self-reliance which it has shown is a source of inspiration to all.”¹¹³ Of course, it is likely that the Secretary-General picked the term “self-reliance” very diplomatically, but that nonetheless reflects the importance of the phrase to his Chinese audience. At that point in 1981, it seemed as though China would be able to balance self-reliance with the cautious integration that scaffolded its international political goals.

As China became more entangled with international institutions and the global economy, this balance became more difficult. This is best encapsulated by China’s struggles to become admitted to and win market economy status within the World Trade Organization (WTO). Unlike the United Nations, admission into the WTO requires a state to make significant policy changes. In China’s case, this meant developing economic liberalism and stepping away from its trademark command economy. Initially, this was not much of a problem for China. The country under Deng Xiaoping had already begun economic liberalization and become a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund when, in 1986, CCP announced its intent to rejoin the Generally Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the precursor to the WTO).

However, as existing GATT members debated whether to admit a nation that barely met the economic liberalization criteria, the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 brought

¹¹³ “Toast by the Secretary-General to the Vice-Premier of China, Beijing, 10 June 1981,” June 10, 1981, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, S-0987-0012-09, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section. Obtained by Charles Kraus. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118482>

international condemnation upon the Chinese government and slowed negotiations.¹¹⁴ Consequently, it quickly became clear that China's admission would be more difficult than anticipated. Even after the GATT was scrapped and converted into the WTO in 1995, China was unable to establish itself as a founding member. The following years in which China attempted to join the WTO involved grueling negotiations with the United States—which could *de facto* veto any nation's admittance into the WTO—amid consistently deteriorating political relations between the two nations.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, China was eventually admitted to the WTO in 2001. This was only possible because China made various concessions and reforms in order to conform to the Western, liberalized economic structure of the WTO and, in effect, the United States.

While this lengthy process undoubtedly frustrated Chinese leaders (Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji attempted to resign three times during the process), they were determined to reap the maximum benefits of joining the WTO. This would be done, according to Chinese WTO representative Shi Guangsheng, only if the WTO was “fully reflecting the interests and requirements of all parties, including developing countries.”¹¹⁶ Jiang Zemin likewise emphasized in a 2001 speech in Hong Kong:

Following its entry into the [WTO], China will steadily expand its opening-up program in terms of commodity and services trade, create a level playing field for a fair and transparent competition between Chinese and overseas enterprises, establish and improve a foreign trade regime that is consistent with international practice and that suits China's own national conditions, and provide the overseas enterprises with more and stable access to the Chinese market so as to facilitate economic cooperation and trade between China and other countries.

¹¹⁴ Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions: Alternate Paths to Global Power*, Asian Security Studies (London: Routledge), 2005, pp. 37-42.

<http://spectacled.ursinus.edu:3035/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=144106&site=ehost-live>.

¹¹⁵ The U.S. bombing of a Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia, a congressional report known as the Cox Report which claimed Chinese spies had stolen American military technology, and America's rejection of China's diplomatic advances despite extensive reform are all touchpoints in this deteriorating relationship. Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions: Alternate Paths to Global Power*, pp. 48-49.

¹¹⁶ Shi Guangsheng, “Statement by Foreign Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng to the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO following the adoption of the Decision on China's Accession to the WTO,” (2001) <http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/wto/t28924.htm>

This rhetoric highlights China's desire to "expand its opening-up" while maintaining "a level playing field" so as to avoid the disasters that occurred during the Century of Humiliation. Importantly, this would all be done using the nation's "strong sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, *self-reliance* and self-improvement" (Emphasis added).¹¹⁷ Therefore, although China had to bend to extensive reforms in order to join the WTO, it would not allow those reforms to subject it to a position of submission. China's on-going battles with the WTO over its market economy status reflect this unwillingness to fully yield to Western economic liberalism.¹¹⁸ Thus, while China seems willing to make concessions in order to strengthen its political axis of power, it limits the influence of Western liberalization when possible.

Accordingly, China has often circumvented the bias of Western institutions like the WTO by creating its own. These Chinese spearheaded institutions have empowered China politically as a global leader and a regional hegemon. For instance, the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), both founded in 2014, are two Chinese-dominated financial institutions created outside the sphere of Western influence (both have their headquarters in China and the AIIB was conceived in China).¹¹⁹ These financial institutions, which fund various global infrastructure projects and initiatives through loans, were created, according to President Xi Jinping, to "help make the global economic governance system more

¹¹⁷ Jiang Zemin, "President Jiang Zemin Delivered A Speech at APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting Strengthen Cooperation and Meet New Challenges Together in The New Century," (2001) https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t25043.shtml

¹¹⁸ This conflict will be described in greater detail in a later section, but, put shortly, China continues to maintain a command economy and violate international intellectual property laws. For obvious reasons, the U.S. argues that these points necessitate China's exclusion from the WTO. Bryce Baschuk, "China Loses Market-Economy Trade Case in Win for EU and U.S., Sources Say."

¹¹⁹ Hongying Wang, "The New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: China's Ambiguous Approach to Global Financial Governance," *Development and Change* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 221–44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12473>.

just, equitable and effective.”¹²⁰ Clearly, by saying the AIIB and NDB would make the system more just, President Xi necessarily implies that the current global economic governance system as it stands is unjust. Both the NDB and AIIB have facilitated multilateral negotiations benefiting China without requiring the extensive reforms mandated by the WTO or IMF.

Currently, it seems increasingly possible that China will be able to reform the long-standing U.S. dominated financial institutions from the inside. One example is the World Bank, where Chinese economist Justin Yifu Lin appointed chief economist from the years 2008-2012 and had extensive control over the bank’s mission.¹²¹ Similarly, although the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has pushed back on China’s manipulation of the renminbi, China’s voting share has increased beyond six percent in the past twenty years, giving it a major voice in all decisions.¹²² While these development do not necessarily mean China is on its way to supplanting institutions like the World Bank or IMF, China’s ability to champion financial institutions outside the American system has certainly strengthened its political axis of power. Whether this system counts as the “self-reliance” for which China’s leaders advocate is up for debate. Regardless, by joining existing institutions, whether skewed in favor of Western powers or not, China has become a major player in the international political arena: as nations continue to join the AIIB and NDB, this power is only likely to grow.

Culture

¹²⁰ Xi Jinping, “Chinese President Xi Jinping's address at AIIB inauguration ceremony,” (2016) http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-01/16/content_23116718_2.htm

¹²¹ “Sustainable Development Solutions Network | Justin Yifu Lin,” accessed July 15, 2019, <http://unsdsn.org/about-us/people/justin-yifu-lin/>.

¹²² Peter Ferdinand and Jue Wang, “China and the IMF: From Mimicry towards Pragmatic International Institutional Pluralism,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 12, 2013): 897–898, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12050>.

In many ways, as China became more connected with the world politically and economically, it developed channels through which it could broadcast its cultural influence. Tracing this cultural projection is difficult, however. Much of China's culture has been in flux since 1949, resulting in inconsistent cultural messaging to the international community. Indeed, recalling the components of cultural power Nye defines, which are "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideas, and policies," China's cultural axis has undergone extensive changes in the past seventy years.¹²³ Correspondingly, this section traces the historical evolution of China's culture, political ideas, and policies. In addition, this section subsequently analyzes how these three elements of cultural power have been received by the international community and briefly previews the existing barriers to China's cultural power.

In terms of political ideas, China went to great lengths under Mao to export Communism. In contrast, China after Mao put comparatively less effort into exporting its central political ideas, namely market authoritarianism (although the economy's success has done much to sell itself). In terms of policies, China's history of human rights violations has wrought critique, and its restrictions on personal freedoms have not made it any allies abroad. Lastly, China has done very little to export that which is traditionally considered culture—"(a) observable artifacts, (b) values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions,"—until recently in the 21st century; however, the little it has done has been relatively successful.¹²⁴ Like military, economic, and political power, the (limited) rise of China's culture power operated through the lens of national humiliation.

After the success of the Communist Revolution in 1949, the political ideas disseminated by China were entrenched in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist rhetoric. Chinese leaders, especially Mao,

¹²³ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, pp. x.

¹²⁴ Edgar Schein, "Organizational culture," *American Psychologist* 45(2): 109–119 (1990), in Helen Spencer-Oatey, *What is culture? A compilation of quotations*. GlobalPAD Core Concepts (2012) Available at GlobalPAD Open House, pp. 3. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/interculturalskills/>

advocated for other proletariat populations around the world to rise up and overthrow the oppressive bourgeoisie and imperialist establishment. Mao's famous "little red book" was read not just all over in China, but all over the world, and quotations like "imperialism and all reactionaries... must be seen for what they are - paper tigers" quickly became famous.¹²⁵ In fact, Mao's writing quickly became popular in a variety of countries, ranging from Peru to Tanzania to India.¹²⁶ While it is easy to note the popularity of Mao's writing, this popularity does not necessarily translate into the direct exportation of China's political ideas. After all, Communism had been around for over a century, and China was not its only champion; the Soviet Union had laid claim to that mantle since 1917.

Between 1949 and the death of Mao in 1976, China was far more focused inward than outward, and China did relatively little to advocate its political model other than advocate for revolution in other developing countries. This does come with the exception of the Bandung Conference of 1955, in which Zhou Enlai, China's foreign minister, worked with a coalition of nations—India, Burma, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Ceylon—to highlight the United States as the main enemy of the continental coalition.¹²⁷ Beyond assisting in the globalization of anti-Americanism, China worked to reaffirm the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" enshrined in the Panchsheel Treaty of 1955: "(1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful co-existence."¹²⁸ China's affirmation of

¹²⁵ Alexander C. Cook, *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 76; Mao Zedong, Quotations from Mao Tse Tung - Chapter 6, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch06.htm>.

¹²⁶ Alexander C. Cook, *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 96, 117, 130, respectively.

¹²⁷ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 496.

¹²⁸ Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*, pp. 5; "No. 4307. AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TRADE AND INTERCOURSE BETWEEN TIBET REGION OF CHINA AND INDIA. SIGNED AT PEKING, ON 29 APRIL

these principles served a dual purpose. First, Chinese leaders wanted to assure their neighbors that their struggle against the First and Second world was unified and that China stood firmly as a member of the Third World determined to advocate for the end of imperialism. Second, it internationally broadcasted the very issues that characterized China's historic memory. Mostly, "non-interference in each other's internal affairs" speaks directly to China's concerns of foreign nations meddling in China's domestic realm as European powers had during the Century of Humiliation. Nevertheless, beyond the Bandung Conference, China was largely focused inward, and the crisis of the Great Leap Forward would only further divert China's attention from advocating for its political ideas abroad.

After the death of Mao, the turn inward quickly became a turn outward. As discussed above, this "turning-out" was primarily an economic opening to global markets. With economic opening, however, comes the spread of ideas, and the China of the late 1970s onwards was advertising something very different from Maoism. China's new model, often branded by foreign observers as "market authoritarianism" was now the selling point of China's political ideas. This market authoritarianism was defined by "the new alternative of 'going capitalist and staying autocratic,'" and "Beijing has provided the world's most compelling, high-speed demonstration of how to liberalize economically without surrendering to liberal politics."¹²⁹ Essentially, China represented an economic and political model that could rival that of the United States, a point which had major "implications for China's sense of identity and of national pride as policy-makers and populace alike [sought] to expunge the stain of humiliation."¹³⁰

1954" *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 299, United Nations, pp. 70.
<http://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20299/v299.pdf>

¹²⁹ Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time*, Basic Books, 2012, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ursinus-ebooks/detail.action?docID=488068>, pp. 32-33.

¹³⁰ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States," pp. 94.

China would go on to find its largest audience in Africa in the 1970s. This is largely due to African dissatisfaction with Western economic and political systems, which had all but failed the many African nations that had turned to liberalism during decolonization. Nonetheless, although Africa seemed to be in an ideal position to adopt the Chinese “model,” very few countries did. Moreover, the countries that did attempt to emulate China’s political ideas (Tanzania and Mali) quickly failed. This failure was caused firstly by a general lack of interest on the part of African peoples in the Chinese model and secondly by a lack of interest on the part of Chinese leaders in helping African countries implement that model. Although China had opened up to the world and its ideas received more attention, economic concerns overrode any desire to spread political ideas.¹³¹

As China’s attempts to broadcast its political ideas floundered, its domestic policies only further diminished China’s fledging international cultural presence. The most infamous of these policies was its hard crackdown on student protesters during the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. These protests had manifested for a culmination of reasons—economic slowdown, demands for greater freedoms, etc.—and, while the aims of the protesters were at times ambiguous, the response of the government was not. After weeks of demonstrations and hunger strikes, the CCP would have no more of the protests. Soldiers were sent to the square on June 3rd with permission to fire, and by the next day hundreds were dead and thousands were injured.¹³² This slaughter brought immediate condemnation from the international community, and international audiences were bombarded with violent images captured by Western reporters.¹³³

¹³¹ David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, “A Historical Overview of China-Africa Relations,” In *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 2012, pp. 42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhwkz.6>.

¹³² Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 523-524.

¹³³ Undoubtedly, the most famous of these is “Tank Man”, which is a short clip of a man standing with his groceries in front an entire tank column in the street, thereby bringing the column to a halt. Adrian Brown, “Reporting from

This delegitimized both China and Communism in the eyes of many international observers.¹³⁴

While no incident has been as serious as this grotesque violation of human rights, China's policies of the 21st century have fumbled its reputation in other ways. Whether through foreign labor exploitation, the crackdown of artists like Ai Wei Wei, or the mistreatment of minorities, namely Tibetans and Uighurs in China's western provinces, China has repeatedly sacrificed its international reputation for domestic security.¹³⁵

In terms of China's ability to spread what is colloquially referred to as culture—"(a) observable artifacts, (b) values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions,"—China has been for the most part successful.¹³⁶ It is, of course, difficult (if not foolish) to attribute this success directly to the efforts of China's leaders. Chinese migrants have set up various communities all over the globe, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, all major influencers of Chinese cultural values and underlying assumptions, have spread internationally, and historic symbols of Chinese civilization (e.g. the Great Wall) are well-known. None of these developments can be attributed to CCP leaders, so China's cultural standing in this stance is relatively divorced from the PRC's control.

However, Chinese leaders have found ways to reinforce or create these cultural ties through the widespread promotion of Confucian Institutes. With its first location established in Uzbekistan in 2004, the Confucius Institute was created with a rather nebulous mission of

Tiananmen Square in 1989: 'I Saw a Lot I Will Never Forget,'" *Aljazeera*, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/asia/2019/06/reporting-tiananmen-square-1989-lot-forget-190604025128201.html>.

¹³⁴ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 525-526.

¹³⁵ Lindsay Maizland, "China's Crackdown on Uighurs in Xinjiang," *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-crackdown-uighurs-xinjiang>; Keith B. Richburg, "Chinese Artist Ai Weiwei Arrested in Ongoing Government Crackdown," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2011, sec. World, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/chinese-artist-ai-wei-wei-arrested-in-latest-government-crackdown/2011/04/03/AFHB5PVC_story.html; Richard Aidoo, "Go Global, Meet the Locals: Pragmatism, Plunder, and Anti-Chinese Populism in Africa," *Journal of Diplomacy*, no. 11 (Winter 2017), pp. 15.

¹³⁶ Schein, "Organizational culture," pp. 3.

spreading Chinese language and culture. Each institution is generously funded by the Chinese government and holds Chinese language courses for local populations. These courses, while mainly language instruction, preach pro-CCP views and introduce general topics of Chinese diaspora to students. When assessing these institutes' ability to win over local populations, they appear to be effective. Empirical studies suggest a positive correlation between the presence of one of these institutes and local media's positive portrayal of Chinese politics, meaning China's cultural projection programs have tangible results.¹³⁷ It is important to note that the Confucius Institutes are often associated with Xi Jinping's conception of the Chinese Dream, which is vaguely defined as "national prosperity, the revitalization of the nation and people's happiness." This association reflects the CCP's belief that winning over foreign populations culturally is important to achieving the goals of the Chinese Dream, which are described in "the light of the miseries brought to China by Western powers during the Century of Humiliation."¹³⁸

When compared to its other axes of power, the growth of China's cultural axis of power seems rather limited. It would be incorrect, however, to suggest China has not grown in cultural power since 1949. China has made waves with its introduction of a potentially viable alternative to the American model, even if no other country has successfully adopted the Chinese model yet. Furthermore, China's cultural broadcasting has made Chinese culture more visible in international communities, garnering the PRC some favor among local populations. Whether these limited successes will be able to outweigh the historic devaluation of China's reputation is

¹³⁷ Falk Hartig, *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Confucius Institutes*, (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 98-103; Samuel Brazys and Alexander Dukalskis, "Why U.S. universities are shutting down China-funded Confucius Institutes," *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2019, accessed June 10, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/01/11/u-s-universities-have-shut-down-confucius-institutes-heres-what-you-need-to-know/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.79aa6df8a0cf.

¹³⁸ Falk Hartig, *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Confucius Institutes*, (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 22-23.

yet to be seen. If China cannot successfully ward off neocolonialist labels (discussed in greater length below), this is unlikely.

The Current Debate

As shown above, China's military, economic, political, and cultural axes have clearly become stronger since 1949. However, the culmination of these historical developments has left China in an ambiguous position, and its status as a superpower is still unclear. As was the case during Japan's economic rise in the 1980s, scholars continue to debate the current state of China's power. Can China's economy continue to legitimize the government? Will China integrate into global institutions or continue to invent its own? To contextualize these questions, the following section explores current scholarship surrounding the China-as-superpower debate. Ultimately, the current debate surrounding China's future as a superpower reinforces the historical assessment of China's rise above; although Chinese military, economic, political, and cultural power may be rising, China still must overcome existing structural hurdles within each axis before it can become a superpower.

Economy

While all four axes are essential to a superpower, current debates surrounding China's rise tend to focus on China's economic power. For example, in his article, *The Inevitable Superpower: Why China's Dominance Is a Sure Thing*, Indian economist Arvind Subramanian argues that China's economy will surpass that of the United States as early as 2030. Subramanian suggests that China's strong economic growth, its positive balance of trade, and its status as a "net creditor to the rest of the world" allow China to leverage political benefits out of its numerous debtors.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, economic scholars like Derek Scissors reject such unqualified

¹³⁹ Arvind Subramanian, "The Inevitable Superpower: Why China's Dominance Is a Sure Thing," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 5 (September/October 2011), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23041777>.

confidence in China's rise. In fact, Scissors marks China's status as a net creditor as a creation of "its weaknesses, not its strengths."¹⁴⁰ Following Scissors' logic, China's closed economic system prevents the state from importing capital, which would speed its domestic development.¹⁴¹ Overall, Scissors seems to doubt Subramanian's prediction of nearly indefinite growth for the Chinese economy.

In reality, this debate reflects the deeper uncertainty that surrounds the future of China's economy. China's growth has been spectacular, but scholars from the Institute for International Economics and the Center for International and Strategic Studies take a more measured perspective on China's success. In their joint publication, *China: The Balance Sheet*, these policy analysts note five sources of China's economic power—"the embrace of market forces, the opening of the economy to trade and inward direct investment, high levels of savings and investment, the structural transformation of the labor force, and investments in primary education"—and three hurdles to economic growth—reforming state-owned enterprises, developing a more efficient capital allocation, and moderating market fluctuations.¹⁴² Moreover, these are only some of the hurdles the economy faces. In the coming decades, China will have to deal with demographic implications of the one-child policy, the environmental toll of rampant pollution, and the challenge of switching from a savings country to a consumer country.¹⁴³ While these obstacles are surmountable, they suggest China's economic rise is not preordained, and mounting economic pressures lead CCP leaders to prioritize short-term economic stability as a

¹⁴⁰ Derek Scissors, "The Wobbly Dragon," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (January/February 2012), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2011-01-01/great-china-debate>.

¹⁴¹ Scissors, "The Wobbly Dragon."

¹⁴² C. Fred Bergsten, *China: The Balance Sheet*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), pp. 23.

¹⁴³ Kyle Hutzler, "The China Skeptic's Talking Points Memo | The Yale Review of International Studies," November 2012, accessed June 24, 2019, <http://yris.yira.org/essays/755>; Thomas L. Friedman, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded Why We Need a Green Revolution-- and How It Can Renew America* (Bayrūt: Akādīmiyā Intarnāshyunāl, 2009), pp. 343-367.

means of securing their “output legitimacy.” In this way, CCP’s short-term economic policies meant to ensure Communist rule paradoxically frustrate China’s rise as a superpower.

Although economics are understandably at the forefront of this debate, excluding any discussion of China’s military capabilities, its political influence, and its cultural power leaves a large gap in the China-as-superpower discussion. International scholars like Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter provide a fuller description of the sources of China's growing international power by noting China’s military and political power along with its economic power. Contextualizing their analysis in the larger scholarly debate shows that while Chinese military and economic power are essential to China’s rise, political and cultural power are also vital to China’s rise as a superpower.

Military

Starting with China’s military, Foot and Walter describe China’s impressive military growth over the past decades. China is “a nuclear weapons state” with a rapidly growing army and navy. In fact, while its defense budget is still dwarfed by that of the United States, “over the period 1998–2007, China’s military spending in real terms has been estimated to have increased by 202 percent.”¹⁴⁴ More recent statistics show that this trend has continued as China has increased military spending by 83% between 2009 and 2018, with a planned rise of 7.5% in military expenditures for 2019.¹⁴⁵ This dramatic increase in military spending has led to the expansion and advancement of China’s military. While all of the People’s Liberation Army’s developments cannot be noted here, their development of aircraft carriers, satellite-weaponry,

¹⁴⁴ Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 18 and 43.

¹⁴⁵ David Tweed, “China Defense Spending Set to Rise 7.5% as Xi Builds Up Military,” *Bloomberg*, March 5, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-05/china-s-military-spending-slows-as-economy-cools>; “Xi Jinping Wants China’s Armed Forces to Be ‘World-Class’ by 2050,” *The Economist*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/06/27/xi-jinping-wants-chinas-armed-forces-to-be-world-class-by-2050>.

and cyber warfare techniques are notable measures of the PLA's technological growth.¹⁴⁶ Considerable advancements to the military structure initiated by Xi Jinping in 2015, and described in detail by a report from the Department of Defense similarly suggest a dramatic increase in China's military power.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, China has increasingly shown a willingness to use its military power aggressively. For example, the Chinese government continues to threaten its neighbors into giving up strategically and politically advantageous positions in the South China Sea like the Spratly Islands. It does this through the construction of military facilities (and the islands beneath those facilities), the encirclement of opposing states' islands, and threats to fishing boats.¹⁴⁸ Even in the face of American opposition, China has asserted its military authority over the South China Sea, highlighting its growing military power and its willingness to use that power.¹⁴⁹

Although these developments are impressive, other scholars argue that it is rash to suggest China's military is on its way to becoming the most powerful in the world. John G. Ikenberry, for example, notes that when compared the combined military strength of the United States and its allies, China's defense budget is relatively small. Ikenberry includes the sum of the OECD's military expenditure because he sees the West's highly integrated military alliances as China's collective military opposition. Even when compared to just the United States, the

¹⁴⁶ It is important to note that the PLA is the army of the Communist Party, not the government. This essentially means the PLA is technically charged with the survival of the Communist Party, not the state. "China Military Power: Modernizing a force to Fight and Win," *Defense Intelligence Agency*, November 2018, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINA_L_5MB_20190103.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ "ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018," *Defense Intelligence Agency*, August 2018. <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Aug/16/2001955282/-1/-1/1/2018-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT.PDF>

¹⁴⁸ Marco Hernández, "Conflicting Claims," *South China Morning Post*, accessed July 8, 2019, <http://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/southChinaSea/img/ConflictClaims.jpg>.

¹⁴⁹ Hannah Beech, "China's Sea Control Is a Done Deal, 'Short of War With the U.S.,'" *The New York Times*, September 20, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/asia/south-china-sea-navy.html>.

Chinese military is limited in both its technology and spending power.¹⁵⁰ Such a comparison is crucial since, if China is to achieve some of its long proclaimed goals of reclaiming Taiwan, it will have to challenge the military authority of the United States (notwithstanding an unlikely abandonment of Taiwan on the part of the United States). Nevertheless, as the landscape of military technology evolves, cutting-edge cyber warfare, anti-satellite weaponry, and advanced cloaking mechanism complicated this imbalance. Therefore, while China's military is in no way comparable to that of the United States or its allies, 21st century technological advancement suggest that writing off China's military power as insignificant would be premature.

Politics

In relation to political power, Foot and Walter note that China "has permanent UN Security Council membership and a growing development aid budget."¹⁵¹ These factors have greatly contributed to China's political power within international politics, allowing the PRC much greater leverage over the UN's mission as well as the allocation of development funds.¹⁵² Beyond the United Nations, as mentioned above, China's ascension to the World Trade Organization in 2001 has brought China greater economic protections and influence in global markets.¹⁵³ Some scholars like G. John Ikenberry and Darren J. Lim, international relations analysts writing in the Project on International Order and Strategy for the Brookings Institute, suggest that China stands a chance at supplanting America's long-standing seat at the top of the international order. As a matter of fact, these scholars argue that China's chances at overtaking

¹⁵⁰ The World Bank || <http://www.worldbank.org/https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?contextual=default&locations=CN-US&view=chart>.

¹⁵¹ Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order*, pp. 18.

¹⁵² Bergsten, *China: The Balance Sheet*, pp. 120.

¹⁵³ Lee Branstetter and Nicholas Lardy. "China's Embrace of Globalization," in *China's Great Transformation: Origins, Mechanisms, and Consequences of the Post-Reform Economic Boom*, National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2006, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w12373.pdf>.

the existing international political order either through existing institutions or new institutions are only improved by the Trump administration's unwillingness to maintain international order through institutional commitment.¹⁵⁴

While these scholars are right to note China's growing institutional power, their assessments may be overblown. For instance, although China contributes significantly to international financial institutions like the WTO, it is yet to be determined whether such multilateral participation will significantly elevate China's political power.¹⁵⁵ Recent developments have undermined China's authority in the WTO, and the issue of intellectual property rights will most likely remain a point of contention between China and other WTO members. These developments are not merely a political hiccup either. The WTO's repeated denial of China's ascension to market-economy status has created hurdles for China's economy. This is primarily because market status would force the United States and other countries to lower anti-dumping fees levied against Chinese goods. While the exact impact of the "Trade War" is still difficult to determine, early reports indicated that the Chinese economy would suffer far more than American economy (except for the American soy market).¹⁵⁶ For this reason, China's status within the WTO, and in many international political institutions, is far from

¹⁵⁴ G John Ikenberry and Darren J Lim, "China's Emerging Institutional Statecraft," *Project on International Order and Strategy*, The Brookings Institute, pp. 16-18.

