

Russian and Chinese Institutes Abroad: Continuation of Hard Power by Soft Means

Juraj Medzihorsky¹ and Milos Popovic²

¹Central European University

²Columbia University

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Abstract

Since the interwar period, major powers have used institutes and other organizations to promote their cultural products abroad. These organizations typically take the form of an Institute with branches that offer language training, organize and sponsor cultural events, as well take part in cultural exchange. Recently, both China and Russia have launched national institutes that adopt this organizational blueprint. The Chinese Confucius Institute was launched in 2004 and the Russian Russkiy Mir Foundation in 2007. While both are explicitly designed to follow the blueprint established by countries in North America and Western Europe, they share a host of features less present in their most established Western counterparts, and also differ in important respects. Perhaps the most important similarity is that they are late entrants to the field and thus have to directly and indirectly compete with the established institutes. In conducting this analysis, we use hierarchical regression analysis to determine how China and Russia choose to locate their institutes and how these institutes vary depending on characteristics of the host country, host city, host university and economic, political, and cultural ties between the host country and sponsoring major power. In doing so, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of how major powers conduct cultural diplomacy.

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Introduction

In recent years, scholars and observers have expressed concerns that the world's leading authoritarian governments have undertaken an ambitious scheme to project soft power beyond their borders. Over the last decade, China, for example, has invested billions of dollars into media activities, publications, exchanges, sport events and language institutes abroad (Shambaugh 2015). For its part, Russia is spreading its voice through media networks such as Russia Today and Sputnik, think-tanks, foundations and public diplomacy group across the former Soviet Union and Europe. Both China and Russia have aggressively marketed their style of governance to societies around the world through government organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs). This is taken to be a more significant threat, as both China and Russia seek to compete with the US and its allies for influence over societies more generally.

What determines the target audience of their soft power strategies? And, how successful are Russia and China at tilting the targeted public opinion in their favor? Drawing on the comparison of Russian and Chinese language institutes, Russkiy Mir (RM) and Confucius Institutes (CI), we argue that the two powers are likely to choose their target audience based on a dominant perception of their foreign policy role in relation to their most significant competitor – broadly referred to as the West. While China strives to appear more attractive to foreigners by adapting to the Western preferences, Russia seems to construct a more defensive role of a great power that shields its regional milieu, often in ethno-centrist terms ("Russian World"), from a perceived Western soft power threat. Consequently, China's inclusive role is likely to encourage the expansion of its language institutes toward democratic and wealthy nations of the West, while Russia's soft-power balancing should mostly focus on former Soviet and communist countries. Somewhat counter-intuitively, we expect that China's soft power will take a diametrically opposed approach to its projection of hard power that aims at wooing either neighboring countries with a significant Chinese minority or underdeveloped, non-democratic countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. In contrast, we expect Russia's soft power strategy to largely coincide with its security concerns. Because Russian institutes speak to fellow authoritarian countries that are often a part of a common communist and language heritage, the public opinion toward Moscow should be largely unaltered or even positive. We also expect that Chinese efforts to "bandwagon" with the West are unlikely to improve its public image as Confucius Institutes do not promote

liberal values that are common with the Western audiences. We expect this might even lead to the Western backlash against Beijing's project.

We explore the above propositions using a novel dataset on Confucius and Russkiy Mir institutes for the period 2004-2015. As expected, we find that China overwhelmingly places its institutes at top-ranking Western universities, whereas Russia establishes its presence in neighboring countries. In addition, our results show that CIs are often found in countries that have a robust trade with China; in contrast, trade and RMs do not necessarily go hand in hand. Finally, we draw on Pew Research and Gallup's polls to show that the effects of both Chinese and Russian projects have been limited in charming their respective audiences.

