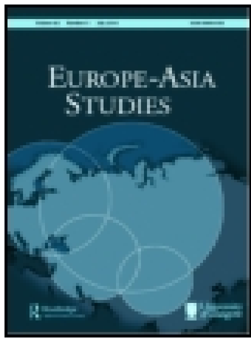

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Charm Offensive or Offensive Charm? An Analysis of Russian and Chinese Cultural Institutes Abroad

MILOS POPOVIC, ERIN K. JENNE & JURAJ MEDZIHORSKY

Abstract

Major powers have long used cultural institutes to enhance their appeal in foreign countries. As aspirant powers, Russia and China have recently launched cultural institutes of their own with the aim of improving their international reputations. However, the location and operations of the Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes often seem to run counter to these aims. Drawing on policy diffusion theory (PDT), we argue that these choices are less the product of strategic calculation than of policy emulation and decoupling. Using a mixed methods approach, we show that, while the Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes were modelled after their Western counterparts (emulation), China and Russia have operated their institutes in ways that go against the principles of cultural diplomacy (decoupling). An analysis of field research on these institutes suggests more overall decoupling with Confucius Institutes than with Russkiy Mir Institutes, which might help account for the relatively greater backlash against the Confucius Institutes in their host countries.

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, THE RUSSIAN AND CHINESE governments launched parallel campaigns of cultural diplomacy to increase their appeal abroad. As aspirant great powers, both states marketed their distinctive brands through state-sponsored cultural institutes and other government organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs). Besides sponsoring international media activities, publications, exchanges and sports events, Beijing introduced cultural institutes in 2004, named after the Chinese philosopher, Confucius. Confucius Institutes are established in partnership with educational institutes in foreign countries using a cost-sharing scheme to provide language and cultural instruction

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at primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions. At the same time, Russia launched its own campaign of foreign influence by establishing media networks such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik*, think tanks and foundations. In 2007, Moscow rolled out new cultural institutes, the Russkiy Mir Institutes and Cabinets, dedicated to offering cultural and language services to foreign publics to enhance Russia's international image though a 'cross-culture dialog and strengthening understanding between cultures and peoples'.[1] These campaigns have raised red flags in the West. In 2014, the American Association of University Professors warned that 'most agreements establishing Confucius Institutes [represent] unacceptable concessions to the political aims and practices of the government of China' (AAUP 2014). Since that time, a number of other Western universities, including McMaster University in Toronto, the Université de Sherbrooke in Quebec, the Université de Lyon, Pennsylvania State University and Stockholm University have closed their Confucius Institutes, citing issues ranging from human rights to academic freedom to security concerns.[2] As of January 2020, at least 29 of the Confucius Institutes established in the United States have been shuttered over charges of academic censorship and opaque hiring practices, among other things (Legerwood 2020). Although the backlash against Confucius Institutes is partly due to rising geopolitical tensions between the US and China, Confucius Institutes have also encountered significant backlash in other Western societies. By contrast, Russkiy Mir Institutes have encountered far less pushback from their host countries, despite warnings by some scholars that Russia is pursuing a campaign of insidious influence through 'Trojan Horses' in Europe (Polyakova *et al*. 2016; Orenstein & Kelemen 2017). Nonetheless, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education banned all cooperation between the Russkiy Mir Foundation and Ukrainian educational institutions from 2015.[3] Why have Beijing and Moscow used their cultural institutes in ways that generate hostility in their host countries and why have the Confucius Institutes attracted more negative reactions than the Russkiy Mir Institutes, particularly in the West? Joseph Nye (2013) argues that China and Russia are simply bad at cultural outreach in Western countries, which requires the kind of open dialogue that authoritarian regimes simply cannot deliver. Others contend that these are simply the growing pains of aspirant powers, which can be overcome with the development of better communication strategies (Ding 2008; Callahan & Barabantseva 2011; Holyk 2011; Blanchard & Lu 2012). However, neither theory can explain why the Confucius Institutes attracted greater international blowback than the Russkiy Mir Institutes.

Drawing on policy diffusion theory (PDT) (Meyer *et al*. 1992, 1997), we argue that Beijing and Moscow adopted elements of other major powers' cultural institutes in order to achieve similar levels of public relations success (emulation). However, in practice, they have established and operated their institutes in the service of narrower political interests,

[1]While the Institutes disseminate Russian art, history, culture, music and other popular content, the role of the Cabinets is to promote the Russian language and serve as an information hub for Russian compatriots. See, 'Russian Center—Definition and Mission', Russkiy Mir Cabinet, available at: https://russkiymir.ru/en/rucenter/what-is2.php, accessed 25 May 2020.

[2]'Confucius Institutes Under Scrutiny in UK', *European Interest*, 20 February 2019, available at: https://www.europeaninterest.eu/article/confucius-institutes-scrutiny-uk/, accessed 25 May 2020.

[3]'If We Were Given Big Budgets—The Russian Flag Would Be All Over the World', Russkiy Mir Foundation, 31 July 2015, available at: https://russkiymir.ru/en/publications/193690/?fbclid=IwAR3Mw1Y5L_vqX30_SQz53wqSlMjD5vgsnub3Y3oyAISG8-567GSi-5xqK-U, accessed 3 January 2019.

which frequently collide with the principles of cultural diplomacy (decoupling). Since Moscow's geopolitical ambitions extend primarily to neighbouring countries with shared cultural values, there has been less decoupling between diplomatic principles and practice in the case of the Russkiy Mir Institutes. By contrast, China has overwhelmingly placed its Confucius Institutes at top universities in Western democratic countries that have divergent values, making them poor candidates for cultural outreach. We find evidence for emulation in the internal organisation of the Russkiy Mir Institutes and Confucius Institutes and in the mission statements of their founders. We find support for decoupling by conducting an analysis of an original dataset of Chinese and Russian institutes as well as a synthetic review of studies on the day-to-day operations of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes.

Our article is structured as follows. We first outline the main question—the variable placement and reaction to Chinese and Russian cultural institutes. We then lay out the argument that policy diffusion helps us make sense of why China and, to a lesser extent, Russia have adopted Western blueprints of soft power, only to subvert them in practice. We examine the evidence using quantitative analysis of our dataset of cultural institutes and a review of field studies of their operations on the ground. The final section summarises our findings and offers policy advice.