¹⁵⁵ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States," pp. 107-108.

¹⁵⁶ By the time China and the United States reached a tentative agreement, it was clear that the trade war had a significant negative impact on both economies. Ben Casselman, Niraj Chokshi, and Jim Tankersley, "The Trade War, Paused for Now, Is Still Wreaking Damage," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2020, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/22/business/economy/trade-economy.html>; Zhou Xin, "Why Is China Throwing in the Towel over Market Economy Status at the WTO?," *South China Morning Post*, June 18, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3015048/us-china-trade-war-weighed-beijings-decision-not-pursue-wto>; Daniel Bases "US Farmers Swamped by Tariffs and Unprecedented Rains," *South China Morning Post*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/3013941/under-water-us-farmers-swamped-tariffs-and>.

trivial. While Foot and Walter gloss over this issue, Ikenberry and Lim describe the daunting task China faces in more realistic terms. They write:

China's ability to wield new institutions as "instruments" of its political and economic goals has limits. Moreover, as the existing institutional order has rules and institutions that China can use to pursue and defend its interests (particularly those relating to sovereignty norms), China's struggle to gain advantage and voice may draw it further into the existing system.¹⁵⁷

Essentially, China is in an awkward position. The more it may attempt to assert itself into the global order, the more it may be drawn into that system and changed by its rules, rather than changing the rules themselves. Although China is certainly in a position to gain political power, the deep institutionalization of the existing order may be too stable to topple.

Culture

Although Foot and Walter discuss military, economic, and political power at length, they leave China's cultural axis of power out of the discussion. Does China have the cultural "soft power" of a superpower? In *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time*, American foreign policy scholar Stefan Halper claims that "China is the protagonist in a clash of values, governance, and two versions of modernity in the twenty-first century."¹⁵⁸ While this is vaguely reminiscent of a Huntington-esque "Clash of Civilizations" argument, Halper zeroes in on the two ideational models the United States and China represent: liberal democracy and market authoritarianism. While liberal democracy is a merger of free-market capitalism and representative government, "market authoritarianism," is made of "a liberal economic policy that opens the economy" and "the persistence of authoritarian rule, which allows the ruling party to keep a firm grip on government, the courts, the military, and the flow of information."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Ikenberry and Lim, "China's Emerging Institutional Statecraft," pp. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time*, pp. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 30.

Although, as Jeffery Legro suggests, China is not explicitly pushing this governing system on other nations the way the United States does, it is certainly trying to garner support for this political system through extensive propaganda and cultural outreach programs.¹⁶⁰ For example, “Beijing invested \$6.8 billion in 2010 to create a global network with daily news and commentary in fifty-six languages on television, on radio, and in print,” with the purpose “to frame developing stories in a China-friendly way.”¹⁶¹ Such advertising campaigns are bolstered by comprehensive language and culture programs like the Confucius Institute, which, as mentioned above, are sites charged with the general purpose of spreading Chinese language and culture. Consequently, Confucius Institutes have become one of the many ways in which the PRC attempts to extend its cultural component of “soft power”.¹⁶²

Other scholars approach claims of a “Beijing Consensus” more cautiously. Mark Beeson and Fujian Li challenge the notion of China’s growing ideational power in their piece *What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States*. Beeson and Li argue that despite China’s impressive growth, it is overzealous to claim China offers a model for other developing nations to emulate.¹⁶³ This is because the “Sino-Capitalist” model lacks “a clearly articulated set of core principles” which “has given it significantly less traction as a distinct discourse or policy paradigm” compared to America’s ten, clearly outlined economic principles enshrined in the Washington Consensus.¹⁶⁴ This essentially means that despite the active cultural programs Halper notes, China will continue to struggle to export its market-authoritarian “model” to other states, thereby limiting its global ideational power. Such a barrier

¹⁶⁰ Jeffrey W. Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2007), pp. 518.

¹⁶¹ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, pp. xxviii.

¹⁶² Hartig, *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Confucius Institutes*, pp. 100.

¹⁶³ Beeson and Li, “What Consensus?”, pp. 108.

¹⁶⁴ Beeson and Li, “What Consensus?”, pp. 103.

is only compounded by the negative reputation the PRC is accumulating abroad through its strategic and economic maneuvers. For instance, as China funds ambitious economic projects in countries in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America, “China is continually having to fend off accusations of ‘neo-colonialism’.”¹⁶⁵ Whether this animosity comes from evidence of corruption and poor planning, dangerous working conditions and racist Chinese managers, or predatory lending practices, China’s economic ambition abroad has certainly engendered negative feelings among foreign populations, if not foreign leaders.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, China’s exceptionally aggressive behavior in the South China Sea has only undermined the PRC’s claims of non-interference, thus pushing its neighbors closer into the sphere of American influence.¹⁶⁷ Clearly, in relation to cultural power, China has difficult ideational and reputational hurdles to overcome. When joining these cultural observations with Foot and Walter’s analysis, existing scholarship suggests that *if* China is on its way to becoming a superpower, it certainly has numerous hurdles to overcome before that happens.

If anything, this scholarship illustrates the unpredictable position in which China finds itself in the 21st century. While China’s growth over the past seventy years has been incredible, economic hurdles (e.g. demographic imbalances) persist and siphon economic productivity. Similarly, China’s modernized military is a formidable force, but its combat capacity is still overshadowed by the U.S. military capabilities. Politically, China continues to struggle to gain the full benefit of important international institutions like the WTO, but it now has access to

¹⁶⁵ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus?", pp. 108.

¹⁶⁶ Nicholas Casey and Clifford Krauss, “It Doesn’t Matter If Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid.,” *The New York Times*, December 24, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/world/americas/ecuador-china-dam.html>; Nadège Rolland, “Reports of Belt and Road’s Death Are Greatly Exaggerated,” February 1, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-01-29/reports-belt-and-roads-death-are-greatly-exaggerated>; Aidoo, "Go Global, Meet the Locals: Pragmatism, Plunder, and Anti-Chinese Populism in Africa," pp. 16-17.

¹⁶⁷ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus?", pp. 107-108.

those institutions. Lastly, China's cultural projection has seen some success abroad, but its prioritization of economic security has often upended its reputation and, consequently, its soft power. With the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, the future of each of China's axes of power has only become further shrouded in uncertainty. Nevertheless, it is clear that China has sought to overcome these deficits in its axes of power, and, although China is not yet a superpower, it intends to overcome these structural hurdles with the BRI.

The Belt and Road Initiative: Overcoming the Hurdles

Especially in relation to economics, the Belt and Road Initiative seems to be China's primary solution to its various structural hurdles. For example, by exporting Chinese labor and construction, the BRI offers an important pressure valve for both social and economic issues in China. However, although China's implementation of the BRI has the potential to ensure the country's continued growth, its often predatory nature and haphazard implementation—as discussed more fully in the case study of Ecuador—threatens to undermine much of China's political and cultural power abroad.

As mentioned in the introduction of this research, the BRI is a massive infrastructure project that seeks to revitalize the historic Silk Road and extend Chinese influence throughout the world. The BRI was formally announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013 during a visit to Kazakhstan. Xi proclaimed the Chinese government would “build the Belt and Road into a road of opening up” not just on the Asian continent, but to all the world.¹⁶⁸ Although Xi relies rhetorically on the long history of the Silk Road, the BRI is hardly restricted to the Silk Road's original trade routes. In fact, Xi notes that “all countries, from either Asia, Europe, Africa or the Americas, can be international cooperation partners of the Belt and Road Initiative.” This is

¹⁶⁸ “The End of Engagement,” *The Economist*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/10/18/the-end-of-engagement>.

important to note since an overwhelming majority of the maps depicting the Belt and Road Initiative only trace paths between Eurasia and Africa.¹⁶⁹ Since its conception in 2013, the BRI has funded enormous infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Ecuador, and Ethiopia, to name just a few. Importantly, these funds are said to come without the reforms that an organization like the IMF would request in return, such as economic liberalization.

Despite these claims, nations participating in the BRI have quickly become aware of the informal strings attached to inviting the construction of a BRI project: the projects are built and overwhelmingly employed by Chinese workers, not local workers, and states that default on their loans either relinquish the project to Chinese control (Sri Lanka signed away its massive port in Hambantota for 99 years) or are cornered into making special payment deals (such as allowing payment in oil, which China desperately needs).¹⁷⁰ While these reputational hurdles have slowed the BRI, countries continue to take on Chinese investment despite stories of predatory loans.¹⁷¹ Not all projects end in catastrophe either. In fact, as demonstrated in the case study of Argentina

¹⁶⁹ While some would suggest that any connections beyond the Eurasian and African continents are a part of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, the Maritime Silk Road is actually a part of the BRI. As evidence, in 2017, President Xi said: “I proposed the building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which I call the Belt and Road Initiative” (i.e., two parts of the BRI). Xi Jinping, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” (2017) at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm. A few examples of maps that incorrectly portray the BRI can be found here: “Belt and Road Initiative,” World Bank, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>; “China Faces Resistance to a Cherished Theme of Its Foreign Policy,” *The Economist*, May 4, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/05/04/china-faces-resistance-to-a-cherished-theme-of-its-foreign-policy>; “China’s Belt And Road Initiative Opens Up Unprecedented Opportunities,” *Forbes*, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2018/09/04/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-opens-up-unprecedented-opportunities/#4641f10a3e9a>.

¹⁷⁰ “Let’s Talk About China,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 2018, sec. Reader Center, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/admin/100000006119100.embedded.html?>; “Ecuador Faces a Huge Budget Deficit Because of Loans It Received from China,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-ecuador-loans-china-20181210-story.html>.

¹⁷¹ Christopher Balding, “Why Democracies Are Turning Against Belt and Road,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 24, 2018 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-10-24/why-democracies-are-turning-against-belt-and-road>.

below, various projects have benefited the host nation's economy as well as the Chinese economy.

Regardless, in most countries China has clearly used the BRI to prioritize economic security over projecting political or cultural power. This is unsurprising due to important domestic concerns within China. Namely, the CCP's heavy dependence on economic growth for stability, which is often labeled "output legitimacy," takes priority over any foreign consideration.¹⁷² When China loses cultural or political authority through hostile BRI practices, the CCP certainly is jeopardizing China's long-term claim to superpower status. However, the short-term risk of an economic crisis that could delegitimize the CCP is far more dangerous in the eyes of the CCP. For this reason, China has used the BRI as a means of tackling its largest economic concerns of the 21st century—energy, food dependency, and unemployment—despite the damage the BRI's impact has on China's political and cultural power.¹⁷³ Amidst the global economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unlikely that China's prioritization of securing economic stability will change in the near future.

Conclusion

By exploring China's historically constructed ideas and interests in the context of China's rise since 1949, this chapter established the relevancy of China's historic memory of national humiliation in foreign policy making. Moreover, assessing the debate surrounding China's superpower status, this chapter has illustrated why China has attempted to cultivate all four axes of power and to what extent it has succeeded. As illustrated by this chapter, because China's leaders perceive the United States as an obstacle to assuaging national humiliation, it has

¹⁷² Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 542.

¹⁷³ Each of these issues has been in some way created by the environmental and demographic troubles described in the historical section.

pursued an aggressive, confrontation policy towards issues like the South China Sea. Similarly, as China seeks to find economic security in the BRI, the BRI's predatory nature sours relations with other Latin American states and jeopardizes China's ability to expand such projects.

Ultimately, Chinese leaders have sought to increase China's economic, military, political, and cultural power in order to overcome the historic legacy of national humiliation and reestablish china as a world power. As the next chapter illustrates, China's monumental rise and expansionist foreign policy have elicited a similarly hostile response from the United States as it attempts to defend its title as sole superpower.

Chapter 3. America's Balance:

American Exceptionalism and the Thucydides Trap

Since the times of ancient Greek historian Thucydides, the rise of a powerful challenger to a dominant power has generally led to war. While Thucydides originally noted this tendency in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*—as Athens rose, Sparta lashed out against it in fear—others have applied his theory to various other power transitions. For instance, Graham Allison, a former Harvard professor of International affairs, analyzes sixteen cases in which a rising power usurped a dominant power, and, out of all of these cases, only four did not lead to war.¹⁷⁴ Importantly, Allison writes this work in relation to China and the United States, exploring a foreign policy question with growing importance: are the US and China destined to clash?

In the context of the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America, there are two main sources of conflict between China and the United States that suggest that a clash may be possible. The first is the crisis in the South China Sea, where China has made an extensive claim to this maritime territory through what is known as “the Nine-Dash Line.” For China, the area bound within this line—virtually the entire South China Sea—is unequivocally China’s because of its historic claims to this massive body of water. Meanwhile, the United States has condemned China’s actions as a violation of international law and a threat to stability in Southeast Asia. As China continues to build islands in the South China Sea and the United States positions its navy in order to deter Chinese expansion, a clash on this front seems increasingly possible. Importantly, U.S. officials are concerned with China’s expansionist policies in the South China Sea not only because it threatens to jeopardize U.S. authority within that region but also because China’s overall rise raises anxiety among U.S. foreign policy

¹⁷⁴ Graham Allison, “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?,” *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>.

makers. For these officials, China's rise is a direct threat to U.S. hegemony and, correspondingly, the American way of life.

Similarly, U.S. foreign policy makers have become increasingly concerned with China's growing presence in Latin America through the BRI. For over a century, U.S. leaders have treated the Western Hemisphere as a zone which the United States should have exclusive access to as a global power. Frequently referring to this part of the world as America's "backyard," the United States has shown great concern for warming relations between China and Latin America. A recent example of this accumulating concern is former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's comments about Chinese involvement in Latin America, where he argues that "*Our* region must be diligent to guard against far-away powers that do not reflect the fundamental values shared in this region" (emphasis added).¹⁷⁵ Tillerson describes the threat of China as a conflict of "fundamental values," which is reflective of a century-old understanding among U.S. foreign policy makers that U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere should not be solely economic or military. It must also be ideological, and officials have correspondingly pushed to keep ideologies that contradict American Liberalism out of the hemisphere. Thus, as China cultivate military, economic, political, and cultural ties within Latin America, U.S. foreign policy makers sound alarms and attempt to balance the rising power's influence in the Western Hemisphere, potentially signalling a clash between China and the United States.

As these conflicts escalate and China continues to rise as a superpower potentially capable of challenging the United States, it may seem like the Thucydides Trap will be realized and the United States will lash out at the rising power. However, applying this historical analogy erases the nuance that exists within the evolving relationship between China, the United States,

¹⁷⁵ "Latin America Should Not Rely on China: U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson." *Reuters*, February 1, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-diplomacy-latam-china-idUSKBN1FL6D5>.

and Latin America. As Allison demonstrated in his case studies, war is not destined to occur. There were four peaceful transitions of power where the Thucydides Trap was “escaped,” and his ultimate argument is that China and the United States can also avoid the Thucydides Trap: “*war is not inevitable.*”¹⁷⁶ When China and the United States clash or escalate conflict, they are *choosing* conflict, not falling into the inevitable outcome of a fixed struggle for power. This means that in both cases concerning the South China Sea and the BRI, China and the United States can also choose cooperation and convert geopolitical challenges into international opportunities.

Focusing on U.S. foreign policy perspectives and decisions, this chapter explores the growing tension between China and the United States in the South China Sea and the Western Hemisphere. Similar to China’s socially and historically constructed memory of national humiliation, U.S. responses to China in both these regions are guided by the historically constructed understanding of American exceptionalism. This idea rests on the fundamental belief that “Americans are special, exceptional, because they are charged with saving the world from itself” and need to defend the fundamental U.S. values to which Tillerson alludes—namely democracy and capitalism.¹⁷⁷ Although in some instances claims of American exceptionalism are certainly an over-embellished rhetorical tool used to galvanize the public, there is ample evidence to suggest that American exceptionalism has substantively shaped the interpretations of U.S. foreign policy interests for centuries. Consequently, U.S. decision makers choose policies

¹⁷⁶ Ironically, this argument is a bit at odds with the title of Allison’s book, which boldly reads “Destined for War.” Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), pp. xvii.

¹⁷⁷ In reality, neither “democracy” nor “capitalism” are values. Democracy is a system of government and capitalism is an economic system. While the implementation of these systems may imply a societies values, the things themselves are not values. However, this chapter refers to each as values because the rhetoric of foreign policy makers treat them as though they are values. For this reason, I use the language of elites to better capture these actors’ understanding of American exceptionalism. Deborah Lea Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (University Press of Mississippi, 1998), pp. 2.

which they believe will achieve these interests. As this chapter demonstrates, because of American exceptionalism's close connection with a fear of an alternative model undermining core U.S. values, U.S. foreign policy makers choose policies that invite conflict with China, leading the United States to act aggressively towards China in the South China Sea and Latin America. Ultimately, this aggression shapes the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America, escalating the potential for conflict to emerge despite the potential the relationship has for cooperation.

In order to demonstrate the crucial impact American exceptionalism has on the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America, this chapter first lays out the historical origins of American exceptionalism and traces its implementation in U.S. foreign policy throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Then, this chapter explores the conflict in the South China Sea and highlights the role American exceptionalism plays in U.S. escalation of this conflict. Specifically, the "Loss of China" complex, an outgrowth of American exceptionalism, pushes U.S. foreign policy makers to undermine China's rise as a superpower and, consequently, the apparent viability of China's political system. Subsequently, this chapter summarizes the ways in which American exceptionalism shapes U.S. foreign policy makers' approach to China's presence in Latin America. However, although this chapter highlights the ways in which American exceptionalism generally shapes U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, the specific ways in which the United States responds to the BRI are detailed through the Ecuador and Argentina case studies in the following chapter. Lastly, this chapter addresses the concerns that China and the United States may go to war and notes the vital role American exceptionalism plays in potential conflict.

American Exceptionalism

Secretary Tillerson's comments on China and Latin America capture an important fear among U.S. leaders that has persisted since and even before the Cold War. For centuries, U.S. foreign policy makers have feared that an alternative model could undermine the "fundamental values" championed by American exceptionalism. The earliest manifestation of American exceptionalism can be traced back before the United States was an independent nation. Colonists arriving in the Americas described the society that they sought to construct as a "City upon a Hill," which the rest of the world would look to as an example. This original understanding of America as an exceptional land was inherently Christian, and that distinction was quickly used to justify the violent seizure and colonization of indigenous lands.¹⁷⁸ While this religious connotation has been inextricably linked to American exceptionalism for centuries, secular iterations of the concept existed in tandem. For example, after the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin described American exceptionalism in more secular terms, suggesting that the democratic governing system of the United States would be the example which European nations would seek to emulate.¹⁷⁹ This is just one of the ways in which the concept of American exceptionalism is amorphous, allowing for a variety of interpretations as to how the United States may serve as an example for the rest of the world. However, while American exceptionalism is not strictly religious or racial, the necessarily Christian and white origins of the concept have ensured American exceptionalism implies fundamental religious and racial understandings of what is American.

This religious and racial understanding is best highlighted by the infamous expression used to justify Westward Expansion and indigenous genocide: "Manifest Destiny." In 1845,

¹⁷⁸ John Whintrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity, 1630," accessed May 7, 2020, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>; Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1998), pp. 43.

¹⁷⁹ Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1998), pp. 37.

during the thrall of Euro-Americans' colonial expansion across the continent, columnist and soon-to-be politician John Louis O'Sullivan wrote that Americans had the "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence."¹⁸⁰ Importantly, although American exceptionalism has been used by indigenous and enslaved peoples to challenge practices and institutions like settler colonialism and slavery, the racial and religious exclusion of non-white groups from American exceptionalism facilitated the violent oppression of these peoples.¹⁸¹ In this way, the contradictions of American exceptionalism—championing freedom while refusing to abolish slavery—coexisted with the foreign policies of presidents like Andrew Jackson and Thomas Jefferson.

This use of American exceptionalism to justify racial and religious injustice in the name of democracy and capitalism was not confined to foreign relations with indigenous tribes or enslaved African peoples either. By the 20th century, America's emergence from a period of isolationism led prominent American historians and politicians to extend the application of American exceptionalism to the rest of the world. For instance, by the turn of the century U.S. leaders like Senator Albert J. Beveridge began to believe that "it is destiny that the world shall be rescued from its natural wilderness and from savage men... in this great work the American people must have their part." This even meant annexing other nations, since "*the sovereignty of the Stars and Stripes can be nothing but a blessing to any people and any land.*"¹⁸² For context, when Beveridge made this comment in 1900, the United States had just defeated the Spanish and

¹⁸⁰ John O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no.1 (July-August 1845): 5-10 <http://web.grinnell.edu/courses/HIS/f01/HIS202-01/Documents/OSullivan.html>.

¹⁸¹ Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1998), 42, 83.

¹⁸² Albert Jeremiah Beveridge, *The Meaning of the Times, and Other Speeches* (Indianapolis : Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1908), <http://archive.org/details/meaningoftimesot00beve>, pp. 128-129.

acquired the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and, *de facto*, Cuba.¹⁸³ By defeating the Spanish and acquiring these territories, the United States not only showed it had the ability to enforce the Monroe Doctrine—“the American continents... are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers”—it also demonstrated that it was willing to apply American exceptionalism to justify the acquisition of lands outside the continental United States.¹⁸⁴ Thus, for the first half of the history of the United States, American exceptionalism served primarily as a rationalization and justification of the extension of the borders of the United States and its genocidal practices.

By the end of the First World War, however, American exceptionalism’s primary impact on U.S. foreign policy makers was to stoke their fears of an alternative model to American Liberalism undermining the so-called American way of life. Leaders in the United States, like those of many European countries, had perceived Communism as an inherent threat to order, stability, and the American way of life for decades before the Russian Revolution. However, the emergence of a large Communist nation in Europe triggered an anti-Communist movement in the United States far beyond the scope of previous repression, during which the U.S. government violently suppressed actual or suspected Communist sympathizers. This “Red Scare” peaked from 1919-1920, but this current of anti-Communism would carry on throughout the 1930s and throughout the Cold War. American domestic leaders responded so harshly to Communism because it was seen as a threat to the American way of life, which, as stipulated by the dogma of American exceptionalism, was Christian, capitalist, and freedom-loving. Communism, on the

¹⁸³ Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War* (Texas A&M University Press, 1998), pp. 243-244.

¹⁸⁴ James Monroe, “Message of President James Monroe at the commencement of the first session of the 18th Congress (The Monroe Doctrine), 12/02/1823,” Presidential Messages of the 18th Congress, ca. 12/02/1823-ca. 03/03/1825, Record Group 46, Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990, National Archives, Archives.gov.

other hand, was an atheistic, anti-materialist, equality-oriented ideology that contradicted the American creed.

This fear of an external model undermining American democracy was only exacerbated by fascism's rise in the 1930s, and the United States began to take even more serious steps towards repressing these alternative models to American Liberalism. Specifically, the House Un-American Activities Committee, formed in 1938, investigated fascist and Communist groups in the United States, using their authority to challenge what they saw as ideologies that "[attack] the form of government guaranteed by our Constitutions." This committee would subpoena and interrogate suspected insurgents and, if witnesses refused to name sympathizers, were held in contempt of Congress and arrested. Those who invoked the 5th Amendment were branded "5th Amendment Communists."¹⁸⁵ The fall of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II did little to soften this Crusade-like hunt for "un-American activities" like Communism. In fact, perhaps the most infamous anti-Communist of U.S. history, Senator Joseph S. McCarthy, waged a televised scorched-earth campaign against possible Communists from 1950-1954.¹⁸⁶ During this time, widespread fear of the Soviet Union facilitated anti-Communist pandemonium, aptly labeled "McCarthyism" after the soon-to-be disgraced senator. This widespread domestic fear that an alternative model could come to the United States was inextricably tied with the underlying belief that the American way of life was exceptional. U.S. leaders made sure to quash any challenges to that historic idea with great haste.

Throughout this time, the American exceptionalism had certainly guided U.S. foreign policy making, but the emergence of the Cold War marked the height of insecurity and fear that

¹⁸⁵ Paul Finkelman, *The Encyclopedia of American Civil Liberties: A - F, Index* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), pp. 780.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Patrick Doherty and Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 13.

Communism could threaten democracy and capitalism within the United States. This era is littered with public political statements and U.S. military endeavors which reflected the U.S. policy of containment. Enshrined in George Kennan's Long Telegram in 1946, the policy of containment had surprising continuity across several presidencies, and each administration acted in accordance with Kennan's articulation of the necessity of combating communism. To Kennan, the "[American] traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of [the United States] be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure."¹⁸⁷ Again, it is clear that Communism was seen as a threat to American values and, correspondingly, U.S. global hegemony.

The ensuing geopolitical struggle with the Soviet Union resulted in dozens of proxy conflicts across the globe. During this "Cold War," American exceptionalism guided the choices of U.S. foreign policy makers, leading them to see the defeat of Communism, an ideological threat, as synonymous with preserving U.S. hegemony. Accordingly, in these various proxy conflicts, the Soviet Union would assist Communist forces while the United States would assist anti-Communist forces. Korea, Germany, Greece, Iran, Vietnam, and Afghanistan are just a few of the countries in which the United States and Soviet Union intervened in regional conflicts in order to suppress or support Communism, respectively. It is important to note that in many of these conflicts that the United States did not always choose to support democratic forces. Despite the early proclamations of American exceptionalism that argued that the United States should spread American values throughout the world, the Cold War clarified the role American exceptionalism had in U.S. foreign policy. Specifically, the fear that an alternative model could

¹⁸⁷ "George Kennan's 'Long Telegram'," February 22, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives and Records Administration, Department of State Records (Record Group 59), Central Decimal File, 1945-1949, 861.00/2-2246; reprinted in US Department of State, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Volume VI, Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 696-709. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178>

undermine American Liberalism *within* the United States led U.S. foreign policy makers to ignore the anti-democratic practices of leaders they chose to support, so long as those leaders were anti-Communist. This is best highlighted by the conflict in Vietnam. Fearing that Vietnam's fall to Communism would have a "domino effect" and cause the rest of Southeast Asia to fall to Communism, the United States propped up the violently repressive—yet anti-Communist and Christian—Ngo Dinh Diem regime.¹⁸⁸ In this way, U.S. intervention in Vietnam highlights a crucial aspect of American exceptionalism, namely that protecting U.S. interests abroad and preserving the American way of life at home takes priority over spreading democracy across the globe.