Our focus on language institutes as a form of soft power is driven by the fact that language is a straightforward medium of transmitting understanding to a broad audience. Attraction is meaningless without understanding. Nye (2004, ii) shows that the use of English as a medium of trans-national communication allowed United States to generate worldwide attraction. In doing so, our contribution to the soft power literature is twofold. First, we bring foreign policy roles into the study of soft power by specifying their impact. We show that roles shape the way in which major powers diffuse soft power through their impact on the choice of audience. Proactive roles that encourage closer cooperation, harmonious relations and integration into the Western system are likely to push for soft power diffusion toward the Western audiences. Simultaneously, defensive roles that present the West as a regional threat that must be balanced will likely focus on neighboring audiences. Second, we venture beyond the literature's predominant focus on US soft power. Our comparison of China and Russia sheds a new light on soft power strategies of authoritarian countries. We engage in a discussion with the emerging literature on authoritarian regimes and soft power by rejecting its core argument that authoritarian regimes are besting Western democracies in a soft power competition. Third, we suggest that a proper analysis of soft power dynamics requires a focus on a particular agency and its impact on the targeted public opinion. Much of the literature explores the impact of soft power through a myriad of different agencies from the media to NGOs by lumping them together. We believe that a sum of agencies tell us little about the workings and effects of soft power strategies. In contrast, we focus on language institutes as the most obvious medium for the spread of ideas, values and expectations.

This paper is organized in the following way. We first discuss how authoritarian countries

use soft power. Then, we explore the logic underpinning broader Chinese and Russian soft power efforts. In the following section, we show that Chinese institutes are usually placed at high-ranking Western universities, whereas Russian institutes are located in the neighborhood. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of global opinion polls, which show that despite the perceived mushrooming of these language institutes, Chinese and Russian image in targeted countries remains largely unchanged.

The Soft Power of Authoritarian Countries

In an important sense, authoritarian countries have taken a page out of the book of western powers, which for decades or even longer, have sought to introduce their values and viewpoints to non-democratic societies around the world through institutes such as Radio Free Liberty/Radio Europe (RFL/RE), British Councils, and French Institutes. These institutes were established to help the US, UK and France spread their values horizontally to a range of societies, going beyond government-to-government relations. A country's ability to do so is said to be contingent on its soft power, a term coined by Joseph Nye to refer to the ability of a country to influence other societies around the world through persuasion and cultural attraction by drawing on institutions and ideas (Nye 2011, 21).

Since the inception of the concept, soft power has typically been applied to the cultural influence of the United States and other democratic powers on the rest of the world (e.g. Nye 1990, 2006; Parmar and Cox 2010; Ilgen 2016). Recently, scholars have emphasized that authoritarian countries also use soft power to improve their international image (Ding 2008), strengthen domestic legitimacy (Edney 2015), or thwart democratization (Walker 2016). Some even argue that the leading authoritarian regimes are exploiting the benefits of the information age to export non-democratic practices abroad (Diamond et al. 2016).

Nye (2013) is skeptical about the ability of authoritarian countries such as China and Russia to successfully export their values because they lack open society as the driving force of soft power. Others are less skeptical about the ability, but disagree as to how engaged authoritarian regimes are in an emerging soft power competition. The "optimists" suggest that authoritarian regimes are mainly concerned with their survival and invest no considerable resources toward the regional, let alone global promotion of authoritarian practices. Way (2016) argues that

autocratic powers have generally focused on bolstering friendly governments than on the spread of authoritarianism comparable to Western democracy promotion. In fact, Russia has encouraged competitive elections by sponsoring opposition activities in countries with seemingly anti-Russia regimes such as Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine (Ibid).

On the other hand, the "pessimists" claim that "a new global competition in 'soft power' is underway," warning that authoritarian countries are the only side that seems to be competing seriously. Once believed democracy's most effective foreign-policy lever, these experts contend, instead, that soft power has now become a crucial weapon for nations like China and Russia to expand their influence, undermine global support for democratic development, and "hollow-out" democracy through subversion of human-rights institutions. Western media outlets and academic institutions serve as a means by which Beijing and Moscow can introduce their views to the western publics without being detected. Walker (2016), for instance, warns that authoritarian countries aim to project their values and practices into democratic space through government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs), fake election monitors, foreign aid, and media enterprises. Echoing these concerns, Cooley (2015) notes that authoritarianism is spreading its tentacles through the emergence of new patrons who provide aid, money and information via both bilateral and multilateral channels. In particular, China and Russia have set up a club of authoritarian regimes under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while China even established its developmental bank, which is seen as an emerging competitor to the Bretton Woods framework. Nye (2005) himself warned that "the so-called 'Beijing consensus' on authoritarian government plus a market economy has become more popular than the previously dominant 'Washington consensus' of market economics."