Cultural diplomacy and soft power

Soft power can be defined as 'the idea that others will align themselves to you and your policy preferences because they are attracted to your political and social system, values and policies' (Breslin 2011, p. 8). It denotes the ability of a country to influence other societies around the world through agenda-setting, attraction and persuasion (Nye 1990, 2006, 2011; Parmar & Cox 2010; Ilgen 2016). Soft power is not a substitute for, but rather a handmaiden of, statecraft. If a country enjoys soft power in another country, the first country might be able to achieve its policy goals in the second country through persuasion, rather than conditionality, sanctions or military force. Soft power is thus a latent and lateral resource that enhances a country's foreign influence.

Cultural diplomacy, a form of 'people-to-people' engagement, is used by governments to boost their soft power in foreign countries. It consists of a lateral exchange of cultural products such as literature, music or sports 'with the intention of fostering mutual understanding' (UN Security Council 1997). In practice, the sponsor state uses public outreach to garner popular favour in the host state. However, the success of such programmes is dependent upon a relationship of trust and understanding between the sponsor and the host states. Cultural diplomacy may only find fertile ground in an environment of open dialogue and a commitment to investing in a long-term relationship on the part of both states (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried 2010). Where such programmes are politicised, they can engender a backlash in the host state. When the sponsor state is called out by citizens or representatives of the host state for any of these reasons, it finds itself in a second bind: the sponsor state cannot counter the criticisms directly because doing so will be seen as propagandistic, further undermining its credibility (Nye 2011). Cultural institutes can help to square this circle. Cultural institutes are a type of government-sponsored non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) that serve as a

surrogate for the sponsor state within the host state. The aim of cultural institutes is to build popular appeal for the sponsor state not only by offering non-controversial cultural products to the public of the host state, but also by serving as a nominally independent, in-country advocate for the sponsor state. By emphasising language, customs and art, cultural institutes help to promote a benign image of the sponsor state, playing down the more controversial elements of its foreign policy practices.

Historically, cultural institutes have been used for relatively modest goals such as maintaining linkages with ethnic diasporas in foreign countries or building popular support for specific policy initiatives. Prior to World War I, the British government encouraged missionaries, entrepreneurs, artists and intellectuals to spread its cultural practices throughout the globe without necessarily bankrolling their efforts (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried 2010, p. 18). Starting in the late nineteenth century, cultural institutes were explicitly used to enhance the sponsor state's standing on the international stage. In 1883, for instance, France established the Alliance française, formally an NGO, as a means of rebuilding the country's prestige after its humiliating defeat in the Franco–Prussian war (Paschalidis 2009, p. 278). In the interwar period, the UK launched the British Council 'to counteract Nazi plans for global cultural hegemony' (Hartig 2012, p. 57). After World War II, Germany established the Goethe Institute in order to rebuild its image abroad (Pamment 2013, p. 12; Varga 2013, p. 444). By the twentieth century, cultural institutes had become a *sine qua non* of great power status. Paschalidis argues, in fact, that 'until 1989 external cultural policy were the prerogative of the major powers' (Paschalidis 2009, p. 283). Great Britain and France deployed them around the world in the name of *mission civilisatrice* or in today's terminology, development missions. The British Council and Alliance française claim to promote democracy, human rights, openness to other societies and market liberalism. To do so, they foster open, horizontal dialogue with the host society (Melissen 2011).

While the British Council and Alliance française are among the best-known examples of GONGOs, cultural organisations of various types have been used by the United States. As one former State Department official put it, the United States 'would not engage in competitive propaganda but would endeavour slowly, carefully and meticulously to construct solid foundations for cultural interchange' (Arndt 2005, p. 58). The slow pace of outreach was designed to establish long-term lateral bonds between the two states by building an inter-societal reservoir of goodwill. It is through these bonds that the sponsor state can reassure the host state of its own benevolence in times of doubt. In the words of Robert L. Johnson, co-founder of the United States Information Agency, cultural diplomacy serves as a conduit for American ideas to influence the view of foreign nations 'so that understanding may replace suspicion' (Arndt 2005, p. 267). Cultural institutes are thus a vital element in the diplomatic toolkit because they help to build and maintain the foundation of inter-societal trust between the sponsor and host, generating politically valuable goodwill in the host state.

Why are some cultural institutes better at performing this function than others? To answer this question, we turn to the principles of soft power developed by Joseph Nye and extended by other scholars. In our reading, four stand out as particularly important to cultural diplomacy (see Table 1). First, there should be cultural similarities between the sponsor and host states because a common cultural, ethnic or religious identity lays the foundation

TABLE 1
NYE'S CONDITIONS OF SUCCESSFUL CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

(1) Cultural similarities	*Cultural diplomacy is most likely to succeed with societies that have a common set of values or identities.* 'Even when honestly applied, US values can repel some people at the same time that they attract others. For example, American feminism, open sexuality, and individual choices are profoundly subversive in patriarchal societies.' (Nye 2004, p. 55)
(2) Economic ties	*Host societies might be more open to cultural diplomacy from countries with which they have stronger economic ties.* '[Indochina's] heavy reliance on China's economic incentives and political support has made Beijing much more comfortable about exercising its soft power initiatives based upon strong bilateral ties.' (Hsiao & Yang 2014, p. 25)
(3) Political similarities	*Cultural diplomacy is more likely to succeed if its participants share similar political values and institutions.* 'For a long time, the calculation was made exclusively on an economic basis. They thought that if we go forward with an economic project then everything will end up in the right place. But our economy did not develop as quickly as we might like because the image of Russia was inadequate.' (Dougherty 2013, p. 24) 'Individualism and liberties are attractive to many people, but repulsive to some, particularly fundamentalists.' (Nye 2004, p. 55) 'Soviet authorities … did not know how to package Soviet modernity and progress so that it was appealing and competitive to capitalist, i.e. American audiences.' (Magnúsdóttir 2010, p. 67)
(4) Open intercultural dialogue	*Cultural diplomacy is more likely to succeed within an open intercultural dialogue.* 'Techniques of public diplomacy that are widely viewed as propaganda cannot produce soft power. In an age of information, the scarcest resources are attention and credibility. That is why exchange programs that develop two-way communication and personal relations among students and young leaders are often far more effective generators of soft power than, say, official broadcasting.' (Nye 2018)

for smoother cross-cultural communication. Nye (2008, p. 95) argued that when a government targets culturally dissimilar societies or disregards negative feedback from host societies, it can undermine its soft power potential. Second, having a common political identity aids diplomacy because the host society may trust the political intentions of the sponsor state. Third, strong economic ties between the sponsor and host states facilitate cultural diplomacy due to the recognition by the host society that the economic futures of the two states are joined. The US government, for example, has used public–private partnerships to complement its economic expansion into foreign markets (Rosenberg 2011). Finally, an open, two-way dialogue must be maintained to forge inter-societal bonds of trust across the sponsor and host states.