Despite defeat in various conflicts in the Cold War, the Soviet Union would eventually collapse in the early 1990s. For American foreign policy leaders, this ostensibly successful struggle with Communism only vindicated American exceptionalism and, as President Ronald Reagan articulated, proved that the United States was "still...a shining city on a hill."¹⁸⁹ After the Cold War, it seemed to many as though there was no longer an alternative model which could legitimately challenge U.S. values or hegemony. In fact, some argued that the end of the Cold War had largely led to "the end of history" and global international conflict.¹⁹⁰ Conflict on a global scale was far from over, however, and the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001 ignited a fervent response from American foreign policy

¹⁸⁸ Jessica M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Cornell University Press, 2013), <https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:2846/book/24103>, pp. 119; Dwight Eisenhower, "Quotes of President Dwight D. Eisenhower," accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/features/eise/jrranger/quotes2.htm>.

¹⁸⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Election Eve Address "A Vision for America" (speech, Washington, DC, November 3, 1980), The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/election-eve-address-vision-for-america>

¹⁹⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Simon and Schuster, 2006).

makers. The very next day, President George W. Bush declared war on terrorism, effectively naming the newest existential threat to the American way of life in the 21st century.

Importantly, President Bush later clarified in his State of the Union address that the War on Terrorism was not merely a crusade against global terrorism. Instead, the war presented the United States “a great opportunity... to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace.” Here, President Bush uses the language of American exceptionalism to imply that by spreading “values that will bring lasting peace,” (i.e. American values), the United States was waging a just global war. Ultimately, terrorism—as the concept itself implies—stoked fear among U.S. policy makers that insurgent groups could use violent tactics to undermine U.S. hegemony and the American way of life. Accordingly, as put by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, that “when [the United States had] dealt with bin Laden and his network [it would] then broaden the campaign to go after other terrorists all around the world.”¹⁹¹ In this way, the war on terror marked a new chapter in American exceptionalism’s shaping of U.S. foreign policy making.

Today, American exceptionalism lives on in the rhetoric and foreign policy of U.S. political leaders. In fact, the rhetoric of President Donald J. Trump have revived American exceptionalism in its more original form by using direct and obvious racialized language and policies. For example, For example, President Trump has shown little hesitation to make unsavory, hateful comments about foreign, predominantly nonwhite nations, showing his rhetorical willingness to suggest that the United States is racially superior to other nations.¹⁹² Furthermore, President Trump’s travel ban on Muslim countries points out the strong religious

¹⁹¹ Guardian Staff, “War on Terrorism: Quotes of the Week,” The Guardian, September 23, 2001, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/23/september11.terrorism4>.

¹⁹² Ibram X. Kendi, “The Day Shithole Entered the Presidential Lexicon,” The Atlantic, January 13, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/01/shithole-countries/580054/>

impact American exceptionalism has on U.S. foreign policy.¹⁹³ While both of these cases may seem like exaggerated expressions of the understanding that the United States is/should be both white and Christian, President Trump's directness merely casts light on a long-standing component of American foreign policy making. In reality, American exceptionalism maintained its racial and religious connotation throughout the history of the United States, and President Trump's foreign policies are in line with this historic understanding of American exceptionalism.

Before concluding, it is important to note the very dichotomous way in which U.S. foreign policy makers depict the world to the American public. For instance, at the core of the Truman doctrine was the belief that "nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life." Similarly, after 9/11, President Bush laid out very clearly that "every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists."¹⁹⁴ These comments illustrate the ways in which President Truman and President Bush depicted the ideological threats to the American way of life as simply evil. Whether the Soviet Union's "Evil Empire" or Iran, Iraq, and North Korea's "Axis of Evil," U.S. presidents attempted to establish foreign challenges to American values as evil. This political crusade against challenges to American Liberalism are rooted in the historically constructed belief in American exceptionalism. Furthermore, in a speech in 2018, Vice President Mike Pence made it clear that China's alternative model to American Liberalism, market authoritarianism, and China's rise

¹⁹³ Zolan Kanno-Youngs, "Trump Administration Adds Six Countries to Travel Ban," *The New York Times*, January 31, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/31/us/politics/trump-travel-ban.html>.

¹⁹⁴ Wesley W. Widmaier, "Constructing Foreign Policy Crises: Interpretive Leadership in the Cold War and War on Terrorism," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2007): 779.

will not gain traction in the United States: “our message to China’s rulers is this... the American people will not be swayed.”¹⁹⁵

This history has detailed the ways in which U.S. foreign policy makers constructed the historic belief in American exceptionalism and how that belief has impacted foreign policy implementation for over two centuries. It is now clear that this historically constructed belief that America is exceptional generates a fear among U.S. foreign policy makers that an alternative model like Communism may threaten the American way of life—typically understood as democratic, capitalist, white, and Christian—and must therefore be defeated. Furthermore, this history has noted the hypocrisy of American exceptionalism, since it has simultaneously been used to promote equality, justify genocide, champion the spread of democracy, and support undemocratic governments across the world. In the end, the historically constructed belief in American exceptionalism has guided U.S. foreign policy makers to favor expansionism, containment, and unilateral counter terrorism efforts. Overall, American exceptionalism has pushed U.S. foreign policy towards conflict-oriented approaches. The case of China is no different. The following section continues this examination of the historically constructed belief in American exceptionalism’s impact on U.S. foreign policy towards China specifically.

The “Loss of China” Complex

As mentioned above, The United States lost various battles in its struggle against Communism during the Cold War. For each of these defeats, when Communist forces triumphed over U.S.-backed forces, a blow was dealt to American exceptionalism. The defeat in Vietnam

¹⁹⁵ Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China" (2018), The White House, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

was particularly troubling for U.S. foreign policy makers, and massive domestic rejections of the war in Vietnam only solidified the fear that failures abroad could undermine the American way of life at home. While Vietnam is perhaps the most well-known example of this increasing insecurity, the fall of China to Communist forces has particular importance to U.S. foreign policy makers in the context of the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. As a massive country with critical geopolitical significance, the Communist victory over the United States-backed Nationalists left a scar on the historically constructed idea of American exceptionalism. The resulting “Loss of China” complex constituted a reminder that America’s “exceptional” model was once beat out by another, alternative model.

Accordingly, U.S. foreign policy makers attempt to assuage their nation’s historically constructed failure, optimized in the “Loss of China” complex, by thwarting Chinese global expansion proving that China does not represent a viable alternative to American values. Indeed, even though Communism has been replaced by China’s new model—“market authoritarianism”—American foreign policy makers still attempt to balance China’s rise in order to alleviate this historic failure, quash an ostensible threat to the American creed, and defend American hegemony. This has led the United States to act aggressively within the evolving relationship with China and Latin America, specifically towards China’s military expansion into the South China Sea and the extension of the BRI into Latin America. Ultimately, as U.S. foreign policy makers attempt to balance China’s rise in these two regions, they increase the chances that the United States and China may clash. The following explores how the “Loss of China” complex leads U.S. foreign policy makers to make these conflict-oriented choices despite the potential for cooperation in this evolving relationship.

The South China Sea Crisis

Conflict between China and the United States is in no way an isolated incident, and there is a long antagonistic history between the two countries. Lin Biao, one of the Chinese Communist Party leaders during the 1960s, illustrated this antagonism well when he argued that international politics was characterized by a “fierce struggle between the people of the world on one side and U.S. imperialism and its lackeys on the other.”¹⁹⁶ The underlying belief in Lin Biao’s writing is imperialists, especially the United States, will always attempt to humiliate weaker states, which is indicative of the historically constructed memory of national humiliation in chapter two. As China approached the United States with skepticism, the United States, as mentioned above, viewed China’s fall to the Communists as an embarrassing defeat that undermined American exceptionalism and, accordingly, had to be undone. In this way, opposing historically constructed ideas made it appear as though these states would inevitably at odds with one another.

However, the era of “ping-pong” diplomacy and Nixon’s visit to China would cool this relationship, and the United States and China began to cooperate much more frequently despite these differences. Nevertheless, the United States remained the primary imperial antagonist in the eyes of the Chinese public, and anti-American sentiment remained strong throughout the 20th century.¹⁹⁷ This low opinion of the United States was only further degraded after the U.S. bombing of a Chinese embassy in Kosovo in 1999, which some Chinese officials believed was an intentional attack.¹⁹⁸ Today, although the rhetoric of Chinese leaders has comparatively

¹⁹⁶ Lin Biao, “Long Live the Victory of People’s War!,” accessed July 8, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/ch08.htm.

¹⁹⁷ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, vol. 3, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), pp 693-694.

¹⁹⁸ “Timeline: U.S. Relations With China 1949–2020,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>

cooled off in recent years, there is ample evidence to suggest that Chinese leaders still view the United States in this antagonistic lens, such as their actions in the South China Sea.

Yet in the context of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy makers were far more preoccupied with the Soviet Union. It was only in the years before the collapse of the Soviet Union that the United States began to view China as a primary antagonist. This distrust of the Chinese quickly became apparent after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. After the CCP violently murdered a unclear number of student protesters, the United States, along with numerous European powers, openly condemned the Deng regime for its action. This official condemnation was matched with public demonstrations, and massive protests criticizing the Chinese broke out within the United States. For instance, on June 4th, 1989, many students gathered in New York City and “raised Chinese flags that had been spray-painted with Nazi swastikas” to show their disgust with the Chinese regime’s actions.¹⁹⁹ American opinion of China was further degraded in 2001 after the Hainan Island Incident, in which a U.S. reconnaissance plane collided with a Chinese fighter. The pilot then was forced to make an emergency landing on the Hainan Island, where they were detained by Chinese officials. The Chinese government then held the crew members for weeks during negotiations with the United States, ultimately souring relations between diplomats and further upsetting the American public.²⁰⁰ Clearly, despite periods of cooperation, conflict is not a new aspect of Sino-American relations.

¹⁹⁹ Robert D. McFadden, “The West Condemns the Crackdown,” *The New York Times*, June 5, 1989, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/05/world/the-west-condemns-the-crackdown.html>

²⁰⁰ Craig S. Smith, “COLLISION WITH CHINA: THE CREW; U.S. Officials Meet With 24 Still Detained With Aircraft,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 2001, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/04/world/collision-with-china-crew-us-officials-meet-with-24-still-detained-with-aircraft.html>.

Within the context of this antagonistic conflict, China has attempted to expand into the South China Sea, and the United States has taken dramatic steps to reject Chinese claims to the South China Sea. As mentioned in chapter two, China has made aggressive moves in the South China Sea, even going as far as building artificial islands on coral reefs in the Spratly Islands. The United States, in turn, has taken a tough military stance. For example, in relation to sheer number of U.S. Navy ships the United States has in Asian waters, the Trump administration has increased the number of deployable U.S. ships from 273 to 287.²⁰¹ This increased military capacity has been matched with an increased military presence; the U.S. Navy has conducted no less than ten freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. This Naval escalation has been matched by increased air presence. Operating under the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), American warplanes, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and long-range bombers have been upgraded and reorganized to ensure improved reconnaissance performance and inter-aircraft communications.²⁰² Clearly, U.S. foreign policy makers have shown a willingness to flex U.S. military might in an attempt to balance China's expansion into the South China Sea.

As the United States has responded aggressively against China's actions in the South China Sea by increasing its military presence and capabilities in the region, U.S. foreign policy makers have simultaneously pushed for political pressure against China.²⁰³ For instance, the United States has strengthened ties with government of Australia, which has voiced concern over

²⁰¹ Robert Blackwill, *Trump's Foreign Policies Are Better Than They Seem* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

²⁰² Blackwill, *Trump's Foreign Policies Are Better Than They Seem*.

²⁰³ Hannah Beech, "China's Sea Control Is a Done Deal, 'Short of War With the U.S.'," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/asia/south-china-sea-navy.html>; John Kirby, "Statement by U.S. Department of State Spokesperson John Kirby on the Decision in the Philippines-China Arbitration," U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, July 12, 2016, <https://ph.usembassy.gov/statement-u-s-department-state-spokesperson-john-kirby-decision-philippines-china-arbitration/>.

China's aggressive behavior in recent decades. The two nations now routinely run joint-military exercises in the Pacific, marking the determination of the United States to build coalitions against China's rise.²⁰⁴ In addition, the United States has turned to external political institutions to delegitimize China. In 2019, the U.S. government supported the Hague's decision to reject China's "Nine-Dash Line" claim to the South China Sea. At the same time, U.S. foreign policy officially encouraged peaceful, diplomatic solutions to the crisis.²⁰⁵ This diplomatic pressure is crucial to note because complicates the U.S. response to the South China Sea crisis. Although the United States has greatly increased its military presence in the South China Sea and cultivated military alliances with nations like Australia, the United States has simultaneously attempted to pressure China to conform to international norms that are in line with core U.S. values.

The U.S. stance on China's entry into the World Trade Organization is a key example of this engagement strategy. Essentially, the United States has historically supported China's entry into existing institutions like the WTO, as President Clinton did in 2000. Specifically, President Clinton suggested that a deal allowing China into the WTO would "clearly increase the benefits of cooperation and the costs of confrontation."²⁰⁶ Even though the United States has since taken a harsher stance on issues related to China's involvement in the WTO, it has in no way seriously recommended China be excluded from the organization (although President Trump has recently challenged that institution's very existence).²⁰⁷ Instead, American foreign policy has encouraged Chinese reform so that it may actually elevate its status in that organization to a country with

²⁰⁴ Blackwill, *Trump's Foreign Policies Are Better Than They Seem*.

²⁰⁵ Ishaan Tharoor "Analysis | What the South China Sea Ruling Means for the World," *Washington Post*, accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/13/what-the-south-china-sea-ruling-means-for-the-world/>.

²⁰⁶ William J. Clinton, "Remarks on the House of Representatives Action on Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton, 2000-2001* (Best Books on, 2000), pp. 1018.

²⁰⁷ Ana Swanson, "Trump Cripples W.T.O. as Trade War Rages," *The New York Times*, December 8, 2019, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/08/business/trump-trade-war-wto.html>.

“market economy” privileges: “If China wishes for its producers’ or exporters’ prices or costs to be used in anti-dumping comparisons, it should complete its economic transition and ensure that market economy conditions prevail in its economy.”²⁰⁸ In this way, the United States has used both aggressive military buildup and diplomatic pressure to encourage China to relinquish territory in the South China Sea and, more importantly, reform in ways that coincide with U.S. values and reduce China’s commitment to market authoritarianism.

Whether military or diplomatic, the response of the United States to China’s rise and the South China Sea crisis is rooted in the “Loss of China” complex and American exceptionalism. This sentiment is captured perfectly by American Vice President Mike Pence’s speech in 2018 on the subject of China. Although Pence begins his speech focusing on all the positive relationships China and the United States have held over the centuries, he specifically changes tone at 1949. Indeed, he argues that “soon after it took power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party began to pursue authoritarian expansionism.” Consequently, China began to become less democratic and less worthy of America’s trust. He then urges that “under President Trump’s leadership, the United States of America has been defending our interests with renewed American strength” by “making the strongest military in the history of the world stronger still.” Here, the connection between the “Loss of China” and America’s military response is clear. Pence lays out the “good” history China had, focusing on how there was a strong hope that China would become democratic and not Communist, thereby validating American exceptionalism. In this way, Pence highlights the role that American exceptionalism and the “Loss of China”

²⁰⁸ “European Union – Measures Related to Price Comparison Methodologies (DS516) THIRD PARTY SUBMISSION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA” *Office of the United States Trade Representative*, November 21, 2017, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/enforcement/DS/US.3d.Pty.Su.pdf>; “China Loses Market-Economy Trade Case in Win for EU and U.S., Sources Say,” *Bloomberg*, April 18, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-18/china-is-said-to-lose-market-economy-trade-case-in-eu-u-s-win>.

complex play in the military response of the United States to China's rise and the South China Sea crisis.

At the same time, however, Vice President Pence identifies various ways in which the American government has pushed for democratic reforms in China. Similar to President Clinton's encouragement of Chinese economic reforms, Pence notes that the United States has repeatedly encouraged economic liberalization and democratic reform within China, effectively pushing China to step away from its market-authoritarian practices and towards American Liberalism.²⁰⁹ As with U.S. military balancing in the South China Sea, these gestures are ultimately rooted in the "Loss of China" complex, and U.S. officials like Vice President Pence try to push China towards democracy as a means to assuage the failure of 1949. Moreover, U.S. foreign policy makers use this encouragement as an attempt to thwart the alternative economic model that market authoritarianism represents, thereby highlighting the insecurity American exceptionalism creates. However, unlike the U.S. military response, this encouragement of reform within China suggests that U.S. foreign policy-makers can push to cooperate on democratization and liberalization rather than just attempt to prevent China's rise to power. Regardless, whether promoting military buildup or diplomatic pressure, American leaders still cling to the hope that China can be "won back" to the side of democracy. This hope influences U.S. foreign policy choices and marks the relationship between the "Loss of China" complex, American exceptionalism, and the U.S. response to the South China Sea crisis.

The Belt and Road Initiative and Latin America

²⁰⁹ Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China" (2018), The White House, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

Another important region of contention between China and the United States is Latin America, where American exceptionalism plays a vital role in the U.S. response to China's growing presence in Latin America. While this section will highlight the important ideas behind this response, the detailed response of the United States to the BRI specifically is reserved for the following chapter on Ecuador and Argentina. Nevertheless, from this brief analysis it is clear that the historically constructed belief in American exceptionalism impacts the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America.

As mentioned above, although officials in the United States profess a strong desire to spread democracy across the world, the fear created by American exceptionalism encourages U.S. foreign policy makers to prioritize keeping an alternative model away from the United States, even if that means promoting undemocratic regimes. Importantly, the closer that alternative model comes to the Western Hemisphere, or, worse yet, the United States itself, the stronger the response of officials. For instance, the United States has fought long battles against Communists in Cuba and Colombia in an attempt to keep Communism away from the United States. These unilateral actions are reminiscent of the Monroe Doctrine, and as China proceeds to increase investment in Latin American nations, the U.S. officials grow increasingly concerned that neighboring countries may turn towards market authoritarianism.

This alarm is best captured by U.S. foreign officials growing concern about surveillance systems built by Chinese companies for Latin American countries, such as in Ecuador. Since these surveillance systems show the potential for increasing authoritarian tendencies within Latin America and, correspondingly, the likelihood that market authoritarianism will gain traction in America's "backyard," U.S. officials have been open about rejecting these nations adopting a Chinese model of development. As former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson argued, "China's

state-led model of development is reminiscent of the past. It doesn't have to be this hemisphere's future."²¹⁰ Clearly, U.S. foreign policy makers do not want a foreign "model" to undermine American values within the Western Hemisphere. Regardless whether that model is Communism or market authoritarianism, American exceptionalism and the fear it creates drives U.S. foreign policy. Chapter four highlights this response in greater detail, focusing specifically on Ecuador and Argentina.

Conclusion

As shown here, China and the United States have great potential to collide due to the fact that China's determination to reverse its national humiliation challenges America's desire to preserve its exceptional role in the world. As noted in the beginning of the chapter, peaceful power transitions are historically rare. Nonetheless, peaceful shifts in global power have occurred. If China and the United States are to peacefully navigate the shift to a more equitable distribution of power, they must learn how to accommodate one another rather than working to create exclusive spheres of influence.

Whether this accommodation will occur is a popular debate among scholars, but it is important to note, as Allison's case studies demonstrate, war between China and the United States is not inevitable. However, Allison notes that conflict can only through the establishment of "a depth of mutual understanding not seen since the Henry Kissinger-Zhou Enlai conversations in the 1970s" and "radical changes in attitudes and actions, by leaders and publics alike, than anyone has yet imagined."²¹¹ Put another way, Allison sees a restructuring of ideas, among both leaders and the public, as essential for China and America to understand their

²¹⁰ "Latin America Should Not Rely on China: U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson." *Reuters*, February 1, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-diplomacy-latam-china-idUSKBN1FL6D5>.

²¹¹ Graham Allison, "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?"

interests in ways that lead to cooperation rather than conflict. This restructuring would certainly be arduous given, but, as this chapter has shown, more recent incidences—like the near collision of an American Navy ship and Chinese destroyer in the South China Sea—reveal that conflict, induced by accident or otherwise, remains a real possibility without some form of critical reflection from both China and the United States.²¹²

In fact, Henry Kissinger himself, the architect of decades of American foreign policy, agrees. Writing in his piece “The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, not a necessity,” Kissinger argues that “the U.S.-Chinese relationship should not be considered a zero-sum game, nor can the emergence of a prosperous and powerful China be assumed in itself to be an American strategic defeat.”²¹³ These conclusions wrongfully drive China and the United States towards a disastrous, avoidable conflict since they assume China’s role as an enemy rather than a partner. Instead, Kissinger recommends that China and the United States revision their relationship as a “Pacific Community” in order “to commit themselves to genuine cooperation and find a way to communicate and relate their visions to each other and the world.”²¹⁴

Currently, each nation’s historically constructed ideas—national humiliation and American exceptionalism—drive their leaders’ interpretation of how best to achieve the military and economic interests of the nation. Although neither of these historically constructed ideas lend themselves towards cooperation, China and the United States must learn how to accommodate one another rather than working to create exclusive spheres of influence in order to avoid conflict. Not only is this critical in the South China Sea, it is also vitally important in

²¹² *US Navy Ship, Chinese Destroyer Nearly Collide in South China Sea - CNN Video*, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2018/10/04/us-navy-china-destroyers-south-china-sea-confrontation-walker-pkg-vpx.cnn>.

²¹³ Henry A. Kissinger, “The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations: Conflict Is a Choice, Not a Necessity,” *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2012): pp. 50-52.

²¹⁴ Henry A. Kissinger, “The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations: Conflict Is a Choice, Not a Necessity,” pp. 50-52.

other parts of the world. Therefore, this research turns to Latin America, where the United States has enjoyed hegemonic influence yet China's influence has grown. By doing so, the following chapter expands this analysis to include the role of socially and historically constructed ideas and interests on the foreign policies of Ecuador and Argentina, showing how these shape each country's relations with the United States and China.

Chapter 4. Latin America's Struggle: Finding Autonomy Between Scylla and Charybdis

As mentioned in the introduction, metaphors and historical analogies distort our understanding of global history and are predicated on some unbalanced form of pessimism or optimism. For Latin American states specifically, when put in the context of the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America, these comparisons are often rooted in pessimism.²¹⁵ This is unsurprising for a few reasons.

First, Latin American states' long history under European colonialism and American imperialism defines their modern struggle for autonomy.²¹⁶ Centuries of European and American domination have led to stunted political development within Latin America. Although this foreign meddling has never completely dictated the outcome of political events in Latin America, influence from countries like the United States and the United Kingdom has had a significant impact on domestic politics. Even today, as meddling from American intervention has comparatively decreased in the 21st century, there are still ample examples of the United States

²¹⁵ Alfredo Toro Hardy, and World Scientific (Firm), *The World Turned Upside Down,: The Complex Partnership Between China And Latin America*, Series on Contemporary China, (Singapore: World Scientific, 2013), pp. Xxiii-xxiv; Kevin Gallagher and Roberto Porzecanski, *The Dragon in the Room: China and the Future of Latin American Industrialization*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010), <https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:2201/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=344008&site=ehost-live>, pp. 2, 6-10; Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Latin Leap Forward," *World Policy Journal* 23, no. 3 (2006): 33+. Gale Academic OneFile (accessed March 25, 2020).

<https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:2266/apps/doc/A155751153/AONE?u=coll33478&sid=AONE&xid=a2e7054b>.

²¹⁶ Indeed, the very language we use to describe this region of the world carries this legacy. "Latin," for instance, obviously derives from the languages of European colonizers. Thus, referring to this region as "Latin" perpetuates the legacy of colonialism by linguistically subordinating the presence of indigenous, African, and Asian cultures (among others) to that of European-derivative cultures. "America" is also problematic since it supports the myth that these lands were "discovered" by Europeans (Amerigo Vespucci, specifically) rather than recognizing the extensive history of indigenous peoples prior to colonization. Ultimately, the language we use to describe this region of the world is insufficient and problematic. While it is beyond the scope of this research to address this dilemma and, consequently, these terms must remain for communication's sake, at the minimum it is essential to address the problematic language we still use to describe the world. Germán Arciniegas, *Why America?: 500 Years of a Name : The Life and Times of Amerigo Vespucci*, (Villegas Asociados, 2002); Hardy, *The World Turned Upside Down, The: The Complex Partnership Between China And Latin America*, pp. 120-124; Louise I. Gerdes, *Latin America: Opposing Viewpoints* (Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2009), pp. 14-17.

intervening in the domestic politics of Latin American countries. Because of this historic legacy of external intervention, prospects for the development of Latin America's political autonomy would seem to be bleak.²¹⁷

Second, as a consequence of this historic and ongoing subjugation, persistent economic exploitation has likewise crippled Latin American economies, forcing many Latin American states to rely on external bodies like the IMF for loans and bailouts, therefore also forcing them to adopt the guidelines for economic restructuring mandated by these external actors. Although the 1980s and 1990s saw some short-term success from some of these reforms, few Latin American economies have seen many long-lasting benefits from economic restructuring in accordance with the Washington Consensus. This inability to redefine Latin American global economic relations stems from persistent structural barriers to autonomous economic development within most Latin American economies. As of 2016, the IMF has characterized some of these barriers as “(i) shortcomings in the quality of education; (ii) low export diversity and complexity; (iii) lower commodity prices for commodity exporters; and (iv) inadequate infrastructure.”²¹⁸ Infrastructure, in particular, continues to serve as a structural deficit that restrains Latin America's growth, despite recent improvements.²¹⁹ Because of this history of

²¹⁷ For example, Michael M. Hutchison and Ilan Noy, “Macroeconomic Effects of IMF-Sponsored Programs in Latin America: Output Costs, Program Recidivism and the Vicious Cycle of Failed Stabilizations,” *Journal of International Money and Finance*, Regional and International Implications of the Financial Instability in Latin America, 22, no. 7 (December 1, 2003): 991–1014, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jimonfin.2003.09.007>.

²¹⁸ Sergi Lanau, *The Growth Return of Infrastructure in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND, 2017), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1487674&site=ehost-live>.