If authoritarian values are indeed bound to become a fierce competitor to democracy-promotion worldwide, perhaps there are some identifiable patterns in soft power strategy of major non-democratic powers. Two exemplary non-democratic powers who have repeatedly challenged US hegemony are China and Russia. This paper focuses on soft power of these two countries. Apart from their distaste for US hegemony, these two countries share a number of similarities that make them comparable. First, both China and Russia possess tremendous resources at their disposal to invest in soft power projects abroad. Second, Moscow and Beijing share a common ideological heritage of Marxism-Leninism, which encourages the export of

political values as a counter-narrative to US democracy-promotion (Wilson 2015). Finally, both countries launched government-led language institutes around a similar time (China in 2004 and Russia in 2007) with an aim of disseminating their values and promoting cultures to the world. In the subsequent sections, this paper explores China's and Russia's soft power with an eye on the placement of these institutes around the world.

China and Russia Meet Soft Power: Logic of Language Institutes

Over a decade ago, Chinese President Hu Jintao declared the need for China to leverage itself on the international stage through soft power. As Xi Jinping was preparing to succeed President Hu Jintao in 2011, he issued a communique that called for turning China into a "cultural superpower"¹. In 2000, Russia, too, embraced soft power, calling for a 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."² President Vladimir Putin developed the concept to enshrine the use of information and cultural attraction as the main aims of soft power.

The turn of the new century was a time when both countries undertook the implementation of soft power policies by investing hundreds of millions of dollars to establish the transmitters of cultural influence from TV and radio stations to GONGOs and think-tanks to language institutes. For its part, Beijing set out to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to establish so-called Confucius Institutes (CIs) and "classrooms" throughout the world as part of its global, multi-billion-dollar soft power offensive under "Hanban," a government entity affiliated with the Ministry of Education tasked with teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Since 2004, Beijing has invested at least USD 500 million to found 530 CIs at universities and colleges and 631 classrooms in primary and secondary schools in 127 countries. China is now halfway through its plan to establish one thousand CIs by 2020. Even though Moscow poured considerably less money into its soft power projects, its cultural presence is visible in the form of media outlets (Russia Today and Sputnik Radio), think-tanks and Russkiy Mir (RM) language institutes. Similar to China's CIs, Russia has established 235 RMs in 70 countries since 2007 under the Russkiy

¹"China's 'Soft Power' Problem", *The Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2015, available online: <http://www.chinaaid.org/2015/12/wall-street-journal-chinas-soft-power.html>, accessed: 8/2/2016.

²"The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", June 28, 2000, available online: <http://www.contexto.org/pdfs/RUSforpolconcept.pdf>, accessed: 8/3/2016.

Mir Foundation, which is charged with the promotion of Russian language abroad under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education. It appears that both countries have used language institutes to take part in what many see as an emerging global competition in cultural influence.