In light of these principles, the placement of Chinese and Russian cultural institutes around the world raises questions. In 1987, Beijing established the Office of Chinese Language Council International (informally known as *Hanban*), a government entity affiliated with the Ministry of Education and tasked with promoting the instruction of Chinese abroad, among other things. Since 2004, Beijing has invested at least US$500 million to establish 530 Confucius Institutes at partnering universities and colleges and 631 Confucius Classrooms in primary and secondary schools in 127 countries. Each Confucius Institute was established by *Hanban* in cooperation with the Chinese

government and the host country's affiliated institute or university. Currently, China operates 480 Confucius Institutes worldwide.[4]

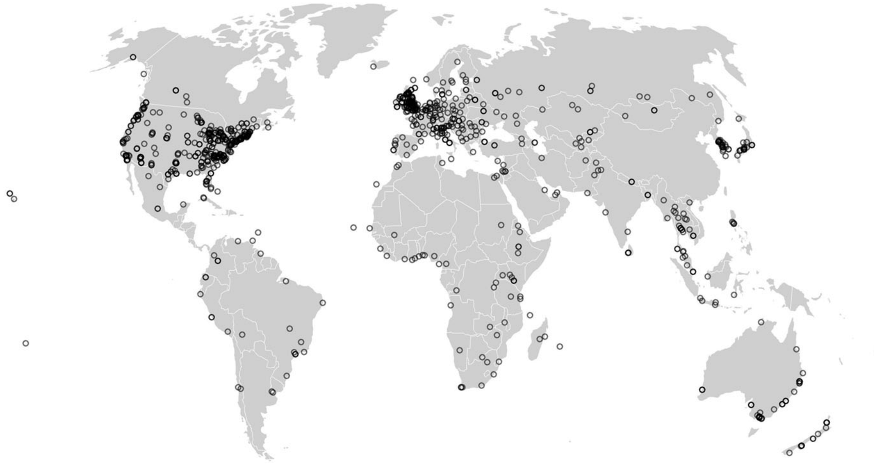
For its part, Russia has founded 235 Russkiy Mir Institutes in 70 countries since 2007 under the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which is tasked with promoting the Russian language abroad under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education. Figure 1 shows that the cultural institutes cluster geographically—Confucius Institutes are overwhelmingly located in Western countries, with the US alone hosting one third of them. By contrast, Russkiy Mir Institutes are primarily located in Russia's neighbourhood (Ukraine, Central Asia and the Baltic states).

These patterns suggest that conventional accounts of Russian and Chinese soft power policies are, at the very least, incomplete. According to one influential theory, Russia and China place their cultural institutes in the West to propagate an alternative vision of global governance. Their ultimate aim is to beat the West at its own soft power game by competing quite literally on their own turf (Lankina & Niemczyk 2014; Bermeo 2016; Diamond *et al*. 2016; Walker 2016). According to Diamond *et al*. (2016), 'a new global competition in soft power is thus underway' in which both China and Russia have attempted to soften their image abroad or even promote authoritarianism. Cooley (2015) likewise warns that Russian and Chinese soft power poses grave threats to the democratic West; and Walker (2016) argues that the institutes serve to thwart democratisation in the developing world through autocracy promotion. Still others claim that the real aim of these campaigns is merely to shore up popular support at home (Edney 2015). Nearly all of these authors, however, construe Russian and Chinese cultural diplomacy as a direct attempt to compete for the hearts and minds of people living in Western and/or liberal democratic societies. However, many Confucius Institutes and most Russkiy Mir Institutes are placed not in democratic countries, but in countries that trade with the sponsor state. Although China does disproportionately target democracies, it pays more attention to university ranking and country wealth in its placement. In other words, the location of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes suggests a more complex story than direct competition with Western democracies.

More sympathetic scholars argue that China and Russia have yet to figure out how to conduct cultural diplomacy and offer suggestions as to how they might do so more skilfully. Among other things, they recommend that Beijing develop its 'normative resources' (Ding 2008, p. 44; Callahan & Barabantseva 2011) and 'instrumental characteristics' (Holyk 2011; Blanchard & Lu 2012). Others explore how Confucius Institutes affect host societies, the linkage between Confucius Institutes and overseas Chinese, and the role of Confucius Institutes in improving inter-governmental relations (Smith *et al*. 2009; Starr 2009; Pan 2013). While this body of work yields important policy insights into how aspirant powers can boost their cultural attractiveness, it does not address why the aspirant powers would locate and operate their institutes in ways that seem ill-suited for growing their international prestige.

[4] 'Confucius Institutes Worldwide', University of California Los Angeles, available at: https://www.confucius.ucla.edu/about-us/confucius-institutes-worldwide, accessed 25 May 2020.

Confucius Institutes and Classrooms



Russkiy Mir Institutes and Cabinets

FIGURE 1. Confucius Institutes and Classrooms (2004–2015) and Russkiy Mir Institutes and Cabinets (2007–2015)
Source: The official *Hanban* website, available at: http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm, accessed 25 May 2020; the official website of The Russkiy Mir Foundation, available at: https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1_j-kesjnVWTlM9AIlR43_ROnGro&usp=sharing, accessed 25 May 2020.

We believe that both camps may have overstated the top-down instrumentality of Chinese and Russian cultural diplomacy. Our analysis of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes tells a story of policy emulation and decoupling whereby Russia and China adopted past models of cultural diplomacy without fully adopting the soft power principles upon which their effectiveness depends. This decoupling between institutional design and implementation, particularly of Confucius Institutes in liberal democratic societies, may help to account for the sometimes hostile reactions Confucius Institutes

have encountered in the US, Canada, Australia, France, Germany and Sweden. The section below lays out the policy diffusion argument in detail.

Cultural diplomacy and policy diffusion

Policy diffusion theory (PDT) holds that ideas and identities are not only socially constructed, but transmitted or diffused from one social setting to another through transnational activist networks (Keck & Sikkink 1999), epistemic communities (Haas 1992) and norm entrepreneurs (Mintrom & Norman 2009). There are two interrelated mechanisms by which policies diffuse from one government to another. The first mechanism is inter-state competition and incremental learning. Rather than creating policies from scratch, governments search for general policy models that have a record of success in similar states, anticipating that these models will yield similar material benefits to the adoptee (Jones-Correa 2000; Elkins & Simmons 2005). In welfare, tax and environmental policies alike, there has been a marked policy convergence or institutional isomorphism across states, as a consensus forms that one policy model is superior to alternative models. For example, Meseguer (2006) observes that countries learn from the effectiveness of others' trade liberalisation policies, adopting those policies deemed to have been a success. In hospital financing, Gilardi *et al*. (2009) and Gilardi (2010) find that countries abandon their policy models if they perceive them to be ineffective and search for policies that have proven effective elsewhere. There has been a similar convergence across national higher education policies following UNESCO standards (Meyer *et al*. 1997), as well as a sudden expansion of human rights laws enacted across countries (Meyer *et al*. 1992).