²¹⁹ Marianne Fay, et. al., “Rethinking Infrastructure in Latin America and the Caribbean: Spending Better to Achieve More,” *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, The World Bank, 2017, pp. 43.

economic exploitation and persistent structural hurdles, assessments of the future of Latin America's economic growth are often dismal.²²⁰

Third, and most relevant for this research, Latin America appears to many analysts to have limited options for financial and political relief. Some Latin American states have relied on international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank for decades, while others have gone right to creditors like the United States. Although those options have been expanded by China's introduction of BRI funding into Latin America, the general skepticism that surrounds China's BRI likewise drives pessimistic evaluations of Latin America's future.²²¹

For all these reasons, it is, again, unsurprising that many assessments of Latin America's future are pessimistic. Indeed, although not a specifically employed analogy, it is useful to characterize the way most scholars understand Latin America with an equally limited metaphor: Scylla and Charybdis. To the many scholars describing Latin America's geopolitical position, the dilemma seems relatively clear. Latin America is caught between China and the United States much the same way Odysseus was caught between Scylla and Charybdis. As Latin America attempts to develop politically and economically, it can either chart the familiar route by sticking with the United States and making significant but predictable sacrifices (Scylla), or it can chart a new, unknown course with greater risks and rewards by siding with China (Charybdis).²²²

²²⁰ Hutchison, "Macroeconomic Effects of IMF-Sponsored Programs in Latin America: Output Costs, Program Recidivism and the Vicious Cycle of Failed Stabilizations,"; Peter Kingstone, *The Political Economy of Latin America: Reflections on Neoliberalism and Development after the Commodity Boom* (Routledge, 2018), Chapter 1.

²²¹ Wang Huiyao "China's Belt and Road Plan Needs to Be Redefined," *South China Morning Post*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/3008513/chinas-belt-and-road-plan-has-branding-problem-and-needs-be>.

²²² For instance, Peter Hakim, "Is Washington Losing Latin America?," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 1 (2006): 39–53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20031841>; and Max Nathanson, "How to Respond to Chinese Investment in Latin America," *Foreign Policy* (blog), November 11, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/28/how-to-respond-to-chinese-investment-in-latin-america/>.

These scholars, however, allow a seemingly dichotomous, desperate situation to distort their analyses. It is absurd to imagine Latin American states' *only* option is to choose between China and the United States and Washington Consensus institutions. Indeed, Eduardo Galeano, a renowned Uruguayan journalist, historian, and political activist, provided a clear answer to whether Latin America only must choose between exploitative powers at a democracy rally in Chile in 1988: "We Say No." For Galeano, "the powerful opinion-makers treat [Latin Americans] as though [they] do not exist, or as though [they] are silly shadows," but Latin American states have real agency beyond accepting exploitation by the United States or China.²²³

Conceivably, Latin American states can achieve self-determination, the ability to exercise political and economic autonomy without external compulsion, by pursuing a third way.²²⁴ This option has deep historical precedents from the movement for Latin American independence, symbolized by Simón Bolívar, to the protests of authors and activists like Eduardo Galeano. Thus, although existing structural hurdles limit the choices available to Latin American states, history suggests that Latin American states are not limited to choosing between the lesser of two evils and that there may be a more optimistic way to interpret their dilemma. In fact, as this research demonstrates, it is possible for Latin American states to take advantage of the ongoing competition between China and the United States through the BRI and create a third way.

To illustrate this point, this research analyzes two Latin American states' interaction with the Belt and Road Initiative, namely Ecuador and Argentina. In recent decades, both of these states have looked to China for markets and investment, hoping to improve economic growth,

²²³ Eduardo Hughes Galeano, *We Say No: Chronicles 1963-1991* (New York, NY: Norton, 1992), pp. 242.

²²⁴ Although the phrase "third way" is often associated with an alternative to Capitalism and Communism, "third way" is used in this research merely to mean an alternative to choosing between domination/exploitation under China or the United States. Basically, the political ideology of that alternative is not considered here as important as whether that alternative helps Latin American states achieve greater autonomy.

build infrastructure, and gain access to China's burgeoning market. Both countries have also been part of the so-called pink tide in Latin America, which was a turn toward left-wing governments in Latin America in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These governments rejected neoliberal economics, criticized the United States and Washington Consensus institutions, and in some cases, called upon indigenous traditions as a form of national pride.²²⁵ In addition, both countries experienced a return to more conservative governments that were more supportive of the United States and liberal economic policies shortly after.

Yet despite these similarities, these countries' relations with China have differed in terms elevating autonomy and improving the economy. For Ecuador, the turn towards China has only resulted in further exploitation, not greater autonomy. Under the leftist government of Rafael Correa (2007-2017), Ecuador sought to diversify its economy, turning to China to cultivate Ecuador's access to natural resources like minerals, petroleum, and hydropower. While Ecuador has attracted considerable Chinese investment, that investment did not diversify Ecuador's economy or resolve key issues like inconsistent energy access in rural communities. In fact, this turn to China has contributed to Ecuador's huge debt and created a new dependency on Chinese loans. Overall, critics have argued that Chinese-financed projects have brought more damage than development. This damage led Correa's successor, Lenín Moreno, to turn back to the IMF for economic assistance. Thus, despite widespread criticism of the neoliberal economic policies championed by the United States and international financial institutions, U.S. economic influence remained significant and under the current administration of Lenín Moreno.

Throughout this time, Ecuadorian leaders, to a limited extent, pursued a third way as an

²²⁵ Benedicte Bull, "Social Movements and the 'Pink Tide' Governments in Latin America: Transformation, Inclusion and Rejection," in *Democratization in the Global South: The Importance of Transformative Politics*, ed. Kristian Stokke and Olle Törnquist, International Political Economy (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 75–99, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230370043_4, pp. 90-93.

alternative to Chinese and U.S. financing by attempting to strengthen regional alliances with like-minded Latin American countries. However, as Ecuador struggled to navigate this evolving relationship, it became far more difficult for the state's leaders to commit to these alternatives, leaving Ecuador's attempt at finding autonomy via a third way largely unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, Argentina seems to be at a point in which it may benefit from the BRI. Argentina is a larger and wealthier country than Ecuador, with a more diversified economy. In 2017, Argentina's GDP based on purchasing power parity was estimated at \$911.5 billion. With a population of 52.8 million, this translated into GDP per capita of \$20,700. In contrast, Ecuador, with a population of 17.6 million, had a GDP estimated at \$188.5 billion and GDP per capita of \$11,200.²²⁶ This is not to say Argentina's economy is strong or stable, however. Although Argentina was one of the world's wealthiest countries 100 years ago, it has been plagued by recurring economic crises, high inflation, and mounting external debt. The worst of these crises came in 2001, when runaway inflation and unemployment crashed the economy, leading the government to default on its foreign debt. The economy rebounded over the next several years under President Néstor Kirchner's (2003-2007) expansionary fiscal and monetary policies. Years later during the administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), this growth, combined with a decline in exports, generated rising inflation, leading the government to expand state intervention in the economy and to seek increased trade and investment with China.

Similar to Ecuador, this growing interconnectedness brought BRI infrastructure investments, but, of the various BRI projects within Argentina, none have had the catastrophic consequences that they had in Ecuador. In fact, many of these projects may actually prove to

²²⁶ "Ecuador | Economic Indicators | Moody's Analytics," accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.economy.com/ecuador/indicators>; "Argentina | Economic Indicators | Moody's Analytics," accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.economy.com/argentina/indicators>.

bolster the nation's economy. The subsequent return to more conservative economic policy under the government of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) initially made it seem as though Argentina would be turning away from China. However, Argentina has continued to seek deeper economic ties with China, demonstrating that the government still sees China as a critical partner and investor. With this more positive relationship, Argentina has had more success in pursuing a third way through Mercosur, a common market organization in South America. While Mercosur has its own troubles, Argentina's continued commitment to the institutions reflects the viability of Argentina's pursuit of autonomy via an alternative to Chinese and U.S. influence.

Regardless of the case, like China and the United States, the choices Latin American states make are guided by their historically-constructed ideas and interests, namely the legacy of colonialism, American imperialism, and a desire for autonomy. This research highlights both the limits and the potential for Latin American autonomy by focusing on the ways in which Ecuador and Argentina have sought to enhance autonomous growth by turning to China. Although Ecuador's experience suggests that the BRI can severely limit autonomous growth, the Argentine case illustrates how the BRI could present Latin America with a real opportunity to develop mutually beneficial economic relations with China, thereby enabling Latin American states to pursue alternative sources of economic growth and autonomy. The key difference between these cases is the extent to which each state provided oversight over BRI projects. In Ecuador, high levels of corruption and desperate financial needs led to under-regulated, slipshod projects that ultimately plunged Ecuador further into debt and generated greater foreign dependency. In Argentina, complex domestic political barriers and strong anti-Chinese sentiment (or Sinophobia) led the government to apply greater scrutiny to each project, resulting in less

calamitous outcomes and greater autonomy. Nevertheless, in both cases, Ecuador and Argentina continue to struggle to preserve/increase autonomy while navigating this evolving relationship.

The Struggle for Autonomy

Before approaching each case study individually, it is essential to cover their shared history as Latin American states. Specifically, Ecuador and Argentina have had their core understanding of their role in geopolitics dramatically shaped by the history of American imperialism. Right as most Latin American states finally began to gain independence from European imperial powers in the 19th century, the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine signaled that the United States was determined to prevent European powers from dominating the hemisphere “the American continents... are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”²²⁷ President Theodore Roosevelt’s Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine formalized America’s self-proclaimed right to intervene in Latin American nations to preserve order and protect property rights, effectively solidifying American dominance over the Western Hemisphere.²²⁸ In the decades that followed, whether through the establishment of banana republics, supporting the infamous Condor Plan, or, most recently, waging modern drug wars, the United States has frequently infringed upon Latin American states’ autonomy.

This historic infringement has led many (but not all) Latin American states and leaders to attempt to escape or at least diminish American influence in recent decades. For example, some Latin American states have turned to China’s BRI as an alternative avenue to alleviating economic duress. In fact, although not all of China’s investments are officially listed under the

²²⁷ James Monroe, “Message of President James Monroe at the commencement of the first session of the 18th Congress (The Monroe Doctrine), 12/02/1823,” Presidential Messages of the 18th Congress, ca. 12/02/1823-ca. 03/03/1825, Record Group 46, Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990, National Archives, Archives.gov.

²²⁸ Interestingly, this same document was meant to provide rationale for America’s “Open-door Policy” in China. Theodore Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress for 1904”, House Records HR 58A-K2, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, Center for Legislative Archives, National Archives, Archives.gov.

BRI, as of 2016, Latin America was the number one recipient of China's outward foreign direct investment in the world.²²⁹ This staggering amount of investment has been encouraged by Latin American leaders and often manifests in massive infrastructure projects, often related to energy. Some stand out energy projects funded mainly by the Chinese government include the Coca Codo Sinclair Dam in Ecuador and two nuclear power plants in Argentina (one in Patagonia and one in Córdoba), and the Pimental dam at Belo Monte, Brazil. Latin American states have turned to China for more than energy assistance, however, and Chinese investment has contributed to expansions of the Panama Canal, the establishment of a complex surveillance network in Ecuador, and the development of a space station in Argentina's Patagonia, to name a few. While other projects have tapered off or become suspended indefinitely like the Mexico City–Querétaro High-Speed Railway or the Nicaragua Canal, Latin American states have increasingly turned towards China for trade, loans, and investments, raising concerns among some U.S. officials that China is turning Latin America away from the United States.

Nevertheless, Latin American states have far from severed ties with the United States. Indeed, some leaders have actually doubled down on their commitments to international financial institutions and the Washington consensus. Argentina's President Macri, for example, turned to the IMF once again for a massive bail out from the IMF in 2019 in a last ditch attempt to salvage the crashing Argentina peso and recessed economy.²³⁰ Meanwhile, Ecuador's President Lenín Moreno met with Vice President Mike Pence in 2019 to discuss growing ties between the two countries, including the transfer of military technology, the extradition of

²²⁹ Weidong Liu and Michael Dunford, "Inclusive Globalization: Unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Area Development and Policy* 1, no. 3 (November 3, 2016): 323–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598>, pp. 7.

²³⁰ Carolina Millan and Patrick Gillespie, "With \$56 Billion Loan in Danger, IMF Officials Fly to Argentina," *Bloomberg*, August 26, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-26/with-56-billion-loan-in-danger-imf-officials-fly-to-argentina>.

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, and affirm his “commitment to refresh the relationship between Ecuador and the United States,” which had soured during the term of his predecessor, Rafael Correa.²³¹ Overall, although Latin American states have increased ties with China in the past decades, their economic and diplomatic relations with the United States remain firm.

Not all Latin American policies, however, only take the side of China or the United States. Indeed, some of these nations have pursued a third way, seeking to affirm Latin American autonomy and self-determination through regional blocs. As each of the case studies contained within this research show, Latin American states supplement their cooperation with the United States and China with the creation of regional institutions that seek to enhance their own autonomy, namely the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP), a regional bloc of countries that was created to resist U.S. domination and promote radical revolutionary processes, the Pacific Alliance, and the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), which was created with the hope of establishing common external tariffs and the free movement of goods, services, currency, and people among member states. Although the legacies of these organizations are complicated, their historic origins reflect the deep-seated ideas their founders have about Latin America’s role in the world. More often than not, these ideas are entrenched in attempts to reject American imperialism, to exploit the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America, and, ultimately, to champion Latin American autonomy.

Accordingly, the following sections explore the extent to which the Republic of Ecuador and the Argentine Republic align themselves with China, the United States, or some alternative

²³¹ Mike Pence and Lenín Moreno, "Remarks by Vice President Pence and President Lenin Moreno of the Republic Of Ecuador in Joint Press Statements" (speech, Quito Ecuador, June 28, 2018), White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-president-lenin-moreno-republic-ecuador-joint-press-statements/>

third way. Regardless of each state's balancing of these alignments, each choice is informed by the leaders of that state's understanding of how to best achieve greater autonomy. However, Argentina has seen far more success in this respect than Ecuador. Again, the key difference here is the extent to which each state provided oversight over BRI projects. In Ecuador, high levels of corruption and desperate financial needs led to haphazard BRI projects that ultimately increased Ecuador's debt and generated greater foreign dependency. In Argentina, domestic political barriers and Sinophobia led the government to apply greater scrutiny to each project, leading to higher quality BRI projects and Argentina's increased ability to participate in regional institutions. Both Ecuador and Argentina continue to struggle to increase their autonomy while navigating this evolving relationship. By analyzing the differences in how each state interacts with the BRI, it becomes clear that heightened levels of domestic scrutiny, for whatever reason, allow Latin American states to benefit more from this evolving relationship.

The Republic of Ecuador

Ecuador is an important example of the challenges that the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America can present a state. Various aspects of Ecuador's history and modern politics have prevented it from achieving its desired autonomy, but foreign debt and corruption are by far Ecuador's greatest hurdles. The following explores the history of Ecuador before the BRI in order to introduce its historically constructed desire for autonomy and some hurdles it faces as it navigates this evolving relationship. Then, this research highlights the ways in which Ecuador has turned to China, the United States, and the ALBA-TCP in an attempt to obtain greater autonomy. Ultimately, Ecuador's high levels of corruption and desperate financial needs have made it difficult for the nation to pursue a third-way and reduce dependence on foreign countries and corporations, and their corresponding international financial institutions

and multinational corporations. Ecuador's autonomous development has also been compromised by the government's neglect of indigenous peoples and social movements, whose concerns over foreign investment and loans have often gone unheeded.

Ecuador before the BRI

Like its South American neighbors, Ecuador has long struggled to establish stable political and economic infrastructure. Politically, 20th century Ecuador was governed mostly by *caudillos*, or strong-men. These semi-authoritarian leaders held precarious positions of power, despite their strong labels. In fact, none served for more than four years, a complete presidential term, between 1924 and 1972.²³² Because of this political instability, Ecuador failed to develop strong political institutions capable of establishing order and promoting general prosperity. This allowed for high levels of corruption, the exclusion of the general population from political affairs, and decades of economic exploitation from American companies like the United Fruit Company. This political instability culminated in two military dictatorships between 1972 and 1979, which held divergent legacies in respect to pushing for the cultivation of Ecuador's autonomy.

The first military junta was led by General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara, whose government boldly claimed its nationalist character and championed economic modernization.²³³ In fact, during Lara's years in power, the military government implemented mildly progressive reforms like the regulation of foreign capital and limited agrarian redistribution. As a result of this nationalist push and increase in regulation, Ecuador experienced a significant increase in

²³² Peter Pyne, "Presidential Caesarism in Latin America: Myth or Reality? A Case Study of the Ecuadorian Executive during the Presidency of José María Velasco Ibarra, 1960-1961," *Comparative Politics* 9, no. 3 (1977): 281-304, Accessed March 27, 2020. doi:10.2307/421320, pp. 282.

²³³ Anita Isaacs, *Military Rule and Transition in Ecuador, 1972-92* (Springer, 2016), pp. 55.

domestic manufacturing between 1972 and 1975.²³⁴ The increase of an industrial base in Ecuador is important to note because, as discussed below, Ecuador has spent most of its economic history as an exporter of primary goods. In this way, Ecuador began to move towards a political economy less dependent on purchasing finished products from the United States and more towards establishing an industrial base to supplement its agricultural trade and growing petroleum industry. Importantly, however, marginal gains in economic freedom did not equate to the expansion of personal freedoms among the populations, and Lara's regime was politically repressive and excluded most of the public from participating in the decision-making process of elites.²³⁵

Meanwhile, in contrast with these nationalist tendencies, the second military dictatorship in Ecuador, led by a triumvirate of leaders of Ecuador's military branches, was more conservative in nature. In fact, rather than focusing on Ecuador's national pride and moving towards independence from the U.S. sphere of influence, they participated in the CIA backed Operation Condor. Essentially, Ecuador turned towards the United States for clandestine support.²³⁶ Operation Condor was "a secret intelligence and operations system" in South America that served as "a secret component of a larger, U.S.-led counterinsurgency strategy." Organized under Operation Condor, Ecuadorian military personnel "seized, tortured, and executed" supposed political dissidents.²³⁷ Although this second military government came

²³⁴ Catherine M. Conaghan and Rosario Espinal, "Unlikely Transitions to Uncertain Regimes? Democracy without Compromise in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 22, no. 3 (1990): 560–61.

²³⁵ Conaghan, "Unlikely Transitions to Uncertain Regimes? Democracy without Compromise in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador," 560.

²³⁶ Once a debated subject, the CIA's recent declassification of various Operation Condor documents confirmed Ecuador's participation. For one of many examples, see U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "ECUADOR PARTICIPATION IN OPERATION CONDOR - A COUNTERTERRORIST ORGANIZATION CO.," declassified June 11, 1999 (Original date redacted). https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000345205.pdf

²³⁷ J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), pp. 1. <https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:2201/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=246988&site=ehost-live>.

peacefully to an end in 1979 with the massive, million vote election of Jaime Roldós Aguilera, the suspicious circumstances of Roldós death in a plane crash two years later and subsequent personal testimonies have led some scholars to believe that the CIA continued to meddle in Ecuador's politics after the military dictatorship.²³⁸

In this way, Ecuador's government emerged from an era of *caudillos* and dictatorships into one of democracy. However, Ecuador's transition to a constitutional democracy has been far from perfect, and challenges to the government's authority in recent decades have highlighted the fragility of Ecuador's constitutional regime.²³⁹ Moreover, major problems continue to plague the Ecuadorian government to this day, most notably corruption and human rights challenges, weak institutions, and disregard for local and indigenous rights. President Moreno's declaration of a national state of emergency in October 2019 further marked the extent of the government's lack of control. Military personnel and police units applied deadly force in response to urban and rural workers challenging Moreno's reduction of fuel subsidies in mass protests.²⁴⁰ Even more recently, as of April 2020, Ecuador's former President Correa has been formally charged with corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison, further polarizing a divided political system.²⁴¹ With such an unstable political history, Ecuadorian leaders struggle to navigate the politically complex pressures of the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin

²³⁸ The Associated Press, "Ecuadorian Leader Dies in Plane Crash," *The New York Times*, May 25, 1981, sec. Obituaries, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/25/obituaries/ecuadoran-leader-dies-in-plane-crash.html>; Jaime Galarza Zavala, *Quiénes mataron a Roldós* (Ediciones Soliterra, 1981); John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (New York: Plume, 2005).

²³⁹ There has been one other coup in 2000, but it was (technically) unsuccessful. Larry Rohter, "Ecuador Coup Shifts Control To No. 2 Man," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2000, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/23/world/ecuador-coup-shifts-control-to-no-2-man.html>.

²⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Ecuador," Human Rights Watch, December 6, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/ecuador>.

²⁴¹ José María León Cabrera, "Ecuador's Former President Convicted on Corruption Charges," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/world/americas/ecuador-correa-corruption-verdict.html>.

America. Corruption, especially, has complicated Ecuador's negotiations with China, as discussed below.

Turning to Ecuador's economic history, Ecuador's economic development has likewise been stunted by years of instability. For instance, Ecuador has struggled under the weight of foreign debt for about a century. This debt has been distributed between the United States, European nations, and the IMF, exacting a significant toll on Ecuador's economy and society. As an illustration of just how large Ecuador's debt was in comparison to its economic production, in 2000, Ecuador's debt was equivalent to a staggering 70 percent of the nation's GDP. The debt decreased as a percentage of GDP over the next several years, declining to 28.5% in 2007. Nonetheless, "in 2007, the Ecuadorian government paid \$1.75 billion in debt service, more than it spent on health care, social services, the environment, and housing and urban development combined."²⁴² This means that much of the wealth spent on financing Ecuador's debt could have been spent on public goods or economic modernization. Having campaigned on a populist platform of fighting poverty rather than paying the country's external debt, President Rafael Correa took the bold step of declaring most of the nation's remaining debt "odious"—an illegitimate debt accrued by a previous, typically dictatorial and highly corrupt government—and stopped payment on Ecuador's foreign debt, even though it had sufficient reserves to meet its debt obligations. As a consequence, Ecuador's credit rating was downgraded, making it difficult for the government and Ecuadorian companies to get credit from Western banks and institutions.

²⁴² Sarah Anderson and Neil Watkins, "Ecuador's Debt Default: Exposing a Gap in the Global Financial Architecture," *Institute for Policy Studies*, December 15, 2008, https://ips-dc.org/ecuadors_debt_default_exposing_a_gap_in_the_global_financial_architecture/.

With these observations in mind, the legacy of foreign debt and its pressure on the Ecuadorian economy is clear.²⁴³

Debt is not the only structural issue facing Ecuador's economy; single commodity dependency has similarly plagued Ecuador's history. A few decades after the introduction of the United Fruit Company into Ecuador, for instance, bananas became the major export of the country. Indeed, by the 1950s, Ecuador was the largest banana exporter in the world. Despite this burgeoning agribusiness's dominance over Ecuador's economy, most of the population did not get to partake in the material wealth created by banana exports, exacerbating inequality while maintaining Ecuador's dependency on an American company. As the United Fruit Company refocused its production into Central America in the mid-1960s, Ecuador struggled to diversify its economy away from single export dependency.²⁴⁴ In fact, it never did. Beginning in the 1970s in accordance with the oil boom, Ecuador came to rely heavily on its petroleum exports to modernize its economy.²⁴⁵ Despite Ecuador's temporary membership in OPEC and limited prosperity, the nation's subsequent dependency on oil created economic vulnerability. In fact, Ecuador's economy has regularly plunged into recession when global oil prices have fallen and when natural disasters such as earthquakes and flooding have disrupted production.

Today, Ecuador continues to rely on oil as its main export and debt continues to plague the Ecuadorian economy. When combined with Ecuador's political instability, it is difficult to see Ecuador in a strong position to negotiate favorable trade and investment terms with China

²⁴³ Arturo C. Porzecanski, "When Bad Things Happen to Good Sovereign Debt Contracts: The Case of Ecuador," *73 Law and Contemporary Problems* 251-271 (Fall 2010), Available at: <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/lcp/vol73/iss4/17>, pp. 3-4.

²⁴⁴ Steve Striffler, *In the Shadows of State and Capital: The United Fruit Company, Popular Struggle, and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900-1995* (Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 2002), <http://archive.org/details/inshadowsofstate01stri>, pp. 116-117.

²⁴⁵ Allen Gerlach, *Indians, Oil, and Politics: A Recent History of Ecuador* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), pp. 40.

and the United States. Nevertheless, the geopolitical competition between these two powers has created unique opportunities for Ecuadorian leaders to address persistent economic and political concerns, even if those are not necessarily the nation's central issues.

Ecuador and China

Ecuador's relationship with China is relatively new. The nations established diplomatic relations in 1980 under Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping. However, significant economic relations did not start until decades later. Since these economic relations were restricted to a small group of elites, it is more appropriate to mark 2008 as a key turning point in economic relations between Ecuador and China. Because of Ecuador's aforementioned sovereign defaults during the 2008 financial crisis, Ecuador was internationally branded as a high-risk debtor, so few investors in the world were looking to continue financing projects and development in Ecuador. China, however, was the exception. In fact, by 2011, "China's loans to Ecuador exceed[ed] \$6 billion," which is a massive investment considering the size of Ecuador's economy.²⁴⁶ Much of this money went towards petroleum extraction and telecommunications infrastructure. The most notable of these investments, however, went towards the Coca Codo Sinclair Dam, informally a part of China's BRI.²⁴⁷

Located in the Eastern Andes in proximity to the Reventador Volcano, the Coca Codo Sinclair Dam is a massive hydroelectric project intended to "supply about 75% of the country's energy needs."²⁴⁸ After President Correa briefly suspended negotiations surrounding the dam's construction in 2007, plans quickly resumed and, by November 2016, the dam had been built.

²⁴⁶ Although these investments were not technically considered under the BRI, after 2013, most of these projects can be included under the BRI's loose parameters. Felix Salmon, "How Ecuador Sold Itself to China," *Reuters*, 5 July 2011, <http://blogs.reuters.com/felixsalmon/2011/07/05/how-ecuador-sold-itself-to-china/>.

²⁴⁷ R. Evan Ellis, "Ecuador's Leveraging of China to Pursue an Alternative Political and Development Path," *AIR & SPACE POWER JOURNAL*, 26, 2018, pp. 3.

²⁴⁸ Salmon, "How Ecuador Sold Itself to China."