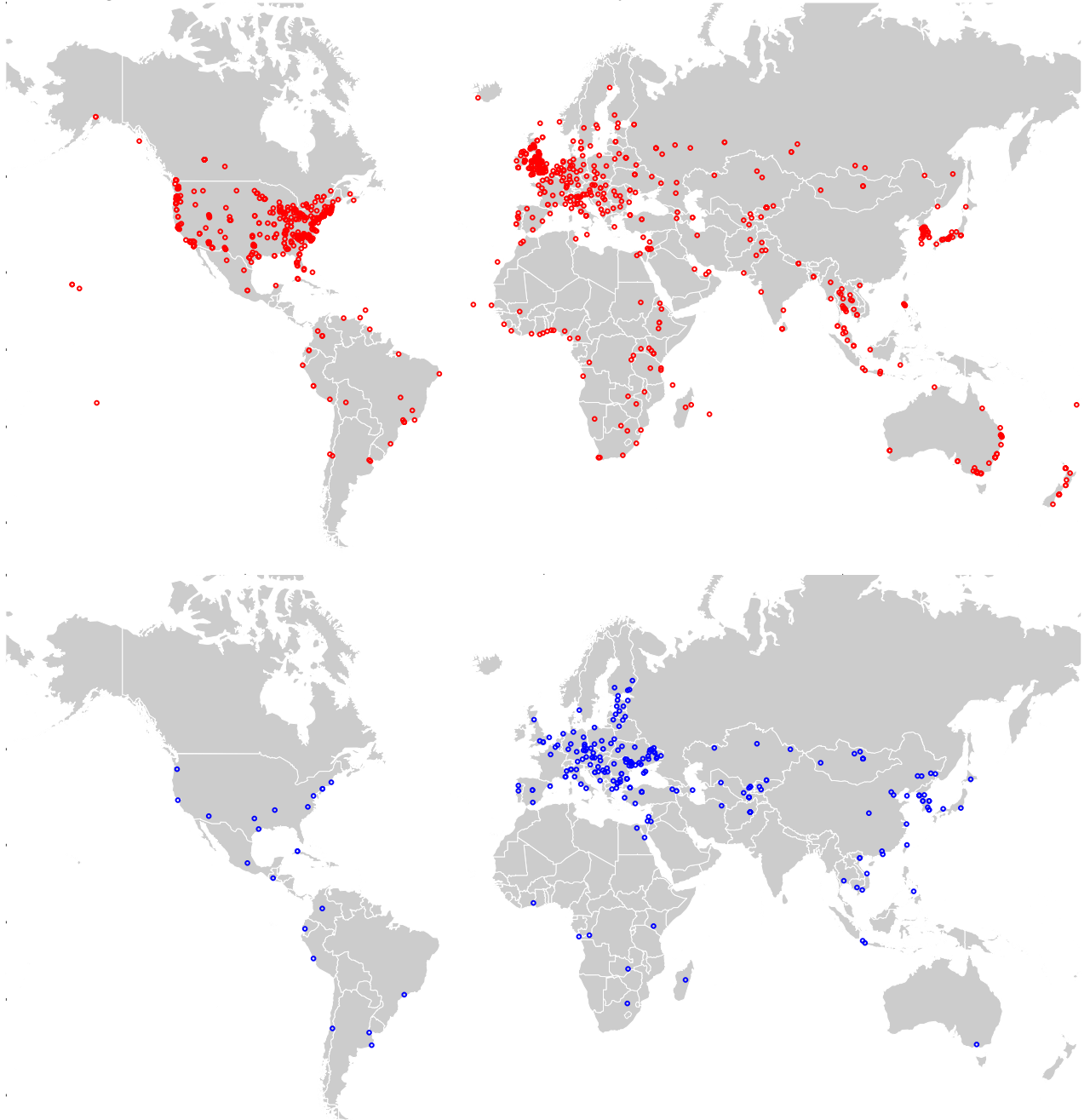
However, it might be less clear whether, and how, these institutes figure in these countries' respective soft power strategies. Language is recognized as a key medium for conveying and disseminating political messages both in the domestic and international arena. Congruent with Nye's understanding of soft power, language institutes may serve as an agency that use language not just to educate but also to persuade others that certain policies are legitimate. As state-led projects, CIs and RMs are well-suited to this role. In fact, Chinese and Russian officials themselves have hinted at this possibility in their public speeches. For instance, China's President Xi Jinping declared that institutes are central to Beijing's national security policy, noting that they are "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".³ Li Changchun, the propaganda head of the Chinese Communist Party, described the CIs as "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up." Similarly, only a few months before the inauguration of the Russkiy Mir Foundation Russia's President Vladimir Putin suggested that Russian language should be used globally to "unite all those for whom the Russian language and culture is dear, whether they live in Russia or beyond its borders" (Laruelle 2015).

In the light of these statements, the placement of CIs and RMs around the world may not be entirely random. A brief look at the world map in Figure 1 also suggests that the language institutes indeed cluster in space. CIs are overwhelmingly placed in Western countries with US accounting for a third of all Chinese institutes. In contrast, RMs are largely positioned in countries neighboring Russia (e.g. China, Moldova, Ukraine, the Baltic states).

What could explain such different soft power approaches of two similar authoritarian governments? One possibility is that these institutes are the latest incarnation of old policies aimed at expanding hegemonic influence in countries on the periphery. If this is the case, there should be some identifiable patterns. Recall that Nye argued that a country is most likely to enjoy soft power in countries that share one's culture and values. Therefore, a soft-power conscious Beijing

³"Xi Backs Confucius Institutes' Development on Anniversary", *Xinhua*, 27 September 2014, available online: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-09/27/c_133677094.htm, accessed: 8/10/2016.

Figure 1: Confucius Institutes (in red) and Russkiy Mir Institutes (in blue)



and Moscow should be more likely to place CIs and RMs in *neighboring* countries, where societies have substantial similarities with them and which already host considerable respective ethnic populations.