The second mechanism is emulation. Here, individuals and organisations imitate the policies of their more successful peers in order to elevate their status (Shipan & Volden 2008, p. 843). Rather than investing in a custom-designed solution, states simply copy what the leading states are doing. Gilardi (2010) shows that decision-makers often imitate policies that have helped incumbent politicians elsewhere win re-election. In the nineteenth century, for example, Japanese elites adopted Western institutional practices in their pursuit of major power status by studying the 'army and police in France, the Navy and postal system in Great Britain, and banking and art education in the United States' (Powell & DiMaggio 1991, p. 69). Because the world's trendsetter states have long been in the West, there has been a long-term global convergence towards Western policy models. Emulation is particularly likely when the state's goals are unclear, when alternative means are absent or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty (Powell & DiMaggio 1991, p. 151; Meseguer 2006, p. 73).

The perils of policy emulation should be obvious. Importing policy models from their original context to a different context without proof-checking them through a rational learning process can lead to a mismatch between the model's design and final implementation (Dobbin *et al*. 2007, p. 454; Shipan & Volden 2008). The mismatch occurs because foreign models 'cannot simply be imported wholesale as a fully functioning system' (Meyer *et al*. 1997, p. 154). While early adopters can and often do tailor these models to local needs, late adopters have less discretion in how they use these models (Ansari *et al*. 2010, p. 79). In view of mounting pressures to conform, and in an effort to avoid the costs of catching up with trendsetters, late adopters often neglect to

undertake necessary adjustments to adapt the models to local conditions (Ansari *et al*. 2010, p. 79). This introduces a misfit between the imported policy model and the local policy context—either because the model does not fit the adopter's goals or because it demands a set of practices that are difficult if not impossible for the adopter to employ. The result is a decoupling between the institutes' stated objectives and their practices on the ground.

The Russkiy Mir Institutes and the Confucius Institutes were, to a great degree, products of incremental learning and policy emulation. Chinese and Russian leaders have openly admitted to copying the cultural institutes of leading global powers. The Russian experience with cultural institutes dates back to 1925 and the establishment of the All-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (*Vsesoyuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnoi Svyazi c Zagranitsei*—VOKS), a Soviet organisation that ran cultural institutes to spread the positive and controlled image of the fledgling communist state and penetrate the circles of the Western bourgeoisie (Barghoorn 1958, p. 44; Agaev & Krylov 2002; Fayet 2010, pp. 38–9). VOKS formed and operated numerous 'friendship societies' to promote artistic, cultural and scientific exchanges among educational organisations and public institutions abroad (Kogan 2012, p. 95). According to its first chief, Olga Kameneva, VOKS was not itself an original Soviet invention, but was inspired by Western institutes such as the Alliance française (Kogan 2012, p. 39). In 1958, the Soviet government consolidated VOKS's numerous friendship societies into the Union of the Soviet Friendship Societies (SSOD), which pursued goals specific to the region of operation (Kogan 2012). Soviet centralisation of cultural diplomacy led the United States to follow suit by creating the Bureau of Intercultural Relations, even assigning a Counsellor for Cultural Affairs to the US embassy in Moscow (Barghoorn 2015, pp. 1–2).

In the twenty-first century, Russian leaders have launched new programmes of cultural outreach in line with the country's rising geopolitical ambitions. In 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law that created the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Russian World Foundation), one of Moscow's most important instruments of soft power, aimed at 'promoting the Russian language, as Russia's national heritage and a significant aspect of Russian and world culture, and supporting Russian language teaching programs abroad'.[5] The Kremlin's original aim was to create an alternative world order or, as Russkiy Mir Head Vyacheslav Nikonov put it, 'a self-standing civilization' with Russia at its centre (Nikonov 2010, p. 4). In his words, 'Russian World—that is civilization and, as civilization, is broader than ethnicity, territory, religion, political system and ideological preferences. Russian World is poly-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-semantic' (Nikonov 2010, p. 5). As early as 2000, the leadership called for the promotion of 'a positive perception of the Russian Federation in the world, to popularize the Russian language and culture of the peoples of Russia in foreign states' (Putin 2000). The Russian institutes were meant to serve as the backbone of a wider Eurasian space centred around Moscow, while persuading target societies that Moscow is benign and its foreign policies legitimate.

At the same time, China had been preparing its own charm offensive. In the 2000s, then Chinese president Hu Jintao asserted an urgent need for China to boost its influence on the

[5]'About Russkiy Mir Foundation', Russkiy Mir Foundation, paragraph 4, available at: http://www.russkiymir.ru/russkiymir/en/fund/about, accessed 3 January 2019.

international stage by building up its soft power (Jintao 2017). As Xi Jinping prepared to succeed Hu Jintao as president in 2011, he issued a communiqué stressing the need to 'increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's messages to the world' (Feith 2015). President Xi specifically declared the Confucius Institutes to be 'a symbol of China's unremitting efforts for world peace and international cooperation' and a means to link 'the Chinese people and people of other countries'.[6] The original aim was to promote China as an alternative global power. An even franker perspective on the operations of the Confucius Institutes was provided by Li Changchun, the propaganda head of the Chinese Communist Party, who described the Confucius Institutes as 'an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up'.[7]

From their official statements, it would indeed seem that Beijing and Moscow intended their cultural institutes to serve as instruments of soft power as part of their international charm offensive. In 2015, President Xi Jinping declared that his principal policy aim was to transform China into a 'socialist cultural superpower' (Shambaugh 2015). Chinese IR specialists have become keenly interested in how the EU engages in common security, multilateralism and global crisis management so that China can build an alternative model of global leadership (Cabestan 2008, p. 206). Russian President Vladimir Putin likewise proclaimed Russia's ambition to promote a 'counterbalance in international affairs and the development of global civilization' (Putin 2013). Former Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev declared Russkiy Mir Institutes to be 'the key instrument of the so-called soft power' (Sergunin & Karabeshkin 2015, p. 355), specifically, a means to restore Russia's major power status. Its first director, Vyacheslav Nikonov, defined Russian World as a 'global phenomenon, which cannot be described in one word' (Nikonov 2010, p. 4).