Ecuador began the construction of this massive undertaking with hopes that hydroelectricity would produce cleaner, cheaper energy and bolster the nation's economy. In addition, by reducing the domestic demand for petroleum, Ecuador would be increasing the amount of petroleum it would be able to sell internationally.²⁴⁹ In accordance with Ecuador's general shift towards China and the reluctance of the rest of the international community to loan money to Ecuador, the funds for this project came exclusively from China's Export-Import Bank in the form of a nearly \$1.7 billion loan.²⁵⁰

However, by 2018, it became clear that the dam had created more problems than it had solved. For starters, the dam underperformed in energy output immensely. When compared to original projections, which set the dam's regular production at 1500 megawatts, the dam operates at half capacity. This underproduction stems from a variety of issues. For starters, Sinohydro, a large Chinese state-owned hydropower engineering and construction company, had a complete monopoly over the dam's construction. This not only meant that the production of the dam would create fewer jobs in Ecuador, it also meant that the dam depended on the safety and quality standards of Sinohydro, which were low. For instance, by 2018, over 7000 cracks had formed in the dam's equipment and infrastructure, resulting in hazardous working conditions and underproduction. Furthermore, despite warnings from independent environmental experts, the Ecuadorian government built the dam on a water supply which had not been studied for nearly 30 years. Consequently, government officials were unprepared for the massive build-up of silt that began to quickly clog the dam during and after production.²⁵¹ These ongoing troubles are

²⁴⁹ "Ecuador | International Hydropower Association," accessed April 5, 2020, <https://www.hydropower.org/country-profiles/ecuador>.

²⁵⁰ Nicholas Casey and Clifford Krauss, "It Doesn't Matter If Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid.," *The New York Times*, December 24, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/world/americas/ecuador-china-dam.html>.

²⁵¹ Casey, "It Doesn't Matter If Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid."

compounded by looming, future disasters; the dam is built next to the Reventador Volcano, which is active, and in an area where earthquakes have disrupted vital infrastructure in the past. For these reasons, underproduction plagues the Coca Codo Sinclair dam.

Financially, the dam was equally disastrous. Not only was Ecuador saddled with a high interest loan, the dam meant to provide the government with the funds to pay off that interest was borderline defunct. This was no issue for China, however, since the Ecuadorian government was still able to pay off the debt with discounted petroleum (a resource China desperately needs). Although estimates differ, Ecuador will essentially need to send 75% of its oil exports to pay off this debt, which is a massive toll on Ecuador's economy.²⁵² Moreover, since Ecuador is unable to pay off its debt to China, current President Moreno has turned back to the World Bank and IMF for financing, ironically putting Ecuador into the very situation Correa intended to use the dam to escape.²⁵³ Importantly, although the Coca Codo Sinclair is a useful focal point of China's BRI in Ecuador, Chinese businesses have financed dozens of other hydroelectric projects in Ecuador, along with projects relating to electrical infrastructure and petroleum extraction. In this way, Ecuador has remained financially dependent, even though Correa attempted to use the BRI to escape that same dependence.

If these problems were mostly evident during the dam's construction, why was the dam built anyway? Initially, one may point to Ecuador's desperate economic situation; without any other international creditors to turn to, China was Ecuador's only option. Even if this is true, it does not explain the Ecuadorian government's blatant neglect of worker safety and dam efficiency (or lack thereof). Instead, corruption explains why Ecuadorian officials turned a blind

²⁵² Salmon, "How Ecuador Sold Itself to China."

²⁵³ "El Gobierno de Lenín Moreno se vuelve a acercar al FMI," *La Hora*, 12 June 2018, <https://www.lahora.com.ec/noticia/1102163347/el-gobierno-se-vuelve-a-acercar-al-fmi>.

eye as such a risky project was built haphazardly. First, in respect to the lower level officials in charge of the dam, almost every official in charge of the dam's production has been convicted of bribery or corruption charges. Some were even caught on tape accepting bribes.²⁵⁴ Much later and much more recently, higher officials have been convicted of corruption in relation to private investments like the dam, including Correa himself.²⁵⁵ This observation is important to note because it explains two components of the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. First, although Latin American leaders like Correa may couch their campaigns in the rhetoric of nationalism and restoring the nation's autonomy, personal ambitions can lead the leaders of a state to deviate from this purpose, ultimately undermining that nation's pursuit of autonomous development. Second, although this may seem like a great boon for China, deals mired in corruption such as this one are the source of the BRI's growing infamy.²⁵⁶

As a result, by foregoing open and honest transactions, both Ecuadorian and Chinese leaders undermine their overarching goals. Ecuadorian leaders sacrifice their nation's autonomy for personal gain, propagating corruption and increasing the state's economic dependence on foreign companies and countries. Chinese leaders undercut their government's claims to be non-exploitative, to be unlike the United States. Projects like the Coca Codo Sinclair dam across the world have caused widespread issues for the BRI's global reputation, jeopardizing the CCP's goals of overcoming China's structural hurdles within each axis of power. It is important to note that, to a certain extent, these issues are out of the Chinese government's control. Many BRI projects in Latin America and around the world are led by private Chinese companies rather than State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) like Sinohydro, so the CCP does not have direct control over all

²⁵⁴ Casey "It Doesn't Matter If Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid."

²⁵⁵ Cabrera, "Ecuador's Former President Convicted on Corruption Charges."

²⁵⁶ Andrew Small, "The Backlash to Belt and Road," *Foreign Affairs*, February 17, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-16/backlash-belt-and-road>.

BRI projects, and the parameters that define what is an official BRI project are unclear. The CCP is hardly absolved of responsibility for BRI failures though, and the disastrous Coca Codo Sinclair dam was funded by the state-controlled Chinese Export-Import Bank and Sinohydro, which is a SOE. Moreover, even when projects are mishandled by private companies, it is hardly guaranteed that locals make a distinction between SOE's and private companies. Thus, by prioritizing personal gains, Ecuadorian leaders sacrifice their nation's autonomy. At the same time, Chinese leaders erode the BRI's global reputation and, as a result, its ability to overcome structural hurdles within China's axes of power by permitting the clumsy construction of projects like the Coca Codo Sinclair dam.

In the end, this relationship has ultimately had severe political and humanitarian repercussions. As early as 2006, mass protests against Chinese projects broke out across Ecuador. The situation grew so dire in one province, Orellana, that Correa declared a state of emergency in 2007. This early movement led to various others, many ending in a violent clash between protesters and police/military units. These movements were mostly composed of rural workers and indigenous activists who identified the harsh environmental impact of Chinese mining, petroleum, and hydroelectric projects.²⁵⁷ It is important to note, however, that the violence in the direction of Chinese laborers has historic precedent in Latin America: Sinophobia has a long history in Latin America and surely played a part in these protests.²⁵⁸ In this way, the Correa administration's mishandling of the BRI exacerbated Ecuador's rural/urban political divide as well as racial divisions and Sinophobia. Unlike Argentina, however, this Sinophobia

²⁵⁷ Ellis, "Ecuador's Leveraging of China to Pursue an Alternative Political and Development Path."

²⁵⁸ Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "Indispensable Enemy or Convenient Scapegoat? A Critical Examination of Sinophobia in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1870s to 1930s," in Walton Look Lai and Chee Beng Tan, *The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean* (BRILL, 2010), pp. 65-98.

was unable to stop most BRI projects, mostly because high levels of corruption encouraged Ecuadorian officials to push through this popular rejection of Chinese investment.

Responding to Ecuador's overall negative experience with the BRI, Ecuador's current government has turned partially away from China and back towards the United States. Yet Ecuador maintains relations with China and the BRI, most notably in its expansion of the ECU-911 surveillance system. Although most of China's investments in Ecuador were related to economic infrastructure, China began assisting the Correa administration with the production of a massive surveillance network in 2011. According to Correa, this network was installed in order to combat Ecuador's high murder and theft rates. Indeed, there have been reductions in murder rates across the country since the network came online, but it is unclear whether this reduction has come from the surveillance system. Moreover, there is ample evidence to suggest that Correa also used ECU-911 to intimidate potential political opponents and bolster the operations of the National Intelligence Secretariat (Secretaría Nacional de Inteligencia, Senain), the state's domestic intelligence agency.²⁵⁹ Once President Moreno took office in 2017, he emphasized his administration's desire to leave much of Correa's legacy in the past. ECU-911 seems to be an exception, however. Moreno has shown no willingness to reduce the reach of the surveillance network. In fact, he has broadened its scope.²⁶⁰ While there is no evidence to suggest Moreno is using this network maliciously as Correa had, the expansion of this network and potential addition of facial recognition technology in a nation with a history of censorship and political repression is still concerning. Thus, as with the construction of the Coca Codo Sinclair dam,

²⁵⁹ Charles Rollet, "Ecuador's All-Seeing Eye Is Made in China," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed April 9, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/09/ecuadors-all-seeing-eye-is-made-in-china/>; Paul Mozur, Jonah M. Kessel, and Melissa Chan, "Made in China, Exported to the World: The Surveillance State," *The New York Times*, December 24, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/world/americas/ecuador-china-dam.html>.

²⁶⁰ Charles Rollet, "Ecuador's All-Seeing Eye Is Made in China," *Foreign Policy* (blog), August 9, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/09/ecuadors-all-seeing-eye-is-made-in-china/>.

rather than assist the population of Ecuador, the expansion of Ecuador's surveillance state increases the government's power and ultimately benefits the state's leaders more than anyone.

Ecuador and the United States

With these developments in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that Ecuador's new president would turn back to the United States and familiar institutions in an attempt to revitalize Ecuador's economy and usher in some level of political stability. This turn towards the United States is perhaps best characterized by Vice President Pence's visit to Quito in June of 2018. There, Pence met with President Moreno to discuss how new relations would look between the Trump and Moreno administrations, clearly looking to find a less hostile president in Moreno than Correa. President Moreno did not disappoint. Indeed, this conference clarified the two main avenues through which Ecuador and the United States would cooperate: military technology and economic financing.

To highlight some specifics, in a joint press statement to the public during this Quito meeting, Moreno trumpeted "completely positive and convinced that, through dialogue and joint work, we will make progress and we'll strengthen that brotherhood" between Ecuador and the United States. In this way, Moreno publically confirmed his turn towards the United States. Since Moreno had been hand-picked by Correa as a successor, this was a potentially surprising development. Nevertheless, there are two important moments of this speech which clarify Moreno's relationship with the United States, which is not necessarily a relationship of complete subordination. The first and most telling example of this is Moreno's unsubtle critique of the humanitarian crisis caused by the Trump administration's mass deportation and family separation policy. Here, Moreno addressed his nation's "huge concern for the situation of the Latin American children [who] were separated from their parents" in the United States, a direct

job at Trump's most controversial immigration policy. Despite this determined stance on such a hot political issue, Moreno is comparatively more cooperative with the United States on most other issues. A second example from this joint press conference reflects this sentiment.

Practically in reply to Pence's assurance that "defeating criminal groups and drug traffickers will also require renewed cooperation between our law enforcement and our militaries," President Moreno states that "Ecuador, Mr. Vice President, does not have cocaine crops whatsoever" and that he "would like to salute Vice President Pence to granting the cooperation of funds from the United States for that struggle against [drug trafficking]."²⁶¹ In this way, Moreno clearly established that Ecuador and the United States would be cooperating militarily and economically for years to come.

First, speaking to military expansion, U.S. military presence is in no way new in Ecuador. In 1999, Ecuador permitted the construction of a U. S. air base in order to survey the region for drug trafficking operations. This facility remained open until 2009 when President Correa refused to renew the facility, effectively closing it.²⁶² To reinforce this jab at American military operations in Latin America, Correa suggested that Ecuador receive a military base in Miami, illustrating his typical passive-aggressive stance towards the United States.²⁶³ Going further, Correa actually pushed through a revision to the Ecuadorian Constitution that does not permit foreign troops within its borders in any capacity, eventually expelling U.S. personnel in 2014.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Pence and Moreno, "Remarks by Vice President Pence and President Lenin Moreno of the Republic Of Ecuador in Joint Press Statements."

²⁶² Carlos de la Torre, "Latin America's Shifting Politics: Ecuador After Correa," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (October 17, 2018): 77–88, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0064>, pp. 80.

²⁶³ Phil Stewart, "Ecuador Wants Military Base in Miami," *Reuters*, October 22, 2007, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/ecuador-base-idUKADD25267520071022>.

²⁶⁴ "Ecuadorians Protest US Military's Use of Galapagos Airport," June 18, 2019, <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Ecuadoreans-Protest-US-Militarys-Use-of-Galapagos-Airport--20190618-0014.html>.

Because of this precedent set by Correa, it seems unlikely (and unconstitutional) for the United States to have any type of military presence in Ecuador.

However, as shown above, with the ascendancy of Moreno came the return of military collaborations between Ecuador and the United States. For instance, in 2018, Ecuador began to permit Lockheed P-3 Orion surveillance aircraft to operate along the Pacific coast. These aircraft, much like U.S. military personnel from 1999-2009, were sent to detect and reduce “drug trafficking, organized crime, human trafficking, illegal fishing, and contraband.”²⁶⁵ More recently, in 2019, Moreno has permitted the United States to base similar operations out of the Galápagos, which has brought immense controversy. Not only have there been various protests from Ecuadorians against this move to allow American aircraft to launch from a place of great national pride, Correa himself tweeted against Moreno’s move, replying to Defense Minister Oswaldo Jarrín: “Galápagos NO es un “portaaviones” para uso gringo,” which roughly translates to “The Galápagos are NOT an “aircraft carrier” for gringos to use.”²⁶⁶ This announcement fits well into the context of a meeting between Jarrín and Admiral Craig Faller, commander of the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), in which both leaders confirmed a mutual desire to limit the same illegal activities listed above, especially narco trafficking.²⁶⁷ In this way, despite mounting political costs, the Moreno administration has slowly begun to reintroduce U.S. military presence within its borders.

²⁶⁵ Pablo Vivanco, “U.S. Military Returns to Exert ‘Influence’ in Ecuador and the Region,” *Progressive*, October 5, 2018, <https://progressive.org/api/content/a59c174a-c8a9-11e8-8d62-120e7ad5cf50/>.

²⁶⁶ TeleSur English, Twitter Post, August 9, 2018, 11:14 a.m. <https://twitter.com/telesurenglish/status/1027573879546540032>; Dan Collins, “Galápagos Islands: Outcry after Ecuador Allows US Military to Use Airstrip,” *The Guardian*, June 17, 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/17/galapagos-islands-ecuador-us-military-airstrip>.

²⁶⁷ “SOUTHCOM Commander Visits Colombia, Ecuador,” *SOUTHCOM Public Affairs*, U.S. Southern Command, accessed April 11, 2020, <http://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/1825501/southcom-commander-visits-colombia-ecuador/>.

In addition, “illegal fishing” is of massive geopolitical importance within the context of the evolving relationship between Ecuador, China and the United States. Fish are one of Ecuador’s main exports, and Chinese vessels have been found fishing illegally off the coast of Ecuador as recently as 2017, when a Chinese-flagged ship was detained carrying illegal tons of shark meat.²⁶⁸ Illegal fishing has become big business for Chinese fishing companies and disputes over fishing rights constitute yet another way in which Latin America has become a battleground between China and the United States. Although Moreno and his administration couch their support in the rhetoric of drug war and security, U.S. officials like Admiral Faller are much more explicit about what takes precedence when it comes to U.S. involvement in Latin America. In a testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee’s subcommittee in July 2019, Faller said that Latin American domestic issues present challenges that “directly impact the security of this hemisphere, *our neighborhood*. Criminal organizations, narco-trafficking, illegal immigration, violent extremists, corruption... are principal among those challenges” (Emphasis added). Clearly, in the eyes of U.S. military leaders, retaining control over the situation in the western hemisphere is paramount to U.S. security. Indeed, Faller even invokes an image similar to that of the infamous “our backyard” expression, referring to Latin America as “our neighborhood.” Yet the opportunities and challenges of which Faller speaks are only partially about those he lists above. Instead, the America’s real concern is with other nations increasing their influence within the hemisphere. He states that “most disturbing insight, the aha moment for [him], however, has been the degree to which the external state actors, China,

²⁶⁸ Andrew Jacobs, “China’s Appetite Pushes Fisheries to the Brink,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 2017, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/30/world/asia/chinas-appetite-pushes-fisheries-to-the-brink.html>; Colin Dwyer, “Fishermen Caught With 6,600 Sharks In Galápagos, Now Headed To Prison,” NPR.org, August 29, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/29/547034125/fishermen-caught-with-6-600-sharks-in-galapagos-now-headed-to-prison>.

Russia, and Iran, have expanded their access, and influence right there in our neighborhood,” again invoking the “our neighborhood” image.²⁶⁹

Thus, even though Moreno states that issues like narcotrafficking take priority in the United States’ military involvement in Ecuador, U.S. officials tell a different story. Instead, these officials focus on encroachment by China and other actors onto territory where they believe China does not belong. In this way, by turning back to the United States for military support in combating some of Ecuador’s most pressing issues, it seems as though Ecuador has only further immersed itself in the growing tension between China and the United States. Consequently, Moreno, like Correa, has partially signed away the fate of his state to the choices of an external actor. He merely chose the United States instead of China.

Financially, the Moreno administration has similarly turned away from China and the Correa administration’s path. In his inaugural speech in 2017, Moreno made clear what his administration’s economic goals were by describing desired advancements in the nation’s bureaucracy and private sector. Hoping to bolster the nation’s economy through investment, tourism, and trade, Moreno stressed the importance of establishing a stable economic system for Ecuador.²⁷⁰ Indeed, he even addresses the problems of Ecuador’s dependency on primary goods, listing out the five chief primary goods of Ecuador—bananas, cacao, roses, tuna, and shrimp—as sources of national pride, but he also reiterates the need to establish a more diverse economy. This push for a diverse economy reflected Moreno’s desire to establish a less dependent Ecuador. Moreno also spoke at length about the financial and political dangers of corruption,

²⁶⁹ “Southcom Commander Testifies on National Defense Strategy Implementation,” U.S. Department of Defense, July 9, 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/Videos/?videoid=695597>.

²⁷⁰ Lenín Moreno “DISCURSO DE POSESIÓN DEL PRESIDENTE LENÍN MORENO GARCÉ ANTE LA ASAMBLEA NACIONAL EN PRESENCIA DE JEFES DE ESTADO DELEGACIONES E INVITADOS NACIONALES E INTERNACIONALES” Presidencia Republic de Ecuador, May 24, 2017, <https://www.presidencia.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/06/2017.05.24-DISCURSO-POSESI%C3%93N-ANTE-LA-ASAMBLEA-NACIONAL.pdf>

citing corruption as a major danger to stability and control within Ecuador. In this way, by pushing for a more stable economy and less corrupt political system, Moreno prioritized economic and political autonomy in his agenda.²⁷¹

Despite Moreno identifying this important structural hurdle in Ecuador's economy, he never mentioned Ecuador's largest economic hurdle: debt. This exclusion more likely comes from the political potency of these topics rather than the Moreno administration's negligence. In fact, refinancing of foreign debt was at the top of Moreno's agenda. After immense issues with Chinese financing, Moreno turned towards the United States, IMF, and World Bank in order to tackle Ecuador's persistent economic turmoil. Moreno was relatively successful in this endeavor. First, after making extensive promises of economic restructuring, Moreno was able to win over a \$4.2-billion loan from the IMF in March 2019. Specifically, this economic restructuring would include "boosting competitiveness and job creation; strengthening fiscal sustainability and the institutional foundations of Ecuador's dollarization; protecting the poor and most vulnerable; and improving transparency and bolstering the fight against corruption." To facilitate these reforms, the IMF would support the Ecuadorian government for three years.²⁷² This has allowed the Moreno administration to step away from relying on risky Chinese loans and more on the IMF despite the Correa administration's previous default.

As per usual, these IMF loans came with strings attached, and the IMF pressured Ecuador to "reduce debt-to-GDP ratio through a combination of a wage bill realignment, a careful and gradual optimization of fuel subsidies, a reprioritization of capital and goods and services spending, and a tax reform."²⁷³ The issue of fuel subsidies in particular highlights the Moreno

²⁷¹ Moreno "DISCURSO DE POSESIÓN."

²⁷² "IMF Executive Board Approves US\$4.2 Billion Extended Fund Facility for Ecuador," IMF, November 3, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/03/11/ecuador-pr1972-imf-executive-board-approves-eff-for-ecuador>.

²⁷³ "IMF Executive Board Approves US\$4.2 Billion Extended Fund Facility for Ecuador."

administration's struggles with imposing IMF economic reforms. After President Moreno publically declared in October 2019 that his administration would be eliminating a decades-old fuel subsidy program, massive protests pushed the government to declare a state of emergency. In the ensuing conflict, many protesters were wounded and killed by police forces. Eventually, Moreno held a live, televised negotiation with indigenous leaders (who coordinated many of the mass protests) and walked back on his suspension of fuel subsidies.²⁷⁴ This came after the Moreno administration's heavy-handed repression of protesters, which brought international criticism and led the United Nations to assist in the negotiation process between indigenous leaders and Moreno's cabinet. While it can be argued that Moreno's austerity measures were not in accordance with the IMF's recommendation of "gradual optimization", his adherence to the austerity principles set by the IMF still exposed his government's willingness to depend on the IMF and its programs. Since the IMF has had little success in saving Ecuador from its previous foreign debt crises, it is questionable whether this turn to the IMF will be less detrimental than Ecuador's dependency on China.

Beyond the IMF, Moreno has also successfully convinced the World Bank to assist in Ecuador's economic restructuring. In April 2019, the World Bank approved a \$350 million loan to Ecuador in order to combat poverty and improve the state's rather weak social safety net. The ultimate goal of this program is to help reduce inequality, which is a massive issue in Ecuador, as it is in much of Latin America.²⁷⁵ Importantly, this reform demonstrated that Moreno was not completely deviating from Correa and turning entirely to the political right. Both Correa and

²⁷⁴ "Ecuador President Backs down over Fuel Protests," *BBC News*, October 14, 2019, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50038126>.

²⁷⁵ "The World Bank Approves a US\$350 Million Loan to Strengthen the Social Safety Net in Ecuador," *The World Bank*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/04/04/the-world-bank-approves-a-us350-million-loan-to-strengthen-the-social-safety-net-in-ecuador>.

Moreno have prioritized reducing inequality in their economic agendas, and Correa was moderately successful in this sense (although this success involved increasing the nation's foreign debt).²⁷⁶ However, later developments in 2019 have highlighted Moreno's difficulties as he is caught between goals set by the IMF and the public's wishes. After Moreno announced the suspension of a fuel-subsidy program that had been in place for around 40 years, intense riots broke out across the country. This explosive reaction forced Moreno to declare a state of emergency. Ultimately, with the outbreak of COVID-19, the state of the fuel-subsidies remains in limbo, but, with the international economy suffering tremendously from the global pandemic, Ecuador's economic situation remains precarious.

In summary, this economic crisis has highlighted the difficult path that lay before Moreno in stabilizing the Ecuadorian economy. Although not officially confirmed to be a part of the IMF's agenda, many critics believe the IMF pushed for the suspension of these fuel subsidies, which would help the government reach its goal of reducing the fiscal deficit from \$3.6 billion to under \$1 billion by 2020.²⁷⁷ Whether this a direct austerity measure suggested by the IMF, there have been immense political consequences for the Moreno government. Similarly, by allowing the United States to conduct military operations within Ecuador, Moreno has brought domestic criticism and shown his willingness to rely on the United States and Western financial institutions for military and economic support. Thus, despite invocations of Simon Bolivar and his dreams of a unified South America, by turning back to these external actors, Moreno, like Correa, obfuscates Ecuador's path to a third way.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ "GINI Index for Ecuador," FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, January 1, 1987), <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SIPOVGINIECU>.

²⁷⁷ "Ecuador Declares State of Emergency as Protesters Decry End to Fuel Subsidies," *The Guardian*, October 3, 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/03/ecuador-state-of-emergency-fuel-subsidies-protest>.

²⁷⁸ Moreno, "DISCURSO DE POSESIÓN."

Ecuador and ALBA-TCP

Although both the Correa and Moreno administrations have struggled to find an alternative choice between China and the United States, Ecuadorian leaders have still shown a willingness and ability to pursue a third option, albeit with limitations. Beyond holding typical bilateral relations with neighboring nations, the Correa administration, in particular, pushed for Ecuador's participation in an alternative institution that presented hopes of greater autonomy: the ALBA-TCP.

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP), is an intergovernmental organization that seeks to foster greater economic and political cooperation between its members, which, outside of Ecuador and Venezuela, are mostly Caribbean island nations. Originally conceived by Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro, ALBA-TCP was named “Our America” to differentiate it from the other America, the expansionist one with imperialist appetites,” i.e. the United States.²⁷⁹ Originally just ALBA in 2004, Bolivian president Evo Morales proposed the addition of People's Trade Treaty to further signify that this organization was a fairer, alternative option “to the US-promoted bilateral Free Trade Agreements.”²⁸⁰ In this way, by joining this ALBA-TCP in 2009, the Correa administration aligned itself with vehemently anti-U.S. states like Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua.²⁸¹ More importantly, Ecuador joined a coalition that specifically invoked the legacy of Simon Bolivar, “the liberator” of Latin America from Europeans. Consequently, Correa and his administration

²⁷⁹ Delegación de Venezuela y Cuba, “Declaración final de la primera reunión Cuba-Venezuela para la aplicación de la Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas”, op. Cit., in Salim Lamrani, “The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America: The Challenges of Social Intergration,” *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 4, no. 3/4 (2012): 347–65.

²⁸⁰ Thomas Muhr, “CONCEPTUALISING THE ALBA-TCP: THIRD GENERATION REGIONALISM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY,” *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 3, no. 2/3, (2011): 105.

²⁸¹ Ken Cole, “Jazz in the Time of Globalisation: The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America,” *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2010): 315–32.

took part in a regional push for greater autonomy, one driven by the historic memory of European colonialism and American imperialism.

The economic mission of ALBA-TCP is driven by two main ideas which differentiate it from Washington Consensus institutions. First, rather than focusing on external, exogenous growth policies that see technological advancement occurring independent of economic growth, ALBA-TCP encourages endogenous growth policies. These policies encourage investment in human capital, technology, and natural resources in order to guide directed, specific economic orientation towards desired markets. Second, ALBA-TCP focuses on the cooperative advantages created by states within their economic system rather than competitive advantages. These means that states organized under the ALBA-TCP regional bloc to not focus on competing with one another to drive innovation, which is what the IMF and similar institutions recommend. In some ways, this drive for comparative advantage is similar to nationalist-oriented economic policies like Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) that many Latin American countries turned to during the 1950s and 1960s. Those policies focused on promoting economic independence through replacing the economy's dependency on primary goods with the establishment of an industrial base in an attempt to realign global economic hierarchies. Similarly, since a focus on comparative advantage has often left developing economies in a disadvantaged position in which they depend on primary goods, ALBA-TCP policies encourage members to think more cooperatively. Accordingly, by focusing on cooperative advantage, this regional bloc attempts to undermine economic hierarchies through shared growth and development.²⁸²

As Correa stated himself in 2015, Latin American countries needed to upset the economically constructed “immoral world order” by joining together...

²⁸²Muhr, “CONCEPTUALISING THE ALBA-TCP,” pp. 105-106.

“Para construir la Patria Grande, que ya no sólo un sueño, sino una necesidad de supervivencia.”

“To construct the Great Fatherland, which is not only a dream, but rather a necessity for survival.”²⁸³

Here, Correa calls upon a powerful historical concept rooted in the writings of Simon Bolivar to express the necessity of Latin American cooperation to the survival of states within the region. Essentially, if ALBA-TCP countries come together, expand their membership to include the rest of Latin America, and cooperate economically, then they would be able to form a “Patria Grande” to rival European and American empires. Therefore, by supporting the ALBA-TCP, the Correa administration pushed for greater preservation of Ecuadorian and Latin American autonomy.

The ALBA-TCP has not been very successful in this endeavor, however, for a few reasons. First, because there are few requirements for entry into the organization, there are similarly very few standards for member nations to be held to. Accordingly, tangible economic adjustments in accordance with ALBA-TCP’s mission have been limited. In fact, in relation to economics, despite the high goals of ALBA-TCP and its minor achievements, it now appears the organization has done little but “collectively endorse [its] members’ claims to national sovereignty.”²⁸⁴ Secondly, the organization has recently been unable to select a leader, exposing the lack of coordination and general chaos that has enveloped the leadership of ALBA-TCP for the past four years. This has led several members to leave the organization, with Ecuador leaving in 2018. While this decision was also impacted by Maduro’s repressive policies in Venezuela

²⁸³ Author’s translation. TeleSur TV, “Rafael Correa: Construir la Patria Grande ya no es un sueño,” *YouTube* video, June 12 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJqhpeLHdGU>

²⁸⁴ Christopher Sabatini, “Meaningless Multilateralism,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 14, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-america/2014-08-08/meaningless-multilateralism>.

and the accession of Moreno to the presidency, Ecuador's leaders ultimately reoriented themselves away from ALBA-TCP and towards the United States and pro-U.S. institutions.²⁸⁵

Ultimately, although Ecuador's participation in the ALBA-TCP was driven by a historically constructed desire for autonomy, ALBA-TCP membership did not produce that result. This is not to say Moreno's decision to back out of the institution was a better push towards autonomy. Theoretically, Moreno could have stayed within the ALBA-TCP and pushed for reform from its less radical members and helped the organization construct clearer economic guidelines. Remaining with the ALBA-TCP, which has explicitly anti-U.S. origins, would have made Moreno's turn to the United States difficult.

Conclusion

What does Ecuador's struggle for autonomy tell us about the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America? First, it is clear that Ecuadorian leaders make choices guided by a historically constructed desire for autonomy. Correa pushed for greater sovereignty and autonomy through the rejection of American imperialism and by turning towards China and the ALBA-TCP as alternative avenues of economic and political support. As these avenues proved unsuccessful at preserving Ecuador's autonomy, Moreno eventually would turn back to the United States and leave the ALBA-TCP, championing decreased economic dependency and political corruption. It is likely that Moreno left the ALBA-TCP under pressure from the United States considering the anti-American bent of that regional bloc, suggesting that Ecuador's dependence on external actors has frustrated its pursuit for greater autonomy.

The Argentine Republic

²⁸⁵ The Associated Press, "Ecuador Leaves Venezuelan-Run Regional Alliance," *AP NEWS*, August 24, 2018, <https://apnews.com/6a7d8ed8738a475d8b6c276ffa0b761e>.

Many historical similarities exist between Ecuador and Argentina's—dependence on primary goods, succession of military dictatorships, widespread corruption, foreign debt, etc. For this reason, Argentina has also found itself largely caught between BRI investments and IMF loans. However, while Argentina has also initiated various Chinese-directed infrastructure projects, as of now, none of those projects have played out as catastrophically as the Coca Codo Sinclair project. In addition, Chinese investment within Argentina has increased significantly in the past decade, but that investment is still dwarfed by American investments as of early 2019.²⁸⁶ This means that, unlike Ecuador, Chinese investment has hardly had a massive impact on Argentina's financial situation (or, at least, certainly not the way the IMF has) and Chinese infrastructure projects have not had the kind of disastrous results that Ecuador experienced. Nevertheless, Argentina, like Ecuador, has struggled to find historically desired autonomy in the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. This is because Argentina continues to run a damaging trade deficit with China and relies too heavily on the United States and IMF for loans to cover its massive debt. Meanwhile, even though Mercosur has been more successful for Argentina than the ALBA-TCP has been for Ecuador, efforts to strengthen regional trade through Mercosur have not done much to develop Argentina's ability to pursue a third way. The following explores Argentina's history prior to and relationship with the BRI in order to illustrate this struggle.

Argentina Before the BRI

Argentina's history is rife with years of political chaos, coups, and military governments. These turbulent events have had a lasting impact on Argentina's modern political landscape, especially in relation to the deeply entrenched hostilities between political parties and the

²⁸⁶ Javier Luque, "Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2019): 605–22, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-09587-7>.

public's lack of trust in the government. Nonetheless, regardless of their location along the political spectrum, Argentine leaders have pushed for greater autonomy and economic growth. Sometimes this has involved cooperating with dominant powers, while other times it has involved conflict, if not outright war as in the Malvinas War. Regardless of their relations with Europe and the United States, autonomy has played a vital role in the choices of Argentine leaders, and this has both motivated and conditioned Argentina's relations with China.

At the start of the 19th century, Argentina, like many other Latin American nations, won its war of independence against Spain. Bloodshed and civil conflict, however, continued between competing political factions in Argentina until around the 1860s with the establishment of a strong central government. Shortly after, the expansion of railways and ports during the end of the 19th century contributed to Argentina's economic growth by facilitating the transportation and sale of grain and beef throughout the country.²⁸⁷ The following decades were less forgiving economically, however. During the First World War, Argentina struggled to sell its grain and beef to European markets it depended heavily upon. Despite this economic turmoil, reforms to the Argentine political system during this same period pushed the nation towards democracy.²⁸⁸ The Sáenz Peña Law of 1912, for instance, dramatically amended Argentina's voting process by making the vote obligatory and secret. This reduced voter intimidation and corruption, leading to freer and fairer elections.²⁸⁹ Despite these changes, when the economy began to struggle once again, a handful of military and political leaders staged a successful coup in 1930, consolidated power, and initiated what is often referred to as the "Infamous Decade." During this time,

²⁸⁷ Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), pp. 35, 50, 63-70.

²⁸⁸ Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, pp. 78-80.

²⁸⁹ This is not to say that the law opened elections to the entire Argentine public. Only upper/upper-middle class men had the ability to vote until later in the century. Women did not gain the legal right to vote until 1949. Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, pp. 67, 101.

significant opposition parties were excluded from elections and a combination of fraud, graft, and force kept the military government in power for over a decade.

This era of corruption further entrenched existing governmental favoritism towards American and European companies. Many leaders offered special deals for American and European companies in an attempt to stabilize national trade and/or to reap personal rewards. These relationships were hardly new—British companies dominated railroads in Argentina for decades—but prominent treaties engendered great frustration among the Argentine public.²⁹⁰ A glaring example is the Roca-Runciman Treaty of 1933, which secured a market for Argentine beef in Britain. This treaty protected Argentine primary goods but, in return, Argentina agreed not to develop industries that may compete with British interests in Argentina.²⁹¹ This treaty and similar developments led political leaders and protesters to advocate for greater Argentine autonomy, and the legitimacy of the military government came under increasing attack.

After the government of the late 1930s began to descend into chaos, another military insurgency stepped up to overthrow the corrupt political regime in 1943. Still engrossed in the tumultuous international politics of the Second World War, this new regime struggled to escape mounting pressure set upon the economy by U.S. sanctions. Concurrently, Juan Domingo Perón, a military figure new to politics, quickly seized the opportunity presented by his bureaucratic relations with labor unions to garner favor among the public. Under immense pressure from Perón's supporters, the military government eventually held open and fair elections in 1946, which Perón was able to win with ease. It is important to note that, seeing Perón and his allies as potential fascists and supporters of the Axis, U.S. diplomat to Argentina Spruille Braden openly

²⁹⁰ Colin M. Lewis, *British Railways in Argentina 1857-1914: A Case Study of Foreign Investment* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), pp. 5-20.

²⁹¹ Daniel Lewis, "Internal and External Convergence: The Collapse of Argentine Grain Farming," in David Rock, ed. *Latin America in the 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 211-212.

criticized Perón and denounced his candidacy. This did not undermine Perón, however. In fact, Branden merely provided Perón with rhetorical ammunition. Capitalizing on Argentine frustration with foreign interference in the economy and politics, Perón used the slogan “Braden or Perón” to indicate that he would champion Argentina’s autonomy, unlike his rivals, who were in the pocket of foreign companies.²⁹²

Serving as Argentina’s leader from 1946-1955, Perón found himself caught within the geopolitical/ideological battle of the Cold War. However, Perón made it clear that his political ideology, aptly named *Peronismo* but also known as Justicialism, was neither capitalist nor communist. Instead of taking the side of the United States or Soviet Union, Perón advocated for a third way, suggesting that “capitalism has failed and so has communism,” so “another system must be sought.”²⁹³ Whether *Peronismo* was an ideologically cohesive third way is up for debate. Because of its complicated history, *Peronismo* has been called an ideology of the left and right, corporatism and fascism, and nationalism and populism. Perón’s government was highly involved in the economy and protectionist, but his policies did not fit neatly into any existing dichotomy.²⁹⁴

Regardless, the rise of Perón and *Peronismo* was a real concern for officials in the United States, whose greatest fear was “that of a southern bloc dominated by Argentina.”²⁹⁵ This fear was not imaginary either, seeing as countries like Peru and Cuba began to turn towards Argentina for support in resisting “*Yanqui* Imperialism,” support which Perón readily

²⁹²Lewis, *The History of Argentina*.

²⁹³ F. J. McLynn, “The Ideology of Peronism: The Third Way and the Law of the Excluded Middle,” *Government and Opposition* 19, no. 2 (1984): 193–206.

²⁹⁴ Paul H. Lewis “Was Perón a Fascist? An Inquiry into the Nature of Fascism,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb., 1980), pp. 242-256, accessed April 25, 2020, <https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:2841/stable/2130025>.

²⁹⁵ Glenn J. Dorn, “Perón’s Gambit: The United States and the Argentine Challenge to the Inter-American Order, 1946–1948,” *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 1 (2002): 1–20, pp. 1.

supplied.²⁹⁶ Thus, Perón was able to challenge U.S. authority over their “backyard” through strengthening ties with other Latin American nations. When combined with his ISI strategy that attempted to reduce Argentine dependency on the trade of primary goods, it is clear that Perón pushed for Argentine and, indeed, Latin American autonomy more than just rhetorically. However, Perón’s repressive policies and increasing tensions with the Catholic Church led to an explosive coup in 1955 that ended his presidency. Perón was forced into exile in Spain, and a new government took power.²⁹⁷

The decades that followed were violent and chaotic. Multiple attempts to form a stable government failed. Labor unions clashed with police forces and private, paramilitary units, highlighting lingering divisions between supporters of Peronism, which had been outlawed after Perón’s exile, and its opponents. The new government attempted to peel away Perón’s policies, reducing the government’s involvement in Argentina’s economy. This step away from Perón’s policies led to restored relations with the United States and allowed the government to apply for IMF loans.²⁹⁸ A rapid succession of weak political leaders and military juntas dominated Argentina’s government until Perón was able to return to Argentina in 1973, but his return, tainted by the Ezeiza massacre, in which at least 13 people were killed and over 300 wounded in a violent clash between Peronist and anti-Peronist forces, showed that Perón brought little stability to the self-destructive political system.²⁹⁹

When Perón died suddenly of a heart attack after less than a year back in Argentina, the violence that had existed for decades between leftist guerrillas like the Montoneros and rightist

²⁹⁶ Dorn, “Perón’s Gambit,” pp. 3.

²⁹⁷ Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, pp. 103, 111.

²⁹⁸ Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, pp. 116-117.

²⁹⁹ Although these numbers are generally considered official, many who were at the massacre suggest that these are too low. Alejandro Horowicz, “Ezeiza Protest and Massacre, 1973,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (2009), 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198073.wbierp0533>.

death squads like the Triple A escalated rapidly. By 1976, military leaders once again stepped up and wrestled power from the presiding president, Perón's second wife.³⁰⁰ Once in power, these conservative military leaders did not deescalate the violence that had ravaged Argentina's political system. Instead, they institutionalized complex forms of repression and established an advanced network of state terrorism that would take the lives of an estimated 20,000 Argentines.³⁰¹ This "Dirty War" attempted to systematically quash remaining Peronist forces or critics of the government like famous journalist Rodolfo Walsh. The Argentine government executed men and women through firing squads, "death flights," and public executions.³⁰² Children born to detained mothers were sent to new families while the mothers were "disappeared" or "transferred."³⁰³ Initially, this program of mass killings was conducted without foreign assistance. Later, the military leaders began coordinating with the United States under Operation Condor in the late 1970s, ultimately synthesizing French and U.S. counterinsurgency tactics to wage war on opponents to the military.³⁰⁴ This U.S. support would later be memorialized in public monuments and museums recognizing the horrors of the Dirty War, allowing the legacy of U.S. intervention in Argentina to linger in the nation's historic memory.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), pp. 116-117.

³⁰¹ Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The "Dirty War" in Argentina*, Westport, (Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), <https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:2201/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=126744&site=ehost-live>, pp. 147-148.

³⁰² The Associated Press, "For the First Time, Argentine Army Admits 'Dirty War' Killings," *The New York Times*, April 26, 1995, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/04/26/world/for-the-first-time-argentine-army-admits-dirty-war-killings.html>.

³⁰³ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, pp. 157-158; "Argentina Tries 'baby Theft' Doctors," *BBC News*, September 18, 2014, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-29248974>.

³⁰⁴ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, pp. 135-136.

³⁰⁵ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "ESMA Site Museum - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture, and Extermination," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6248/>.

The fall of this harsh military regime only came after the catastrophic the War of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands.³⁰⁶ By 1980, the government faced massive unrest for a variety of reasons. Not only was the economy in dire straits as rampant inflation set in, but the numerous political opponents had begun to fiercely demand a transition to democracy.³⁰⁷ As military leaders under President Leopoldo Galtieri desperately sought ways to garner popular support from the regime, they found their apparent solution in a 150-year-old territorial dispute with the British. The center of the dispute was a small cluster of islands off of Argentina's southeastern coast that had been controlled by Britain since 1833 and whose population identified almost entirely as British. Nevertheless, seeing the reclamation of the Malvinas (and other small islands like South Georgia and the Sandwich Islands) as an opportunity to gain support and flex the military junta's commitment to preserving Argentine autonomy, Argentina invaded these islands in April 1982. Since there was immense support for the reclamation of the Malvinas by the Argentina public and served little strategic value to the British, the military assumed a swift capture of the islands would help shore up its dwindling political support.³⁰⁸ This exemplary display of "Wag the Dog" or "Diversionary War" ended badly for the Argentine government, however, when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sent a massive naval force to reclaim the islands. After a bloody confrontation, Argentine forces surrendered in June, and the military junta capitulated to a transition to democracy shortly after.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Since this research focuses on Argentina, I will be referring to these islands as the Malvinas, which is the Argentine name for the islands. "Falkland Islands" is more common and used on most maps, however.

³⁰⁷ Amy Oakes, *Diversionary War: Domestic Unrest and International Conflict* (Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 78.

³⁰⁸ Oakes, *Diversionary War: Domestic Unrest and International Conflict*, pp. 87.

³⁰⁹ Oakes, *Diversionary War: Domestic Unrest and International Conflict*, pp. 76; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, pp. 190-192; Klaus Dodds, "Political Geography III: Critical Geopolitics after Ten Years," *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 469-84, <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913201680191790>, pp. 480.

Despite the uncertainty that characterized the rest of the 20th century, the new democratic government was able to obtain a moderate level of political stability. Control of government oscillated between Argentina's Radical party and a new branch of Peronists led by Carlos Saúl Menem, who championed neo-liberal reforms to Argentina's shattered economy. Two notable reforms were the creation of Mercosur in 1995, a shared market organization in South America that helped Argentina open its markets, and the restructuring of Argentina's currency so it was tied to the dollar.³¹⁰ These reforms were able to stop runaway inflation, but increasing unemployment and continued dependence on grain sales kept Argentina's economy from recovering from the disastrous decades under the military junta.³¹¹ When combined with unstable fiscal policy and mounting external pressures, Argentina's economy collapsed in the late 1990s, leading to the 2001 "Argentinazo."³¹² Argentinazo was an explosive popular revolt across Argentina that lasted roughly twelve days. During this time, the country cycled through five presidents and defaulted on its \$95 billion debt, which is the largest default in history.³¹³ Argentinazo was the culmination of decades of mounting frustration among the Argentine public with corrupt government officials, unsuccessful IMF reforms, and general economic instability. An independent report by the IMF released in 2004 notes that, while weak political institutions and inconsistent domestic fiscal policy were largely responsible for this crisis, reforms pushed by the IMF prior to 2001 were, in fact, unsustainable and contributed to the crisis.³¹⁴ Regardless of

³¹⁰ Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, pp. 167.

³¹¹ Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, pp. 171.

³¹² Specifically, an IMF evaluation lists these external shocks as "including a reversal in capital flows to emerging markets following the Russian default in August 1998; weakening of demand in major trading partners, notably in Brazil; a fall in oil and other commodity prices; general strengthening of the U.S. dollar against the euro; and the 70 percent devaluation of the Brazilian real against the U.S. dollar in early 1999." "The IMF and Argentina 1991–2001," IMF, 2004, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/ieo/2004/arg/eng/pdf/report.pdf>, pp. 12.

³¹³ Naomi Klein, "Out of the Ordinary," *The Guardian*, January 25, 2003, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/25/argentina.weekend7>.

³¹⁴ "The IMF and Argentina 1991–2001," IMF, 2004, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/ieo/2004/arg/eng/pdf/report.pdf>,

the IMF's actual level of responsibility, many Argentines would blame the IMF for the country's default and lead campaigns of vehement opposition to the IMF in later years.

This history of Argentina highlights key themes related to Argentine autonomy and sets the scene for the entry of Chinese investment in the 21st century. First, speaking to themes, Argentina has a mixed history in relation to European and American relations. While Argentine leaders have often relied on European countries for economic support, this has generally led to great criticisms from the public. This popular demand for greater independence from Europeans is best illustrated by the Malvinas War. Meanwhile, whether during the early Peronist years or in recent decades related to its participation in Argentina's Dirty War, the United States has received significant negative attention as an interloper in Argentine politics. The IMF's reputational issue in the 21st century has not helped the United States case either. This has especially affected Argentina's position in the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. As China increases its economic investment in and diplomatic ties with Argentina, this anti-United States/anti-IMF sentiment has guided Argentine leaders' responses to the BRI.

Argentina and China

Although Argentina and China formally established relations in the 1970s, it was not until the early 2000s when the two nations established significant relations. The notable Argentine presidents during this period—Néstor Carlos Kirchner Jr. (2003-2007), Cristina Elisabeth Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), and Mauricio Macri (2015-2019)—have each fostered unique and complicated relationships with Chinese investors, CCP officials, and BRI projects.³¹⁵ The first of these two, President Néstor Kirchner and President Cristina Fernández,

³¹⁵ Throughout this paper, I refer to Néstor Kirchner as just "Kirchner" and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as "Fernández de Kirchner." This is important to note since Cristina Fernández is currently Alberto Fernández's Vice

were not only from the same Peronist party, they were married. This does not mean they had identical approaches to China, however. In fact, all three of these leaders struck a unique balance between working with China, the United States, and finding a third way in the South American common market, Mercosur. It is important to note that, when compared to Ecuador, there were greater challenges to Chinese investment in Argentina that impeded the progression of many infrastructure projects. Specifically, domestic political barriers and Sinophobia, while also present in Ecuador, have led Argentina to view numerous BRI projects with heightened scrutiny and, therefore, depend less on Chinese loans.

A key turning point in Argentine-Chinese relations came in 2003, when President Néstor Kirchner initiated “a much more autonomous policy” that those of his neoliberal predecessors, “with traces of anti-Americanism, which defined a new shift in foreign policy.”³¹⁶ Part of this shift involved seeking new sources of foreign markets and financial investment since, after the default of 2001, Argentina had little access to European or American markets and loans. Kirchner found this alternative in China in 2004. In a series of negotiations in which Kirchner first visited Beijing and later Chinese leader Hu Jintao visited Buenos Aires, Kirchner successfully strengthened Argentina’s access to Chinese consumer markets and opened up Argentina for \$20 billion in Chinese investment to be distributed over the course of ten years.³¹⁷

Access to the Chinese consumer market was vital in assisting in the recovery of Argentina’s economy because of one crucial agricultural product: soybeans. Not only is Argentina one of the main producers of soybeans in the world, China’s massive population and

President, so confusion in this respect is common and likely. When I refer to the current president, I use just “Fernández.”

³¹⁶ F. Urdinez, J. Knoerich, and P. Feliú Ribeiro, *Don’t cry for me Argenchina: unraveling political views of China through legislative debates in Argentina*, USP and King’s College London Working Paper, 2016, in Javier Luque, “Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2019): 605–22, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-09587-7>.

³¹⁷ Luque, “Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path.”

high demand for soybeans, combined with the unusually high price of soybeans in 2004, helped Argentina acquire cash that was desperately needed to combat the recession. Over the long term, this created a large trade imbalance—China only purchased cheap primary goods from Argentina while Argentina purchased more expensive finished goods from China—but the short term gains were vital to economic stabilization during the crisis.³¹⁸ In return, Argentina recognized China as a “market economy” (an important distinction in relation to China’s struggle to gain market economy status in the WTO) and reduced trade barriers to Chinese imports.³¹⁹ Although this was in no way the beginning of economic relations between China and Argentina, the meeting between Hu and Kirchner marked a point of inflection in relations between the two countries.

The following years would only lead to greater economic and political connections between China and Argentina. Once Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was elected to the presidency in 2007, she maintained and strengthened ties between China and Argentina through similar diplomatic meetings and negotiations. Even though President Fernández de Kirchner first visited Beijing, the most notable of these meetings came in 2014, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Buenos Aires to negotiate specific projects and loans with President Fernández de Kirchner. The most notable of these projects were two massive hydroelectric dams in Argentina’s Patagonia region, and Argentina gained access to \$7.5 billion in loans for these dams and similar projects.³²⁰ Later in 2015, President Fernández de Kirchner would add the construction of a space station and the inclusion of China Central Television (CCTV) on

³¹⁸ Gonzalo S. Paz, “RISING CHINA’S ‘OFFENSIVE’ IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE U.S. REACTION,” *Asian Perspective* 30, no. 4 (2006): 95–112, pp. 99.

³¹⁹ Luque, “Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path.”

³²⁰ “Xi Jinping Hails ‘new Horizons’ for China and Argentina on Visit to Buenos Aires,” *South China Morning Post*, July 20, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1556670/xi-jinping-hails-new-horizons-china-and-argentina-visit-buenos-aires>.

Argentina's channel listings.³²¹ This last point may seem insignificant compared to the massive infrastructure projects and complex financial deals secured between China and Argentina, but it is essential to recall that the BRI is more than just an economic program. Throughout these negotiations, Chinese and Argentine leaders developed and cultural relationships that ultimately impact one another's foreign policy choices.

In this way, Presidents Néstor Kirchner and President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner secured various funds for development in Argentina. While many of these investments came prior to the official announcement of the BRI, the projects Chinese lenders took interest in anticipated those of the BRI and currently fall under the BRI's loose definition. Like Ecuador and other "on-route" BRI countries, most funds went to infrastructure projects, including but not limited to railways, dams, and projects related to the extraction of oil and gas.³²² All of these developments, as well as important symbolic gestures made during these diplomatic visits, illustrate Argentina and China's growing interconnectedness.³²³ It is important to note, however, that President Kirchner and President Fernández de Kirchner's turn to China did not equate to complete capitulation to the desires of Chinese businessmen. As mentioned above, domestic political barriers and Sinophobia brought many challenges to BRI investment despite this growing interconnectedness.

Speaking first to domestic political barriers, various projects in Argentina have been interrupted or even canceled due to domestic political resistance in Argentina. For instance, in 2010, a Chinese agriculture company, the Heilongjiang Beidahuang Nongken (HBN), began

³²¹ Javier Luque, "Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path."

³²² Paz, "RISING CHINA'S 'OFFENSIVE' IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE U.S. REACTION," pp. 99.

³²³ Of these symbolic gestures, one particularly memorable images are of President Xi Jinping receiving an Argentine soccer jersey with his name on the back during his 2014 visit. "Xi Jinping Hails 'new Horizons' for China and Argentina on Visit to Buenos Aires," *South China Morning Post*.

working with local leaders in Argentina's Patagonia region. This company, one of China's largest, was attempting to secure access to Argentina's soy market through a deal with the province's local government, but a law known as "*Ley de Tierras*," or "Law of Lands" limited the amount of land that could be owned by foreign investors. When combined with outcry from environmental activists and a suspension issued to the deal by a superior court in the province, this project quickly faded out and was never complete.³²⁴ Similarly, in 2010, the Shaanxi Coal and Chemical Corp (SCC) pursued the construction of a methanol plant in Argentina's southernmost province, Tierra del Fuego. In exchange, the local government would insure SCC's access to local sources of natural gas for 25 years. Like HBN, however, SCC was unable to overcome complex bureaucratic hurdles established by the local government, including a complicated bidding process and import restrictions. These challenges also eventually resulted in the cancellation of the project.³²⁵

Sinophobia has also contributed to troubles for Chinese investors and has a long history in Latin America. In the late 19th and early 20th century, xenophobia directed at the Chinese was economic in origin, and Chinese workers were often scapegoated as the source of economic duress in Latin American communities.³²⁶ In Argentina specifically, long-standing historical narratives emphasize the white, European heritage of the nation. These narratives reflect Argentine society's centuries-old marginalization of ethnic minorities. Today, even as Argentina works towards embracing multiculturalism, Asian ethnic minorities like the Chinese are often an afterthought, even in movements that are meant to combat xenophobia.³²⁷ This sentiment

³²⁴ Luque, "Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path."