The actual blueprints of the Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes provide evidence of learning and policy emulation. Moscow explicitly drew on the Alliance française in establishing more top-down control over the operation of Russkiy Mir Institutes. According to the then head of the overarching agency Rossotrudnichestvo, Konstantin Kosachev, 'I am trying to develop a new concept that is called, very conditionally, the creative concept of a Russian World. It's very similar to what the French have been doing for many years with Francophone programs, with the focus on language, history, culture' (Dougherty 2013, p. 43). Russkiy Mir founding director Vyacheslav Nikonov directly referenced the role played by Western institutes in designing the Russkiy Mir Institutes, saying, 'there are many examples around the world to which we should turn: the British Council, the Cervantes Institute, Goethe [Institute], Dante [Alighieri Society], Confucius [Institute], the Francophone programme [Alliance française], and so forth. There are so many excellent examples, which we are carefully examining' (as cited in Sidibe 2007). Kosachev declared, 'this is a foreign policy instrument for every country, and Russia is the last to use it. We're learning to use it mostly from the US, from the Europeans and now the Chinese' (Dougherty 2013, p. 64).

[6]'Xi Backs Confucius Institutes' Development on Anniversary', *Xinhua*, 27 September 2014, available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-09/27/content_18673336.htm, accessed 25 May 2020.

[7]'A Message from Confucius: New Ways of Projecting Soft Power', *The Economist*, 24 October 2009, available at: https://www.economist.com/special-report/2009/10/24/a-message-from-confucius, accessed 25 May 2020.

For its part, Beijing seems to have engaged in more syncretic learning and emulation, combining direct government control (similar to the British Council), government funding combined with an autonomous agency (similar to the Goethe Institute), and joint ventures with local partners (similar to Instituto Cervantes) (Starr 2009). Chinese officials made a close study of US cultural diplomacy in particular to emulate its techniques (Leonard 2008, pp. 92–5), programmes of student exchange, language courses and operational independence (Ren 2012, p. 18). Hartig (2012, pp. 57, 69) observes that the Confucius Institutes were both a mirror image of, and counterbalance to, the British Council and Goethe Institute.

However, emulation never generates a perfect copy; when policy models are transmitted from one setting to another, we should expect to see a significant degree of institutional decoupling. Under this logic, the trappings of the policy adopted through emulation are repurposed to conform to the adoptee's specific interests. While Russia and China designed their institutes in ways that mimic some of the highly visible features of these earlier models, they edited out the elements of the model that collided with their regime interests.

Research design

Our research design combines quantitative and qualitative analysis. We show evidence of policy decoupling through a quantitative assessment of the placement of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes around the world. We then illustrate this decoupling by drawing on published data and field research on how these institutes have operated on the ground. We compiled an original cross-country dataset on Confucius Institutes/Confucius Classrooms and Russkiy Mir Institutes over the period 2004–2015. Drawing on the official websites of these institutes, we collected the name of the sponsor (where applicable) and host university, the year of establishment and the total number of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes per observed country. We obtained the geographic latitude and longitude of each institute (see Figure 1) from Google Maps. There was a total of 530 Confucius Institutes at universities and colleges and 631 Confucius Classrooms in primary and secondary schools in 127 countries. In the period of our study, the countries with the greatest number of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms were the US (470), UK (141), Australia (49), Canada (33), Italy (31) and South Korea (26). By contrast, there were only 235 Russkiy Mir Institutes in 70 countries. States with the greatest number of Russkiy Mir Institutes were Ukraine (21), Bulgaria (11), China (11), Turkey (10), the US (10) and Moldova (9). The majority of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms were established in Western countries, whereas a plurality or one third of Russkiy Mir Institutes were located in countries neighbouring Russia. We model the total number of institutes established in a country as of 2015 as a function of covariates. The reported models are zero-inflated negative binomial regressions with logarithmic link function.[8]

[8]We also check for sensitivity by fitting standard negative binomial versions of the models, with the same substantive findings.

All models are Bayesian, fitted using the brms library (Bürkner 2017) for the R language, applying its default non-informative priors. In all models, the covariates are averaged over the 2003–2014 period.

Decoupling is measured as the extent to which Beijing and Moscow violated the first three of Nye's principles of cultural diplomacy outlined in Table 1. According to Nye (2004), the similarity of cultures and values is one of the main conditions for successful cultural diplomacy. Cultural similarity is notoriously difficult to measure, and the available measures offer various trade-offs between specificity and coverage. The largest available cross-country dataset on cultural attitudes, the World Values Survey (Inglehart *et al*. 2014), contains only about one third of the world's countries, which makes it poorly suited for our purposes. To ensure better coverage, we use a much cruder measure, that of whether the host state shares a border with the sponsor state. We use the Correlates of War geographic contiguity data to construct this variable (Stinnett *et al*. 2002). If China and Russia are attending to cultural similarity, then they should be more likely to place the institutes in their respective neighbourhoods.

Political similarity is assessed by capturing the level of democracy of the host countries. To measure this, we use the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) of the V-Dem Institute (Coppedge *et al*. 2018; Teorell *et al*. 2019), which ranges from 0 (not democratic at all) to 1 (complete electoral democracy).[9] Non-democratic governments are likely to feel marginalised in the existing international liberal order and, therefore, see China as an alternative global leader (Huang & Ding 2006). If this logic holds more generally, then both China and Russia should have established more institutes in non-democratic countries to maximise regime similarity. Finally, economic ties between the sponsor and potential host countries are measured using trade volume,[10] which is the net sum of imports and exports between China/Russia and each host country.

We include additional covariates to analyse the placement of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes. First, wealthier states might make more appealing targets for cultural diplomacy because wealthy countries tend to have better developed educational systems, providing a more favourable infrastructure for the institutes. We measure country wealth using GDP *per capita* data of Gleditsch *et al.* (2002) as reported in the Quality of Government Dataset (Teorell *et al.* 2018). China might also be using its institutes to 'buy prestige' (Wines 2011), in which case we would expect it to be placing the institutes at prestigious universities. We capture this factor using the number of universities from each country featured in the QS World University Rankings (Symonds 2015). Finally, we add country population, as more populous countries may attract more institutes.

[9]We also check for sensitivity by fitting the same models with two alternative regime measures: QoG's fh_ipolity2 variable (Hadenius & Teorell 2007), which combines the popular Polity (Gurr *et al*. 2010) and Freedom House scores, and the mean Unified Democracy Score (Pemstein *et al*. 2010). While all three regime measures strongly correlate, their correlations are not perfect, and they have slightly different geographic coverages. All three indices lead to the same substantive conclusions with only slight numeric differences between the estimates.

[10]'United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database', Comtrade, 2010, available at: http://comtrade.un.org, accessed 4 January 2019.

Empirical findings

Figure 2 shows the fit of 12 bivariate zero-inflated negative binomial generalised additive models (GAMs). In each of the models, the number of Confucius Institutes or Russkiy Mir Institutes is a function of a single covariate averaged over 11 years. To allow for possible non-linearities in the relationship between the variables, we use smooth curves except in cases where the covariate is binary. We find that all covariates except for being China's neighbour are mostly positively associated with CI placement. By contrast, RM placement is associated with being Russia's neighbour, but not with the level of electoral democracy.

Figure 3 reports the coefficient estimates (posterior means and credible intervals) from zero-inflated negative binomial regressions of the number of institutes per country that include all six covariates simultaneously. Since the models are Bayesian, we can draw direct inferences about the coefficients without recourse to significance tests. In the case of Confucius Institutes, all point estimates are positive, as in the case of bivariate regressions. In contrast, some of the point estimates for the placement of Russkiy Mir Institutes are clearly positive and some clearly negative; and still others are neither. Comparing the coefficients one by one, China's neighbours are more likely to host more Confucius Institutes, even conditioning on the other five covariates, but Russia's neighbours are not clearly more likely to host more Russkiy Mir Institutes. In the case of trade, the situation is reversed—the coefficient is larger in Russia's case. University prestige is positively associated with both Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes, but the relationship is considerably stronger for Confucius Institutes.

While in the bivariate models, population size is positively associated both with the placement of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes, in the larger models it is positive in the case of Confucius Institutes, but negative in the case of Russkiy Mir Institutes. In other words, conditional on the other five covariates, a smaller country is likely to host fewer Confucius Institutes but more Russkiy Mir Institutes. The contrast is even stronger in the case of *per capita* GDP. While China clearly focuses on richer host states, conditional on the other five covariates, Russia places its institutes in poorer countries. Finally, looking at EDI's coefficients it is clear that China is more likely to place Confucius Institutes in more democratic countries, while Russia does not favour democratic host countries.

Our analysis paints a picture of greater institutional decoupling in the case of the Confucius Institutes than in the Russkiy Mir Institutes. Whereas Russia has generally placed Russkiy Mir Institutes in neighbouring countries which are also its trading partners, following Nye's principles on economic ties and cultural similarities, China has disproportionately located Confucius Institutes in democracies and in countries containing prestigious universities. Because these countries do not share China's political or cultural values, they are not optimal targets for Chinese cultural diplomacy, according to Nye.

Qualitative evidence of decoupling

We now turn to the findings of studies on the day-to-day operations of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes to illustrate decoupling between institutional design and practice at the micro-level. Here, a significant body of work suggests that these institutes tend to attract

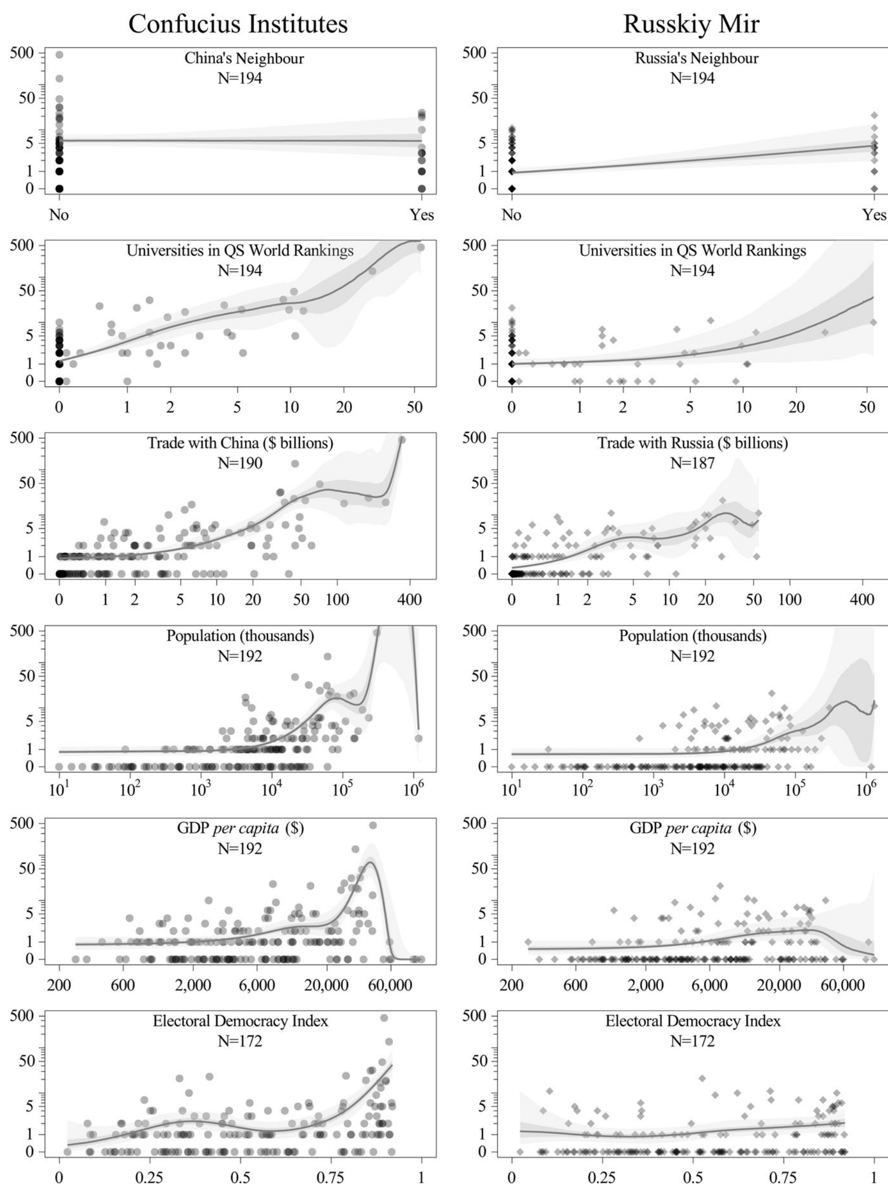


FIGURE 2. BIVARIATE ZERO-INFLATED NEGATIVE BINOMIAL GAMS WITH SPLINE SMOOTHS

Notes: Each dot represents a country. Y-axes show the number of institutes with ticks placed on inverse hyperbolic sine scale. X-axes show covariates. Except for the neighbourhood covariate, the ticks are placed on inverse hyperbolic sine scale. Shaded areas show 50% and 95% credible regions.