³²⁵ Luque, "Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path."

³²⁶ Hu-DeHart, "Indispensable Enemy or Convenient Scapegoat," pp. 96

³²⁷ Chisu Teresa Ko, "TOWARD ASIAN ARGENTINE STUDIES," *Latin American Research Review* 51, no. 4 (2016): 271–89.

continues despite deepening economic relations between China and Argentina, and is illustrated in Argentine news network's coverage of events related to China and Chinese culture within Argentina.³²⁸ The epitome of this Sinophobia came from an offensive tweet sent by President Fernández de Kirchner during a visit to China. On her personal twitter in February of 2015, President Fernández de Kirchner mocked Chinese pronunciation of Spanish words like “arroz” (rice) in a blatant display of racism.³²⁹ Other officials in the Argentine government have gone beyond insensitive cultural comments. In 2013, Diego Guelar, Argentina's ambassador to China, wrote a scholarly monograph titled “The Silent Invasion: The Chinese Landing in South America.” Not only does this book take an alarmist perspective on Chinese investment, it uses derogatory language in its title by referring to the Chinese as “invaders.”³³⁰ Clearly, Sinophobia is pervasive in Argentina, and it has had a tangible impact on Chinese projects in Argentina. For instance, while the HBN project faced heightened scrutiny under the “Ley de Tierras” and struggled to acquire 330,000 hectares of land, an Italian company nearby possessed 900,000

³²⁸ Similar to other parts of the world, anti-Chinese sentiment often manifests in a general anti-Asian sentiment, since many of Korean descent, for example, are still labeled “chinos.” “La fascinación argentina por los ‘chinos’, los ‘negros’ y los ‘gallegos,’” BBC News Mundo, accessed April 28, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/09/150923_fooc_argentina_apodos_chino_negro_gallego_irm; Ariel C. Armony and Nicolás Velásquez, “Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Latin America: An Analysis of Online Discourse,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2015): 319–46, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-015-9365-z>.

³²⁹ This is not the only controversial tweet President Fernández has made about China either. The day after a demonstration related to the mysterious death of Ablerto Nissman, an official investigating both the 1994 and President Fernández's relations with Iran, President Fernández tweeted “En el horóscopo chino soy serpiente. Cuando en la cena, en China, le comente al Presidente Xi Jinping y su esposa...” which translates to “in the Chinese horoscope, I am a snake. During dinner, in China, President Xi Jinping and his wife commented on this...” The cryptic timing and nature of this tweet has reinforced popular Argentine belief that Nissman was murdered by the government, while simultaneously illustrating President Fernández's willingness to publically make fun of Chinese culture. Dexter Filkins, “A Deadly Conspiracy in Buenos Aires?,” *The New Yorker*, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/20/death-of-a-prosecutor>; Robert Mackey, “Argentina's President Mocks Chinese Accents During Visit to China,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/world/americas/argentinas-president-mocks-chinese-accents-during-visit-to-china.html>.

³³⁰ Diego Guelar, *La invasión silenciosa: El desembarco chino en América del Sur* (Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial Argentina, 2013).

hectares unchallenged.³³¹ In a time in which Sinophobia and general anti-Asian racism is on the rise across the world due to the COVID-19 crisis, it is difficult to imagine this challenge diminishing for Chinese companies any time soon.

Thus, even though at the national level both Presidents Kirchner and President Fernández de Kirchner advocated for closer relations with China, neither actively ensured that local barriers to Chinese investment were dissolved or even reduced. In fact, the “Ley de Tierras” was promulgated under President Fernández de Kirchner, so there is evidence to suggest that these leaders actually restricted Chinese access to Argentine markets despite these warmer relations.³³² This is a marked difference from Ecuadorian leaders like Correa, who did little to ensure Ecuador’s autonomy was preserved in dealing with China. Of course, it is important to note that, as shown above, Argentine pushes for autonomy was uneven and entrenched in Sinophobia. Nevertheless, this desire for autonomy potentially shielded the Argentine economy from exploitation at the levels that Ecuador experienced.

This is not to say that Argentina was walled off from significant Chinese investment and trade. As mentioned above, Argentina received massive Chinese investments and China quickly became Argentina’s second largest trading partner, surpassing the United States and trailing only Brazil by 2008. That status remains today and has served to benefit both China and Argentina in unexpected ways. For instance, after African Swine Fever decimated China’s pig population and pork supply in 2019, Argentina was able to secure a substantial, multi-million ton pork deal.³³³

³³¹ Luque, “Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path.”

³³² Luque, “Chinese Foreign Direct Investment and Argentina: Unraveling the Path.”

³³³ “China Set to Receive First Shipment of Chilled Pork from Argentina,” *South China Morning Post*, November 21, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3038728/china-set-receive-first-shipment-chilled-pork-argentina-move>; Leonardo Stanley, “ARGENTINA’S INFRASTRUCTURE GAP AND FINANCIAL NEEDS: The Role of China,” in ed. Enrique Dussel Peters, Ariel C. Armony, and Shoujun Cui, *Building Development for a New Era?: China’s Infrastructure Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Asian Studies Center at University of Pittsburgh Center for International Studies, 2018), <https://www.redalci-china.org/v21/images/Red-ALC-China-y-U-PittsburghBuilding-Development2018.pdf>, pp. 78.

Furthermore, lucrative Chinese investments have led to the progression and completion of significant infrastructure projects in Argentina despite the challenges mentioned above. Most of these projects began development during President Fernández de Kirchner's term but progressed into her successor, President Macri's, term. To complicate matters further, although President Macri initially attempted to distance himself from Chinese investments, mounting pressure from the Chinese government (specifically through the reduction of soy purchases) changed Macri's stance by 2017. This means that President Macri ended up supporting the very infrastructure projects that he had originally planned to dismiss.³³⁴ Analyzing three different types of projects highlights both the complicated nature of the BRI in Latin America and Argentine leaders struggle to maintain autonomy while navigating financial crises.

First, Argentina's renovation of the Belgrano Cargas Freight railway system between 2004 and 2019 highlights the benefits of mutual cooperation between China and Argentina that the BRI offers. Prior to 2004, Argentina's national railway system was highly underdeveloped, dangerous, and economically inefficient. Despite these issues, the potential of developing the railway system was enormous, since establishing a better freighting system would facilitate Argentina's agricultural production and sale.³³⁵ Recognizing the potential benefits of such an investment, Hu Jintao and Néstor Kirchner included the repair of the railway system in their 2004 memorandum of understanding. Yet it was not until 2010 when President Fernández de Kirchner secured a \$10 billion loan from China that tangible plans for the railway's development formed, and these plans have carried on during President Macri's tenure. In 2019, the Belgrano Cargas Freight railway system had been vastly improved, reducing the cost of freighting within

³³⁴ Brook Larmer, "What Soybean Politics Tell Us About Argentina and China," *The New York Times*, January 30, 2019, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/30/magazine/what-soybean-politics-tell-us-about-argentina-and-china.html>.

³³⁵ Stanley, "ARGENTINA'S INFRASTRUCTURE GAP AND FINANCIAL NEEDS: The Role of China," pp. 87

Argentina and (importantly) facilitating China's access to markets in Latin America. It is also important to note that since most of these railways already existed and are merely being improved, Chinese investment has minimal impact on the environment and required no new land contracts.³³⁶ It is likely that these circumstances contributed to the absence of the barriers that the HBN and SCC projects faced, which explains why this project was eventually completed in 2019. Ultimately, the expansion of this railway system is an example of Chinese companies making successful and meaningful investments in Argentina that benefit the Argentine economy.

Second, strategic and technological projects like the creation of the Neuquén Province space station mark the controversy that surrounds certain BRI projects and, more importantly, show that just because a project is built with little regulation does not mean that Argentina cannot regain oversight over the project. Originally negotiated in 2012, the Neuquén Province space station was essentially a bargaining chip used by President Fernández de Kirchner to secure a currency swap with the Chinese government. The subsequent construction of the project was conducted with substantial secrecy and little Argentine oversight.³³⁷ The base itself houses a satellite meant to facilitate China's ambitions of landing on the far side of the moon, which was accomplished in 2019. Despite this proclaimed intent, international and local observers have speculated that the station has nefarious military purposes. These accusations range anywhere from U.S. Admiral Faller's suggestion that "the degree of military activity at [the Neuquén Province space station] is extremely concerning to the security of the United States" to local

³³⁶ Stanley, "ARGENTINA'S INFRASTRUCTURE GAP AND FINANCIAL NEEDS: The Role of China," pp. 92

³³⁷ Cassandra Garrison, "Argentine Lawmakers Seek Greater Oversight of Chinese Space Facility in Patagonia," *Reuters*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-china-space-idUSKCN1RA24I>.

radio station managers noting that “people are afraid” of the base and believe it has military purposes.³³⁸

Regardless of the merit behind any of these claims, this heightened attention ultimately leads to tighter Argentine control over the project. Indeed, Argentine senators put forth legislation in 2019 that would provide Argentina with greater oversight over the facility.³³⁹ Once again, domestic political concerns have challenged BRI projects. Similarly, it is likely that Sinophobia contributed to the heightened scrutiny of this project, especially considering the fact that the United States was approved to construct an “Emergency Operations Center” in the same province with significantly less outcry.³⁴⁰ In both cases, protection of Argentine autonomy was at the heart of local concerns, a sentiment best captured by a quote from a Neuquén lawyer interviewed about the station: “Surrendering sovereignty in your own country is shameful.”³⁴¹ Although these challenges are essentially identical to the ones that prevented the completion of the HBN and SCC projects, their retroactive nature ensured that the project was completed and subsequently brought under greater scrutiny. This allowed Argentina to secure a desperately needed currency swap and minimize any infringement upon Argentine autonomy the base may cause. The Neuquén space station example demonstrates that Argentina can benefit from BRI negotiations and minimize infringements on its autonomy, even when the project brings no immediate benefit to the Argentine economy and instead mainly benefits China.³⁴²

³³⁸ “Southcom Commander Testifies on National Defense Strategy Implementation.”; Ernesto Londoño, “From a Space Station in Argentina, China Expands Its Reach in Latin America,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/world/americas/china-latin-america.html>.

³³⁹ Garrison, “Argentine Lawmakers Seek Greater Oversight of Chinese Space Facility in Patagonia.”

³⁴⁰ “United States Funds the Construction of an Emergency Operations Center for Neuquén Province | U.S. Embassy in Argentina,” U.S. Embassy in Argentina, June 1, 2018, <https://ar.usembassy.gov/united-states-funds-the-construction-of-an-emergency-operations-center-for-neuquen-province/>.

³⁴¹ Londoño, “From a Space Station in Argentina, China Expands Its Reach in Latin America.”

³⁴² Ignoring any potential military applications, this station still hold great strategic value for China and does little to benefit Argentina directly. In 2019, this station facilitated China’s successful landing on the far side of the moon, a notable feat not just because of the mission’s scientific value but also because of its economic potential. The far side

Lastly, impending projects related to producing sustainable energy underscore the real risk Argentina runs of falling into the same trappings as Ecuador. Specifically, massive energy-related projects like could still turn out like the Coca Codo Sinclair dam if Argentina does not maintain rigorous standards for Chinese investments. A key example of the potential risks Argentina runs with BRI infrastructure projects is captured by the controversial Atucha III nuclear power plant that has been in limbo for several years. The original agreement between China and Argentina to begin developing nuclear energy sources in the province of Córdoba came in 2015. Like many of the BRI projects in Argentina, the Atucha III nuclear power plant was initially negotiated under President Fernández but subsequently renegotiated under President Macri. While President Fernández de Kirchner had been fairly lenient in defining the loose parameters of the project, President Macri was far more hesitant to sign on to the project, questioning the viability of nuclear energy as a cost-effective resource. Nevertheless, after the onset of another financial crisis in Argentina (from which the nation has yet to recover), President Macri capitulated and reached a \$10 billion agreement approving the construction of Atucha III. This occurred despite activist resistance, and, although the global COVID-19 pandemic has left this project suspended indefinitely, the project was otherwise slated to enter into operation in 2021.³⁴³ Since Argentina's current President Alberto Fernández has been generally supportive of strengthening ties with China, it is likely that the project will be completed following the pandemic.³⁴⁴

of the moon is littered with a resource called helium-3, which has extensive energy providing capabilities. If China were to gain access to this material, the profits would be astronomical. "China Wants to Mine the Moon for 'Space Gold,'" PBS NewsHour, March 31, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/china-wants-to-mine-the-moon-for-space-gold>.

³⁴³ Fermín Koop and Lili Pike, "China Eyes Argentina in Global Nuclear Roll Out," *Dialogo Chino* (blog), May 23, 2019, <https://dialogochino.net/en/climate-energy/27282-china-eyes-argentina-in-global-nuclear-roll-out/>.

³⁴⁴ Albert Han, "Can Fernandez Woo China and Ease Argentina's Economic Woes?," *South China Morning Post*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3035603/can-alberto-fernandez-woo-china-and-ease-argentinass-economic>.

It is crucial to note how this project is similar and different to the projects that led to Ecuador's greater dependence on China and, consequently, diminished autonomy. Unlike the Belgrano Cargas Freight and Neuquén projects, Atucha III, much like the Sinclair dam, raises significant risks for the environment in Argentina. Moreover, if Atucha III were to underperform as the Sinclair dam did, it would become increasingly difficult for Argentina to pay back its debt to China, landing it in a debt trap similar to Ecuador. In addition, while there have certainly been tragic incidents related to the Sinclair dam, the potential of a nuclear meltdown and the general dangers of radiation involved with nuclear material makes the humanitarian risk of such a project far more significant. This concern has been reflected in certain regions in Argentina (the province of Río Negro made nuclear energy within the province completely illegal), but not in a way that has impacted Atucha III.³⁴⁵ While these are speculations, the comparatively lower levels of scrutiny applied to this project raises questions about the viability of high risk projects in Argentina. As the Argentine pursues similar high stakes energy projects like The Condor Cliff and La Barrancosa dams and summarily dismisses the glaring environmental risks of such projects, it is increasingly apparent that Argentina runs the risk of replicating Ecuador's experience with the BRI.

In summary, the relative success of the BRI infrastructure projects described above marks a key difference between Argentina and Ecuador. Ecuador had high levels of corruption and a desperate economic situation, leading to less scrutinized projects, increased predatory practices, and a reduction in Ecuador's autonomy. Meanwhile, although the economic situation in the early 2000s was similarly dismal and corruption is still present, Argentina's numerous domestic political barriers and high levels of Sinophobia slowed BRI construction. This meant higher

³⁴⁵ "El STJ ratificó la ley antinuclear en Río Negro," *Diario Río Negro*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.rionegro.com.ar/el-stj-ratifico-la-ley-antinuclear-en-rio-negro-YC5895735/>.

scrutiny, less predatory practices, and less Chinese infringement on Argentine autonomy. It is important to note the qualifier “less,” since Argentina has still developed a large trade imbalance with China, grown dependent on its foreign market, and remains susceptible to future BRI related exploitation. Regardless, while Argentina has better managed to avoid Chinese exploitation, it has struggled significantly to meaningfully alter its relationship with the United States and IMF.

Argentina and The United States

As with Chinese-Argentine relations, Argentina has found more success in navigating its relationship with the United States than Ecuador over the past two decades. The key difference between Ecuador and Argentina in this respect is Argentina’s ability to challenge the U.S. military’s relatively exclusive rights to operate in the Southern Cone by strengthening military ties with China. This military relationship is markedly different from Moreno’s allowance of U.S. military operations within Ecuador. Argentina has also found small economic victories by exploiting tensions between China and the United States during the so-called “trade war.” Nevertheless, much like Ecuador, financial instability in Argentina has forced the government to rely heavily on the IMF and abide by Washington Consensus reforms. Since some of this financial stability was caused by U.S. financial developments like the raising of U.S. interest rates, it is clear that Argentina still struggles to find economic autonomy free of the influence the U.S. or the financial institutions U.S. the U.S. champions like the IMF.

In 2007, President Néstor Kirchner spoke to the United Nations General Assembly about a variety of issues facing Argentina and the global community, with Argentine sovereignty playing a key role throughout. The best examples of this emphasis on sovereignty came from his very bold comments on the continued British occupation of the Malvinas. Before the General

Assembly, Kirchner noted that “My country has always said it is prepared to resume negotiations regarding [Argentina’s] sovereignty... it is incomprehensible for us that the United Kingdom refuses to negotiate this matter.” These bold assertions of Argentine sovereignty were accompanied by more nuanced criticisms of actors who infringe upon international autonomy. Specifically, President Kirchner criticized Bush’s war on terrorism. After mentioning the UN’s rejection of the invasion of Iraq and the disasters that occurred there, President Kirchner argued that “action against terrorism must be sustained and *multilateral*” (Emphasis added). In this way, President Kirchner questioned Washington’s unilateral actions and boldly challenged its interventionist practices. President Kirchner also questioned the IMF, insisting that “there are other ways to ensure development and integration. We cannot apply one model for all systems. Every country has the right to choose its own path... we believe that the international monetary architecture needs to be changed, in particular that of the IMF.”³⁴⁶ In this short speech, President Kirchner articulated Argentine leadership’s strong desire to protect their autonomy, avoid economic exploitation, and, ultimately, push back against U.S. hegemony. Although in subsequent years Argentina would find some success in pursuing these objectives, various obstacles still trouble Argentina’s struggle to find autonomy in the face of U.S. influence.

Economically, the IMF serves as one of these hurdles to Argentine leadership. Although the IMF is not an official U.S. institution in any way, the GDP-based voting system within the IMF guarantees that no loan can be created without U.S. approval. This essentially means that when Argentina is at the mercy of the IMF, it is likewise at the mercy of the United States. This is important to note because, as covered briefly above, Argentina has a long history with the IMF that is not particularly positive. Starting a few years prior to the crisis in 2001, the IMF began to

³⁴⁶ “United Nations General Assembly Speeches | C-SPAN.Org,” C-SPAN, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?201151-7/united-nations-general-assembly-speeches&event=201151&playEvent&show=0>.

work with Argentina to restructure its economy. This restructuring was unable to stave off the on-set of the 2001 recession, leading many Argentines to question the utility of the IMF. In fact, many blamed the IMF as a cause of the crisis, and the IMF has had a strained reputation in Argentina since 2001. This issue resurfaced in 2018 after President Macri turned to the IMF in an attempt to curtail rising inflation, unemployment, and slow economic growth.³⁴⁷

In the face of this desperate economic situation, which was largely caused by extensive spending programs of President Fernández de Kirchner, President Macri lobbied the IMF for financial relief, even relying on personal ties with U.S. President Donald Trump in order to secure the U.S. essential support. In fact, President Macri went on to specifically thank President Trump for his assistance with the IMF during President Trump's visit to Buenos Aires. However, in a somewhat comical and infamous moment, Trump remarked that his translation ear piece had not been functioning. For this reason, he replied to very little of what Macri actually said, but instead spoke at length of the two leaders' personal relationship, suggesting that they had "known each other a long while" and that they were "going to be talking about lots of good things for Argentina, for the United States, including trade, including military purchases, and other things." After thanking President Trump for assistance with the IMF, Macri continued to note the important partnerships between the United States and Argentina—battling drug-trafficking and supporting U.S. investments—signifying that U.S. aid with the IMF would not go unrewarded.³⁴⁸ Since Macri had begun his presidency with the intent to avoid negotiations with

³⁴⁷ Benedict Mander and Michael Stott, "Argentina: How IMF's Biggest Ever Bailout Crumbled under Macri," *Financial Times*, September 2, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/5cfe7c34-ca48-11e9-a1f4-3669401ba76f>.

³⁴⁸ Donald J. Trump and Mauricio Macri, "Remarks by President Trump and President Macri of the Argentine Republic Before Bilateral Meeting," (speech, Buenos Aires, November 30, 2018), White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-macri-argentine-republic-bilateral-meeting/>

the IMF, this moment exposed the growing dependence that Argentina has on the United States and IMF due to its fragile economy.³⁴⁹

This growing dependence (i.e. sacrifice of autonomy) has not resolved Argentina's economic troubles. After receiving a massive bailout of \$57 billion, it initially seemed as though Macri had secured a crucial lifeline that would allow his administration's policy of gradual liberalism to regain control of Argentina's economic situation. This turned out not to be the case, however, and inflation persisted at above 50% into 2019, pushing the economy into further disarray. As in 2001, the public was outraged. In response to Macri's first announcement that he was turning to the IMF for aid, thousands of protesters took to the streets in Buenos Aires to condemn the Macri government. For these protesters, the IMF was the root of the collapse in 2001 and depending on it again would cause another.³⁵⁰ Although, as in 2001, the roots of Argentina's economic problems did not stem from the IMF, this second failure has been seen as a misstep on the part of the IMF and an overall embarrassment for the institution. More importantly, this crisis reinforced many Argentines' perception of the IMF as an enemy of the nation and a threat to national autonomy.³⁵¹

As of 2020, even though Argentina has paid back \$44 billion of its debt to the IMF, Argentina's newest President, Alberto Ángel Fernández, faces the possibility of another sovereign default on Argentina's overwhelming debt.³⁵² President Alberto Fernández, a Peronist elected at the end of 2019, has shown signs that he will respond to this crisis with similar policies

³⁴⁹ Mander, "Argentina: How IMF's Biggest Ever Bailout Crumbled under Macri."

³⁵⁰ "Thousands Protest Argentina's Negotiations with IMF," Reuters, May 26, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-protest-idUSKCN1IQ2WG>.

³⁵¹ Santiago Pérez, "Argentina's National Pastime: Hating on the IMF," *Wall Street Journal*, December 26, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/odd-couple-argentina-and-the-imf-stick-together-for-richer-for-poorer-11577379961>.

³⁵² Bruno Binetti, "Argentina Stares Down Yet Another Default," *Foreign Affairs*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2020-03-09/argentina-stares-down-yet-another-default>.

as Néstor Kirchner did in 2001 in a hope to recreate Kirchner's success. Most importantly, President Alberto Fernández has shown a willingness to turn to China as an alternative to the United States and IMF, as the Kirchners had done in years prior.³⁵³ It is far too early to tell how he will respond to Argentina's crisis, especially with chaos caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. However, it is important to note the similarities that exist between Argentina and Ecuador in their relations with the IMF. After both failed to achieve economic stability independent of the IMF, each state had to turn back towards the IMF in order to secure vital loans and bailouts. Not only did these loans fail to bring stability to either economy, but each state's dependence on the IMF led to increased pandering to the interests of the United States. Thus, because the United States controls such a vital vote share in the IMF, when Ecuador and Argentina turned to the IMF for support, they simultaneously turned to the United States.

Of course, Argentina has maintained strong economic ties with the United States for decades and has had considerably greater U.S. investment than Chinese investment despite growing BRI projects within Argentina. In 2018, total U.S. foreign direct investment in Argentina was \$15.2 billion.³⁵⁴ Meanwhile, over the course of ten years, 2008-2018, Chinese foreign direct investment in Argentina was only 12.5 billion dollars, less than one year of U.S. investment.³⁵⁵ Moreover, Argentina signed multiple economic agreements with the United States in 2016 during Macri's presidency like the "Trade and Investment Framework Agreement." This document established a United States-Argentina Council on Trade and reaffirmed Argentine

³⁵³ Fermín Koop, "New Argentina President Looks Set to Deepen China Ties," *Dialogo Chino* (blog), October 31, 2019, <https://dialogochino.net/en/trade-investment/31387-new-argentina-president-looks-set-to-deepen-china-ties/>.

³⁵⁴ "Argentina || U.S.-Argentina Trade Facts," Office of the United States Trade Representative, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/americas/argentina>

³⁵⁵ Enrique Dussel Peters, "Monitor of Chinese OFDI in Latin America and the Caribbean 2019," *RED ALC-CHINA*, <https://dialogochino.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Monitor-OFDI-2019english-2.pdf>

trade relations with the United States.³⁵⁶ The continuation of such trade relations is crucial to note because, although China is now Argentina's second greatest trading partner, the United States ranks closely at third.³⁵⁷ Thus, while Argentina has certainly turned more to China for trade and investment in recent years, this in no way means that the United States has fallen into obscurity. Instead, the United States, whether through the IMF of bilateral relations, remains an influential actor in relation to Argentina's economic stability.

Where Argentina has struggled to escape U.S. economic influence, it has found much greater success in challenging U.S. military control in the Southern Cone. This has often unnerved United States military personnel and brought direct criticism from high ranking members, such as SOUTHCOM commander Admiral Faller. Two developments in particular have elicited concern from U.S. officials: a 2015 agreement between President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and President Xi Jinping to purchase Chinese weaponry and establish the aforementioned space station in Patagonia. These developments have in not dramatically cut U.S. military capabilities in any meaningful way, especially considering the fact that the 2015 agreement never was implemented. However, U.S. response to China's military presence in Argentina demonstrates the powerful concern U.S. officials have for any increase of China's military in Latin America. By pursuing these developments despite this response, Argentine leaders have shown their willingness to challenge U.S. hemispheric authority and advocate for their own autonomy.

³⁵⁶ "TRADE AND INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC," Office of the United States Trade Representative, accessed April 6, 2020, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/agreements/tifa/TIFA%20US%20ARG%20ENGLISH.PDF>

³⁵⁷ "Argentina Exports, Imports and Trade Balance By Country 2017," World Bank, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/ARG/Year/2017/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>.

In respect to the sale of arms, President Fernández de Kirchner and President Xi made a series of non-legally binding agreements that encouraged greater coordination between Chinese and Argentine military forces. Importantly, this coordination included the incorporation of Chinese technology and weaponry, which far out-classed Argentina's antiquated military equipment, into various branches of Argentina's military. This included but was not limited to 14 to 20 FC-1 fourth-generation fighter jets, five P-18N corvettes (small-class warships) to establish the Argentine Navy's "*Malvinas-class*" offshore patrol mission, and 100 or more amphibious armored personnel carriers. While the transfer of these technologies and weaponry never occurred, the agreements expose two important points in relation to the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. First, the issue of sovereignty and autonomy is not merely a rhetorical issue for countries in Latin America, and Argentina's determination to someday reclaim the Malvinas is a key example of how far certain states are willing to go in order to push away European and American influence.