Source: The authors.

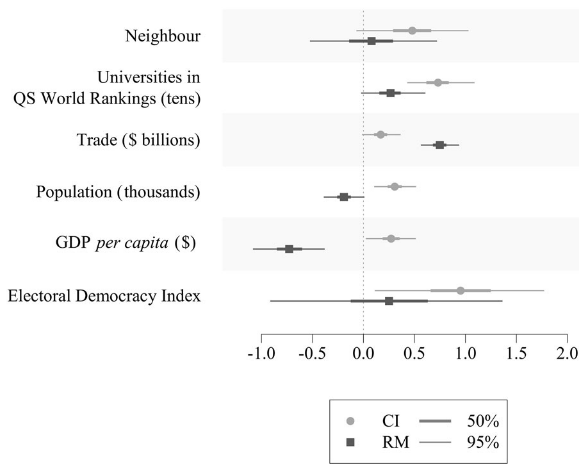


FIGURE 3. Coefficients Under Two Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Multiple Regressions of The Number of Confucius/Russkiy Mir Institutes by Country
Notes: $N = 169$ under both models. Intercepts not shown.
Source: The authors.

criticism in Western democratic societies. For one thing, neither government has distanced itself from its cultural institutes, contrary to Nye's dictum to keep politics separate from cultural outreach. While the British Council and Alliance française operate independently of their sponsor governments, Russkiy Mir Institutes and Confucius Institutes are largely top-down affairs, mimicking the organisational structure of the sponsor state regimes. Second, the imperative of appealing to the society more broadly has often been jettisoned in favour of narrower political interests. Originally, the Russkiy Mir Institutes were created to build an inclusive 'Eurasian civilisation' centred in Moscow. As Konstantin Kosachev, then head of *Rossotrudnichestvo*, explained:

> Our dream is to try to initiate a union, a consolidation of the 'Russian World' in which the centre would be people who are Russian but then, radiating out from that, include those who studied in Russia, married Russians, created families, have business interests, are in some way connected professionally or personally. Then there is another layer of people who are simply interested in Russia, in its literature, the ballet, the cosmos. (Dougherty 2013, p. 43)

Consistent with these ambitions, Moscow has placed its institutes disproportionately in states that are on Russia's periphery—states that had been turning to the West but still lay within Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Laruelle (2015, p. 10) argues that Moscow focused on these countries to minimise the odds that 'colour revolutions' would return to the region, which would pose threats to Russian regional dominance. It might be said that Russia has undertaken a 'charm *defensive*' to connect these seemingly disparate agencies into a network that can penetrate neighbouring regimes and societies (Krastev 2005). Nikolai Patrushev, former head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), defined this network a 'soft power' weapon in the hands of the Russian government: 'NGOs must be

told what problems they should tackle and for what purpose … . The Constitution and laws must be changed before the wave of orange revolutions spreads to the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States' (Popescu 2006, p. 2). Moscow founded, among other things, the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund and the Russian Council on International Affairs, to connect with civil societies abroad (Wilson 2015, p. 1189).

However, the ground operations of Russkiy Mir Institutes have not always reflected Nye's fourth principle: maintaining an open cultural dialogue between sponsor and host country. While the ostensible aim of the Russkiy Mir Institutes is to reach out beyond Russian compatriots to wider Eurasian populations (Dougherty 2013), the institutes have focused nearly exclusively on servicing ethnic Russians, effectively alienating the states' ethnic majorities (Cwiek-Karpowicz 2013, p. 7; Simons 2015, p. 11). Russia's use of Russkiy Mir Institutes in neighbouring countries has come under increased scrutiny in recent years. In Ukraine, Moscow has used Russkiy Mir Institutes as a conduit for funding large Russian-speaking organisations—including the 'Russian-speaking Ukraine' (*Russkoyazychnaya Ukraina*) umbrella organisation of 120 civic groups and 10,000 members established by an MP from former President Viktor Yanukovych's Party of the Regions (*Partiya Rehionov*)—with a focus on projects that promote the country's east–west language divide (Lutsevych 2016, p. 15). The Russkiy Mir Institutes in Ukraine were banned after Yanukovych was removed from power in 2014.

In Estonia, Kallas (2016) shows that while Russia has sought to strengthen its ties with the diaspora through a coordination centre (including Russkiy Mir Institutes), it has failed to attract many young Russians who strongly identify with Estonia and have mixed feelings towards Russia. Expelled and disillusioned members suggest that meddling by the Russian embassy in Tallinn undermined the autonomy of the compatriot centre, alienating all sides (Lutsevych 2016, p. 11). Hedenskog and Larsson document a similar decoupling pattern in Latvia where Russia's paternalistic attitude toward the Russian-speakers not only failed to exploit cultural ties for political purposes, but actually laid the groundwork 'for new schisms within the group' (Hedenskog & Larsson 2007, p. 43). Simons (2015), too, finds that public opinion of Russia in the Baltic states is very negative, due to past grievances as well as present-day fears that the Kremlin might use the local Russian-speakers as a tool to pressure their governments to enact more pro-Russia policies. Still, Russkiy Mir Institutes have not provoked the same kind of backlash in host countries as the Confucius Institutes.

We see a clearer pattern of institutional decoupling in the case of Confucius Institutes. Although intended to promote dialogue with foreign audiences, Beijing's authoritarian governance permeates *Hanban's* day-to-day administration. Because of their concern about the activities of Chinese citizens abroad, Chinese leaders have used Confucius Institutes to monitor the activities of ethnic Chinese abroad rather than to initiate an open dialogue with foreign societies (Kurlantzick 2007, p. 76). Although formally dedicated to using culture and language to appeal to foreign students, the courses offered by Confucius Institutes are centrally controlled by *Hanban*. In courses on Chinese history, Confucius Institute staff are instructed to avoid certain controversies such as Tiananmen Square in favour of teaching China's history of 'national humiliation' at the hands of external powers (Sahlins 2018).

The Confucius Institutes are also handicapped by institutional deficits. One is a persistent shortage of Chinese language instructors who are proficient in the local language. This has

compelled local Confucius Institutes to recruit college graduates regardless of their majors, diluting the quality of instruction.[11] The proliferation of poor language programmes tarnishes the image of Confucius Institutes. A second issue is the shortage of handbooks in local languages, which deters students who are not proficient in English from enrolling in the Confucius Institute language programmes. This further circumscribes the reach of Confucius Institutes and hence their ability to generate soft power. Through it all, *Hanban* has done little to adapt to social values in the host state, instead maintaining a tight grip on the operation of Confucius Institutes even as they court controversy in their host communities. For example, Hartig (2015, p. 133) recounts how *Hanban* officials have mandated self-censorship among Confucius Institute instructors with regard to sensitive issues like Tibet, Taiwan or Tiananmen, despite vigorous objections by their host institutions.

Finally, Confucius Institutes deviate from Nye's recommendations in terms of their institutional relationship with the sponsoring government. While it is true that Western cultural institutes like the British Council or Goethe Institute receive government grants, they are protected in their charters against direct government interference. By contrast, Confucius Institute instructors are contractually bound to 'promote the values of China's one-party state' (Hughes 2014, p. 55) in all their activities, violating Nye's principle of maintaining an open inter-cultural dialogue. *Hanban* carefully screens Confucius Institute instructors and employees to filter out human-rights activists, Falun Gong members or anyone other than those loyal to the CCP. One teacher at the Confucius Institute at McMaster University in Canada was forced to file for asylum due to her prior Falun Gong membership and concern about incriminating herself under Chinese law. *Hanban* retains wide latitude in imposing punishments for engaging in 'any activity … without permission or authorisation from the Confucius Institute Headquarters' (Hughes 2014, pp. 58–9). Finally, Confucius Institutes violate Nye's cardinal rule against mixing politics with culture by extending their activities beyond language and cultural instruction, engaging in the academic life of their host institutions, and 'moving into a new stage of "indigenization" (*bentuhua*) of the broader academic life of the universities' (Hughes 2014, p. 69). Beijing has even been known to use GONGOs, including its Confucius Institutes, to attract Western financial support (Patalakh 2017, pp. 45–6) and solicit donations from Chinese citizens around the world (Brenner 2012, pp. 135–36).

Severe institutional decoupling in China's Confucius Institutes is at least partly responsible for the backlash that Confucius Institutes have encountered in Western countries. In 2012, the Confucius Institute at the University of Sydney organised a lecture by Chinese academics who promoted China's official view on Tibet, ushering in a wave of criticism from the Tibetan community and the Australian public (Hughes 2014, p. 58). Opposition to Chinese cultural institutions has surged as a consequence of growing concerns that China is using its institutes as a Trojan Horse. The operations of German Confucius Institutes led to a public panel discussion in 2012 over whether Confucius Institute scholars were free from Beijing's influence; accusations were made that Confucius Institute directors reported to the Chinese ambassador in Berlin about their work (Hartig 2015, pp. 143–44). In 2014, the University

[11]'Confucius Institute Looks to Local Recruitment', *CNTV*, 11 July 2013, available at: http://en.people.cn/90782/8321118.html, accessed 25 May 2020.

of Chicago discontinued its agreement with *Hanban* after 100 faculty members submitted a petition to shut down the School's Confucius Institute (AAUP 2014; Redden 2016). A number of other Western universities, including McMaster University in Toronto, the Université de Sherbrooke in Quebec, the Université de Lyon, Pennsylvania State University and Stockholm University have also closed their Confucius Institutes over charges of human rights violations and academic censorship.[12] Altogether, this supports an account of institutional decoupling from the principles of cultural diplomacy.

Conclusion

Many Western scholars believe that the Russkiy Mir Institutes and Confucius Institutes have a poor record of success because authoritarian regimes do not have the wherewithal to engage democratic publics. More sympathetic scholars believe that the problems with the Russkiy Mir Institutes and Confucius Institutes are due to institutional growing pains. We contend that neither account fully captures the rationale of Chinese and Russian cultural diplomacy in these cases and that PDT offers a fuller explanation of both the placement of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes in their day-to-day operations. In establishing the Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes, Beijing and Moscow have openly emulated older models of cultural diplomacy used by past powers to enhance their international reputation.

Our quantitative analysis of an original global dataset of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes supports this general claim, showing that while both Beijing and Moscow favoured their trading partners, Beijing has been more likely to place its institutes in countries with dissimilar cultural and political systems, against Joseph Nye's recommendations. At the same time, existing studies on the operations of Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes show that the Chinese and Russian governments have directly interfered with the instruction, hiring and cultural activities of their institutes. Wherever the institutes have been deployed in pursuit of narrow political interests, the sponsor states inadvertently limit their soft power potential.

It is not possible to directly measure the 'success' of the Confucius Institutes or Russkiy Mir Institutes, since we do not have the counterfactual of what each host society would have been like without the institutes in question. However, it is notable that neither China nor Russia have improved their public image in any of the countries they have targeted. In fact, survey data from Pew Research and Gallup suggest that favourability toward China and Russia across host countries has remained constant or declined since Beijing and Moscow launched their charm offensive. Although China has placed nearly half of its Confucius Institutes in the US and UK, positive views of China in these countries dropped by 10–15 percentage points between 2013 and 2015, largely due to growing security tensions between these countries (Gallup 2015, p. 12; Wike 2015). We believe that China might have derived greater benefit from placing the institutes in politically similar countries—non-democracies rather than democracies. While Moscow appears to have largely avoided the trap of targeting inhospitable political systems, the operation of the Russkiy Mir Institutes in Ukraine has done little to help, and has probably hurt, Russia's

[12]'Confucius Institutes under Scrutiny in UK', *European Interest*, 20 February 2019, available at: https://www.europeaninterest.eu/article/confucius-institutes-scrutiny-uk/, accessed 25 May 2020.

image in that country. Among the top Russkiy Mir host countries, only China and Moldova have a steadily positive view of Russia, while Bulgaria, Turkey and Ukraine have an overall negative opinion of Russia and its leadership (Gallup 2015, pp. 12–3).

What this means is that although China and Russia have strong incentives to use cultural diplomacy to improve their image abroad, they face considerable challenges in doing so. Not only do they face an uphill battle in appealing to the publics of liberal democracies, but Beijing and Moscow have exerted direct control over their institutes in societies that value open dialogue. There are already fears in the West that Beijing and Moscow are executing grand schemes to undermine Western hegemony and cultivate authoritarianism on Western soil. The regimes' revealed preference to micro-manage their soft power campaigns only reinforce these fears. Their actions become more explicable through the lens of policy emulation and decoupling—Beijing and Moscow adopted models of Western diplomacy without observing the rules that make them effective. So long as this institutional misfit remains unaddressed, the Confucius Institutes and Russkiy Mir Institutes (and probably other instruments of Chinese and Russian soft power) are unlikely to do more than reinforce the good opinion of those who need no persuasion.

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