Second, the U.S. response to these agreements is telling. A U.S.- China Economic and Security Review Commission report released shortly after the agreement, despite recognizing that "none of these agreements entail actual legal contracts," warned that Argentina's purchase of these weapons could contribute to the "constriction of U.S. military sales" in Latin America, the "potential creation of a security hazard," the undermining of Argentine domestic stability and governance, and a "temporary intensification of [the] Falklands dispute." To be clear, the tone of this independent report was in no way alarmist. In fact, the author ultimately suggests that these developments "present no direct security threat to the United States."³⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the

³⁵⁸ Jordan Wilson, "China's Military Agreements with Argentina: A Potential New Phase in China Latin America Defense Relations," U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, November 5, 2015, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China's%20Military%20Agreements%20with%20Argentina.pdf> pp. 8-13.

government's explicit recognition of these transfers as Argentina and China against U.S. interests shows American concern even for unlikely weapons purchases.

In relation to the establishment of a space station in Patagonia, while the U.S. response to this action was already mentioned above, it is essential to note the deep concerns this station created for U.S. officials. In a report to Congress in 2019, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission argued that the space station “could be used [by China] to collect intelligence on U.S. and other foreign satellites, missile launches, and drone movements” and “interfere with or compromise communications, electronic networks, and electromagnetic systems in the Western Hemisphere.”³⁵⁹ Other comments on the facility have been less technical in nature, instead condemning China's intentions outright. For example, White House National Security Council spokesman Garrett Marquis stated that “the Patagonia ground station, agreed to in secret by a corrupt and financially vulnerable government a decade ago, is another example of opaque and predatory Chinese dealings that undermine the sovereignty of host nations.”³⁶⁰ This transparent duress shows that Argentina's rejections of U.S. military authority are meaningful and deeply troubling to American foreign policy makers.

In summation, Argentina, like Ecuador, remains highly dependent on the IMF and United States for economic support, especially in the past five years. Unlike Ecuador, however, Argentina has found success at challenging U.S. military authority in Latin America by negotiating arms deals with China and allowing China to build a space station in Patagonia. This is distinct from Ecuador's experience considering Moreno's administration has allowed the

³⁵⁹ “2019 REPORT TO CONGRESS of the U.S.-CHINA ECONOMIC AND SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, November 2019, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019%20Annual%20Report%20to%20Congress.pdf> pp. 297

³⁶⁰ Cassandra Garrison, “China's Military-Run Space Station in Argentina Is a ‘Black Box,’” *Reuters*, January 31, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-space-argentina-china-insight-idUSKCN1PP0I2>.

United States to perform routine exercises within Ecuador's borders. Ultimately, economic instability has ensured that both Ecuador and Argentina remain dependent on the IMF and United States, but Argentina's ability to maintain beneficial relations with China has allowed Argentina to find more success in navigating the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America.

Argentina and Mercosur

As Argentina has done relatively well navigating this relationship, it has been better able to preserve its autonomy and pursue an alternative to choosing between China and the United States. Specifically, Argentina has been able to strategically position itself through its membership in the regional trade bloc known as Mercosur, or Southern Common Market. Today, this bloc, founded in 1991, represents a shared \$3.4 trillion GDP between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.³⁶¹ The original agreement, the Treaty of Asuncion, affirmed these four nations' intent to establish a common market in the Southern Cone that facilitated economic development by reducing barriers to migration, investments, and trade.³⁶² Similar to the European Union, Mercosur has a central decision-making body, the Common Market Council, that functions as a forum for coordinating regional economic priorities. By establishing Mercosur, these states intended to bolster regional cooperation and empower member states' economic leverage in the world.

Despite these professed goals, Mercosur states have struggled to cooperate since its creation, and individual economic crises have thrown the organization into disarray in the past.

³⁶¹ Bolivia is soon to become a member, and Venezuela has had its membership temporarily suspended. There are a number of other observer countries, but these four make up the current full members. "Mercosur: South America's Fractious Trade Bloc," *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/background/mercotur-south-americas-fractious-trade-bloc>.

³⁶² "MERCOSUR FREE TRADE AGREEMENT," *World Trade Law*, accessed April 12, 2020 <http://www.worldtradelaw.net/document.php?id=fta/agreements/mercoturfta.pdf>

For example, in 2001, Argentina's economic crisis forced the government to grapple with currency destabilization and turn to Brazil for aid. Although Brazil was able to maintain trade with Argentina, subsequent disputes between the nations of the terms of trade in response to the crisis exposed Mercosur's weak negotiating system.³⁶³ Later in 2011, Argentina began to raise barriers to imports as part of a protectionist shift, further undermining Mercosur's free trade objectives and resulting in a significant reduction in trade between Argentina and its Mercosur partners in 2012. Questions surrounding membership also began to strain Mercosur's members. Specifically, the bloc began to create more issues for itself by suspending Paraguay and, during Paraguay's suspension, adding Venezuela to the group. Venezuela quickly became an issue because it showed no evidence of a willingness to actually adopt Mercosur's shared external tariff, although its admission facilitated the sale of oil from Venezuela to Argentina and Brazil.³⁶⁴ Overall, Mercosur has presented lofty goals that it struggled to follow for decades, and internal disputes, rather than external Chinese or American pressures, have served to undercut the regional bloc's mission.

Nevertheless, far from a failure, Mercosur has recently shown promise to help Argentina and other full member nations to increase economic growth. Mercosur's recent agreement with the EU, for instance, has shown the importance of the regional trade bloc for improving Argentina's economic standing. This deal, made in the summer of 2019, had stalled for decades over disagreements relating to agricultural tariffs, but, ironically, President Trump's trade war

³⁶³ Jeffrey W. Cason, *The Political Economy of Integration: The Experience of Mercosur* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010). Accessed May 1, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁶⁴ "Mercosur RIP?," *The Economist*, July 14, 2012, <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2012/07/14/mercosur-rip>.

with China stimulated free market movements in places like Latin America.³⁶⁵ This helped the region reach this monumental deal and secure access to one another's markets.³⁶⁶ For Argentina specifically, gaining the ability to sell beef and grain to Europe comes at a pivotal time. Now that China and the United States have reached an initial agreement regarding the trade war, Latin American countries like Argentina will see decreased business in China as trade normalizes with the United States, especially in relation to agriculture.³⁶⁷ This development is vital to note, since, by distributing its economic relations throughout the world, Mercosur enables its member nations like Argentina to escape dangerous dependence on markets in places like China, which, as the cooling of the trade war shows, can quickly become less reliable.

In this way, despite Mercosur's inconsistent implementation of free trade policies and internal conflict, the regional bloc serves as a serious option for Argentina and its other member nations to advocate for greater autonomy and develop Latin America's economies through integration. This marks a key way in which Argentina's positioning in the evolving relationship between, China, the United States, and Latin America differs from Ecuador. Although Argentina, like Ecuador, is far from exercising largely unrestricted autonomy in the 21st century, Argentina's ability to navigate competition between China and the United States without completely folding under foreign pressures has allowed Argentina to retain a moderate negotiating power and better chances at pursuing greater autonomy through regional bloc's like Mercosur.

³⁶⁵ Ernesto Londoño, Shasta Darlington, and Daniel Politi, "'World Upside Down': As Trump Pushes Tariffs, Latin America Links Up," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/18/world/americas/trump-trade-latin-america.html>.

³⁶⁶ Shasta Darlington, "E.U. and Four Latin American Nations Reach a Trade Deal," *The New York Times*, June 28, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/world/americas/eu-four-latin-american-nations-trade-deal.html>.

³⁶⁷ Keith Bradsher, "China Poised to Buy More From U.S., at the Expense of U.S. Allies," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2020, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/business/economy/china-us-trade-deal-allies.html>.

Conclusion

Ecuador serves as an example of a vulnerable Latin American country in this evolving relation for the various reasons discussed above. Although driven by the same historic desire as in Argentina, China's relationship with Ecuador has been far more exploitive than in Argentina. This is for two main reasons. First, Chinese relations with Ecuador and the rest of Latin America picked up during Ecuador's default and economic crisis, giving Ecuador great need and few alternatives for international financing. Although Argentina experienced a similar crisis, the situation had relatively stabilized by the time major Chinese investments began to pour into the country around 2005. This meant that Argentina established less dependence on China and was in a better position to negotiate the terms of BRI agreements. Second, political corruption enabled Ecuadorian leaders to allow Chinese officials and businesses to exploit their economy and natural resources. As these leaders lined their pockets, BRI projects were completed under little scrutiny and, operating at reduced productivity, offered limited benefits to Ecuador's economy. Meanwhile, in Argentina, although political corruption is a major part Argentina's political system, domestic legal barriers and Sinophobia led to higher levels of scrutiny of BRI projects and, consequently, more beneficial projects for Argentina.

Eventually, economic desperation led Moreno's government to turn back to the United States, sacrificing autonomy to the U.S. and IMF in hopes of gaining control in the future. Here, Argentina and Ecuador are very similar in their continued dependence on the United States and IMF, but Argentina has been able to maintain more significant relations with China and reject U.S. authority in Latin America than Ecuador. While Ecuador's heavy dependence on China translated into heavy dependence on the United States, Argentina's more moderate dependence on China has led to more moderate dependence on the United States. A notable exception to this

trend is Argentina's dependence on IMF, which, as in Ecuador, continues to push for austerity reforms in Argentina.

As Ecuador found itself caught in a challenging position between China and the United States, its growing dependence on these states made Ecuador's pursuit of a third way through the ALBA-TCP unsustainable. Trade with China ensured that Ecuador's economy retained its primary-goods export model, meaning that Ecuador would have struggled to make ALBA-TCP economic reforms if attempted. Subsequent dependence on the United States ensured that President Moreno was in no strategic position to challenge American authority, and Ecuador likely left the ALBA-TCP to maintain relations with the United States. Meanwhile, as discussed below, Argentina has been able to continue developing its own regional economic bloc under Mercosur. Although Mercosur's success has also been relatively limited, Argentina's continued participation in this regional bloc demonstrates its comparatively greater capability to pursue autonomy in the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. Whether Ecuador will eventually be able to alter its dependent position in this relationship is unclear, but, for now, Ecuador continues to struggle to achieve historically desired autonomy.

After comparing Ecuador's and Argentina's experiences with the BRI, it is now clear that, while there are many similarities between these two cases, a few key distinctions help explain why Ecuador has had less success than Argentina in navigating this evolving relationship. Both Ecuadorian and Argentine leaders make choices guided by a historically constructed desire for autonomy. However, expressions and interpretations of this desire manifest differently in each country, and, importantly, the personal aspirations of leaders in Ecuador led to significant failures related to BRI projects. Other external factors also contributed to Ecuador's difficult relations with China, namely its lack of access to alternative forms of

finance. Conversely, internal pressures within Argentina led leaders to approach BRI projects with greater scrutiny. Domestic political barriers and Sinophobia impeded the BRI's implementation within Argentina, but this hesitant acceptance of Chinese financing paradoxically strengthened Argentina's ties with China without creating extreme dependence.

As Ecuador's economy struggled under the weight of foreign debt and Moreno turned back to the United States, Argentina likewise renewed its dependence on the IMF. Yet Argentina maintained the United States at an arm's length, unlike Ecuador. Ultimately, Ecuador's growing dependence on the U.S. led Moreno to leave the ALBA-TCP, severing ties with an organization rooted (at least rhetorically) in a shared historic desire for greater autonomy. Contrary to that experience, Argentina was able to maintain membership in Mercosur and even participate in critical deals that allow the Argentine economy to brace for China's potential turn away from Argentine agriculture.

These important differences between Ecuador and Argentina inform our understanding of the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. More importantly, this analysis deconstructs the metaphorical representation of Latin American states as caught between two impossible choices, between Scylla & Charybdis. Alternatively, as President Moreno put it: "when two elephants fight, the ones who lose are the insects who are of course being crushed by the elephants in the attempt to evade them."³⁶⁸ This wrongheaded interpretation of the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America neglects the very real agency Latin American states like Ecuador and Argentina have in navigating this relationship. As seen in Argentina, even in the face of a desperate economic crisis

³⁶⁸ Keegan Elmer, "Latin America Trade Grows as China and US Tussle for Influence," *South China Morning Post*, July 28, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3020246/latin-america-trade-grows-china-and-us-tussle-influence>.

and historic dependence on foreign markets, playing China and the United States against one another and finding alternatives through Mercosur allowed Argentine leaders to prevent Argentina's capitulation to these powers. In Ecuador, on the other hand, political corruption and over-dependence on foreign capital made it so Ecuador's leaders have struggled to see their situation as anything other than a choice between China and the United States.

Conclusion

While I was studying abroad at La Universidad de Salvador in Buenos Aires, my “Geopolitica” professor made an interesting assertion about the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. Roughly, he said:

“All nations participate in the great game of power, but they see the game differently. Latin American countries like Argentina? Che, we are playing checkers. We don’t see many moves ahead, and we barely plan for what will happen next year. The United States? They are playing chess. They see a few moves ahead, and they plan for what will happen in the next 8-10 years. China? China is playing Go. They see many moves ahead, and they plan for what will happen in the next 100 years.”

This metaphor, to me, was so interesting not because of my professor’s intended meaning, but because of the subtle assumption that lay underneath this metaphor. My professor was using the metaphor in the context of comparing institutionalized foreign policy makers in Latin America, the United States, and China. His intention was to show us how political fluctuation makes it more difficult for a state to maintain consistent, farsighted foreign policy objects. Underneath this meaning, however, lay the assumption that each state makes about international relations. That is, they see “a great game of power” in which there is a clear opponent. This view of international relations is pervasive and problematic. It assumes that there is no choice in international relations for cooperation, when, in reality, that choice is ever-present.

An Evolving Relationship: The Belt and Road Initiative

This research has explored the complicated, evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America by analyzing their relationship with one another and the BRI. In doing so, it has shown that China’s rapid rise as a formidable geopolitical power, the United States’ mixed response to that rise, and Latin American states’ struggle to avoid exploitation and benefit from this evolving relationship are all guided by central historic ideas. National

humiliation, American exceptionalism, and the struggle for autonomy have shaped and continue to affect the interests of these states, creating a broad spectrum of choice within which each actor pursues its goals. Furthermore, this research has illustrated how and why these core historic ideas have led many actors within this relationship to favor conflict over cooperation.

In China, the overwhelming need to assuage national humiliation has led the rising power to engage in expansionist policies that pose a direct challenge to U.S. global dominance. This need has also led Chinese leaders and companies to expand relations with Latin American countries like Ecuador and Argentina, sometimes putting narrow self-interest over mutually beneficial ties. President Xi's lion metaphor points to the ambivalence inherent in China's rise. While China's BRI may increase trade and foreign investment and improve living conditions for citizens in participating countries, it may also increase debt and dependence and bring environmental, social, and corruption risks.

In the United States, the inferiority complex created by American exceptionalism has driven its leaders to view any move made by China as a hostile attack against core American values, whether across the Pacific or in its own, self-proclaimed, "backyard." Aggressive intervention/interference in the politics of Ecuador and Argentina by the United States in the name of promoting democracy and capitalism have escalated the conflict between China and the United States, and U.S. actions abroad have likewise confounded opportunities for meaningful cooperation between China, the United States, and Latin America. This conflict-oriented policy is not an inevitable conclusion of the "Thucydides Trap," as the historical analogy would suggest. Instead, it is the outgrowth of American exceptionalism, a historical self-conceptualization that has pushed American foreign policy makers towards pursuing conflict-

oriented “solutions.” In essence, Vice President Mike Pence’s “they will fail” mentality dictates American foreign policy, whether in the South China Sea or in the Western Hemisphere.³⁶⁹

Lastly, Latin American states’ historical struggle for autonomy has guided various leaders to attempt to play these great powers against one another. In Ecuador, Correa, seeing the United States as a fundamental threat to Ecuador’s autonomy, turned to China for financial relief. Shortly after, Moreno, under the enormous pressure of Chinese loans and failed infrastructure projects, turned back to the United States in order to attempt to gain control over the economy. Eventually, Ecuador’s pursuit of an alternative to these great powers tapered off, and Ecuador left the ALBA-TCP. Meanwhile, in Argentina, leaders were successfully able to benefit from the BRI and maintain relations with the United States while still cultivating Mercosur. Nevertheless, while the situation was comparatively less dire, Sinophobia and anti-Americanism greatly influenced policy makers in Argentina, and the risk that Argentina may succumb to a fate similar to Ecuador is real. Ecuador’s leaders struggled because they saw autonomy as a choice between Scylla and Charybdis, while Argentine leaders saw a more complicated choice, one with a viable third way. Regardless, both states viewed this evolving relationship with “some suspicion,” as Eduardo Hughes Galeano suggested. Where this suspicion was insufficient, each nation suffered, losing some of the very autonomy they desperately sought.³⁷⁰

Clearly, national humiliation, American exceptionalism, and the struggle for autonomy have shaped and continue to affect the interests of these states. Understanding the role these collective historic memories play in each state’s foreign policy explains why states make the

³⁶⁹ Mike Pence, “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China”, The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>

³⁷⁰ Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (London: Profile Books, 2009), pp. 267.

choices they do. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that historically constructed ideas and interests shape the complicated, evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America.

The Persistence of Realism

Furthermore, this research has illustrated how and why these collective historic ideas have led many actors within this relationship to favor conflict over cooperation. In all three cases, foreign policy makers have demonstrated an understanding of international relations rooted in distrust and antagonism. This is because, for all these actors, Realism persists as the dominant understanding as how to achieve the state's interests. There are three primary reasons for this dominance of Realism. First, Realism is simply the oldest, most widely accepted school of thought in International relations since the 5th century B.C.E. Even today, Realist thinkers from ancient times are evoked in modern international relations. The two most glaring examples are Sun Tzu, author of the *Art of War*, and Thucydides, author of *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, both of whom are regularly called upon by generals and politicians alike.³⁷¹ These ancient understandings of Realism are then layered with more contemporary examples, ranging anywhere from Bismarck to Putin.³⁷² When compared to Liberal Institutionalism, which emerged with United States President Woodrow Wilson at the start of the 20th century, and Constructivism, which only really became popularized by Alexander Wendt in the 1990s, it is unsurprising that Realism's long history gives it a cutting edge in interpreting international relations.

³⁷¹ W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, "Political Realism in International Relations," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/realism-intl-relations/>; Andrew Valls, *Ethics in International Affairs: Theories and Cases* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 15.

³⁷² Otto Pflanze, "Bismarck's 'Realpolitik,'" *The Review of Politics* 20, no. 4 (1958): 492–514; John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.

Second, Realism conforms to many masculine tendencies. Since foreign policy making is overwhelmingly dominated by men, it is even less surprising that Realism is the dominant view among Chinese, American, and Latin American foreign policy makers. As Feminist international relations theorist J. Ann Tickner, a distinguished scholar at American University, writes “strength, power, autonomy, independence, and rationality” are all characteristics typically associated with men as well as Realism. Furthermore, Tickner argues that “hegemonic masculinity,” which is “a type of culturally dominant masculinity that... is a socially constructed cultural ideal,” ultimately “sustains patriarchal authority and legitimizes a patriarchal political and social order.” This hegemonic masculinity, while prevalent in all societies, is most apparent “in the realm of international politics, where the characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity are projected onto the behavior of states whose success as international actors is measured in terms of their power capabilities and capacity for self-help and autonomy,” i.e. through Realist, masculine terms.³⁷³ Clearly, gender disparities in the foreign policy making institutions similarly reinforces the persistence of Realism.

Third, the historically-constructed ideas of China, the United States, and Latin American countries are all predicated upon a level of insecurity and distrust. China seeks to restore its historic legacy, America seeks to preserve its historic legacy, and Latin American states seek to shed their historic legacy. In each case, the states involved fear the actions of the others. The opening quotes at the beginning of this paper reflect this sentiment well. Xi Jinping attempts to assure the world it need not fear (or impede) China’s rise, subtly reflecting his concerns that other states will attempt to suppress China’s rise. Less subtly, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence vehemently accuses China of challenging the United States, asserting America’s commitment to

³⁷³ J. Ann Tickner, “Gender in International Relations : Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security” *Political Science Quarterly*, 1993, 108. 10.2307/2080425.

maintain U.S. hegemony across the Pacific. Lastly, Eduardo Hughes Galeano suggests that no power can be trusted, highlighting Latin American distrust of intervening global powers like China and the United States. These states and their leaders view other powers as hostile and malicious, resulting in a conflict-oriented understanding of the world. Although this conflict-oriented understanding does not preclude all alternative interpretations of international relations, it overwhelmingly leans towards a Realist perspective. Accordingly, these states continue to act as though international anarchy defines international relations, treat cooperation with suspicion and hesitation, and, ultimately, emulate Realist principles.

Realism persists in these states because of its legacy, the overwhelming masculine imbalance within foreign policy, and each state's historic insecurities. Because the foreign policy makers involved in this evolving relationship have adopted the lens which expects conflict—Realism—they paradoxically increase the chances of conflict through aggression.

Correspondingly, China and the United States vie for military, economic, political, and cultural power while Latin American countries attempt to capitalize on this shifting relationship without losing autonomy. The BRI intensifies this conflict, manifesting as a point of contention rather than cooperation.

Constructivism and the BRI

Galeano's quote, unlike that of President Xi or Vice President Pence, holds great nuance. By suggesting that the great powers of the world be held in suspicion, Galeano highlights the need of Latin American countries to recognize uncertainty. Many great powers will seek to take advantage of Latin America, but some, when scrutinized, can nevertheless bring rewards. By recognizing that conflict is not inevitable and that there are opportunities for cooperation even in deals made with great powers, Galeano avoids Realism's destructive self-fulfillment. Yet by

recognizing the likelihood of conflict in international relations and recommending suspicion, he likewise dispels the overoptimistic perspective of Liberal Institutionalists. In this way, Galeano's quote reflects a Constructivist perspective, which most accurately depicts this evolving relationship and its connection with the BRI. Conflict is not inevitable, and neither is cooperation. States have a choice. Thus, despite the claims of my professor, it perhaps seems as though Latin Americans have the clearest perspective of international relations.

As this research has demonstrated, the popular understanding of international relations and history, that conflict is inevitable and states must act accordingly, is self-defeating for all involved: there are no winners. As China and the United States jockey for global dominance and Latin American countries are continuously drawn into the conflict, international peace is jeopardized, social justice within all of these states is undermined, and the environment is ravaged potentially beyond repair. These are issues exacerbated by conflict that could be resolved through cooperation. The advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only highlighted this need for cooperation in a world in which crises, and hopefully solutions, transcend borders. These solutions only emerge, however, when we choose to cooperate and overcome historically constructed antagonisms.

Like Galeano, another scholar once recognized the importance of choice. Although he is often labeled a champion of Realism, closer readings of Henry Kissinger's earlier works suggest that he too recognized the reality of choice. In his unpublished senior thesis, Kissinger challenged Immanuel Kant's understanding of the impact that history's inevitable end, "perpetual peace," had on an individual's freedom. He wrote:

"Whatever one's conception about the necessity of events, at the moment of their performance their inevitability could offer no guide to action... However we may explain

actions in retrospect, their accomplishment occurred with the inner conviction of choice.”³⁷⁴

Kissinger suggests that regardless of individuals’ understanding of history, that understanding provides them no obvious answer to how to address a situation. Thus, individuals are always making a choice. In international relations, this situation is no different. Each actor in the evolving relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America makes a choice between conflict and cooperation. They make these choices based on their understanding of whether their core interests clash or coincide. To Kissinger, “foreign policy can seek to merge competing core interests—and that is the means of turning confrontation into cooperation,” meaning by reconceptualizing these interests, and, correspondingly, deep seated historic ideas.³⁷⁵ Importantly, these actors are not monolithic, homogenous entities, but complex networks of individuals, each with uneven, fluctuating influence on a state’s foreign policy choices. These complicated networks make the actions of states difficult to understand, and their choices nearly impossible to predict.

Re-conceptualizing Geopolitics, History, and International Relations

Yet geopolitics, international relations theory, and history are used to predict the choices of states every day. History especially is treated as the key to predicting and explaining the actions of a state. In every case, although these fields may provide guidance, they merely help us cope with the only true inevitability in the world: uncertainty. As demonstrated throughout this research, we use metaphors and historical analogies in an attempt to understand the world as it is, was, and will be. However, in doing so, we distort our understanding of the world with

³⁷⁴ Henry Kissinger, “The Meaning of History,” unpublished, in Niall Ferguson, “The Meaning of Kissinger,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 10, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-08-18/meaning-kissinger>.

³⁷⁵ Henry Kissinger and Jeffrey Goldberg, “World Chaos and World Order: Conversations With Henry Kissinger,” *The Atlantic*, November 10, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/kissinger-order-and-chaos/506876/>.

imaginary representations and stretched comparisons. The nature of language itself, ever encompassing yet ever limited, makes it impossible for us to ever truly articulate what is happening in the world. Empiricism in all fields—geopolitics, history, international relations, and science—is an illusion.³⁷⁶ There are no tangible truths, even in history, only that which we believe.

Kissinger speaks to this point as well—“what ‘really’ happened is often less important than what is thought to have happened”—but still recognizes why history is important. By using history not as an analog to the present, but, as done in this research, as a way to understand how “the memory of states” impact their “interpretation of the present in light of the past,” we can dissect states’ complicated decision-making processes without relying on skewed comparisons.³⁷⁷ Essentially, this research recognizes that history as it “really” happened is less useful for determining how a state will act than how a state *believes* it happened. When this type of history, one that recognizes the historic memory of states, is applied to geopolitics and international relations without distorting metaphors or convoluted analogies, we can begin to understand how our historically constructed ideas and interests shape our choices, and, therefore, history.

The global struggle between China, the United States, and Latin America, characterized by conflict-oriented decision-making processes, is self-defeating for all involved: there are no winners. As China and the United States jockey for global dominance and Latin American countries are continuously drawn into the conflict, international peace is jeopardized, social justice within all of these states is undermined, and the environment is ravaged potentially

³⁷⁶ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (HarperCollins, 2007), 174-176.

³⁷⁷ Kissinger, “The Meaning of History.”

beyond repair. The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic has only clarified the dangers of taking hostile positions during a time when significant cooperation is necessary to address the crisis. As this research has demonstrated, however, that conflict is not inevitable. Although arduous, it is possible for states to pursue historical re-conceptualization and challenge dominant, conflict-oriented historical narratives that are widely accepted across the country. Through nationwide reflection and re-evaluation of dominant historical narratives, all states within this evolving relationship could cultivate collective historic memories that facilitate cooperation rather than conflict. Such a powerful reorientation would require serious shifts in the teaching of history. Moreover, if we are to avoid the dangers of a self-fulfilling Realist world, we must reconsider our understanding of geopolitics, international relations, and history.

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