Neighboring countries are also likely to host a significant Chinese and Russian minority alike. This is because large ethnic population may serve as a strong conduit for soft power transmission. Indeed, Laruelle (2015) shows that the label used for institutes, "Russkiy Mir"

("Russian World") has a much larger meaning because it depicts an imagined community of ethnic Russians across the globe who are linked by language, history and destiny to the Russian government. The purpose of RMs is, therefore, to create connections between the Russian government and Russians from all over the world by attracting the latter to participate in a new global meta-project. As Putin's close aide pointed out in 2014: "Russia is the country that underlies the Russian World, and the president of that country is Putin; Putin precisely is the main guarantor of the security of the Russian world" (Ibid). Similarly, some suggest that the Chinese diaspora has become vital to Beijing's global charm offensive (Kurlantzick 2007, 76). For instance, Beijing has buttressed relations with ethnic Chinese organizations around the globe through programs like government-run summer camps for diaspora Chinese children entitled "Travel to China to Find your Roots," and supports new Chinese history textbooks designed for diaspora schools, emphasizing China's history of *guochi*, or national humiliation, at the hands of external powers.

However, while Russia's institutes seems to fit this narrative, CIs do not. As exemplified in Figure 1 above, Western (non-neighboring) countries are the most frequent target for Chinese institutes. Another explanation is that by offering free language courses and instruction in a local institute, the two powers hope to achieve a dominant position in these countries' economies. The CIs are particularly seen as a facilitator of economic and political relationships with other countries, particularly in the region. A recent study shows that the increase in the number of CIs in Southeast Asia is tightly coupled with the expansion of the ASEAN-China trade. The Chinese leadership hopes that the establishment of the CIs would offset such fears and enforce a positive image of China worldwide. If this logic holds, there should be more language institutes in China's and Russia's top *trading* partners. These partners, in turn, are likely to have a strong interest in strengthening ties with Russia and China, respectively. This is because trade interdependence leads to more cooperation in other fields, generating the demand for Russian or Chinese language in the host country, and promoting additional inter-cultural communication.

The final possibility is that there is indeed a global activity aimed at spreading, or at least preserving, *non-democratic* regimes abroad. Russia, for example, is opposed to Color revolutions in its Near Abroad, which it sees as the result of Western meddling and subversion. China, too, has been a tacit guardian of governments with poor human-rights records from Sudan to

Myanmar to North Korea. At the same time, non-democratic governments may feel marginalized by existing international system and US foreign policies, and therefore open to following China's lead as an alternative global leader (Huang and Ding 2006). This marginalization may allow either Beijing or Moscow to establish itself as a role model of economic success in such host countries. If this logic holds, then both China and Russia should establish more institutes in authoritarian countries.

While each of these explanations has some analytical purchase, it is evident that some factors work better at explaining the placement of CIs than RMs, and vice versa. For example, it appears that the presence of ethnic minority in a neighboring country squares better with Moscow's placement of language institutes than with that of China's CIs. In contrast, Beijing seems to establish CIs in wealthy, democratic countries with top ranked universities, with the US and the UK hosting a disproportionate share. These contrasting approaches to soft power imply that China and Russia appear to have different geographic priorities related to their language institutes. Evident is Russia's excessive focus on expanding RM presence in the region, and China's focus on the most dominant countries in the international arena. This configuration may suggest that the soft power of these two countries is a continuation of their security policies, and especially their relationship to the United States and US-dominated international system.

Moscow's "Charm Defensive" vs. Beijing's "Charm Offensive"

The evidence increasingly suggests that, despite their purported aims, the world's leading authoritarian powers actually use these institutions defensively to shore up their fragile regimes rather than in a longer game of influencing western societies of the superiority of their values. In fact, numerous authors have noted this phenomenon. Walker (2016, 53) himself writes, "Above all, authoritarian rulers are preoccupied with regime survival, and they study and learn from other authoritarian regimes, both past and present, in order to maintain power". Indeed, both China and Russia assign a considerable weight to building a "strong state" as a bulwark against the perceived Western ideological penetration into their respective institutions and societies (Wilson 2015, 291–292). The Chinese Communist Party, for example, proclaimed "cultural security" as one of its main goals (Edney 2015). Similarly, in 2006, the Kremlin's ideologue Vladimir Surkov coined "sovereign democracy" to legitimate the state takeover by Putin's party

in response to color revolutions (Okara 2007).

While both countries take steps at countering Western soft power, they importantly differ in the way they do so. China seems to pursue a global "charm offensive" aimed at Western societies, whereas Russia adheres to "charm defensive" that mostly targets previous or prospective spots of democracy-promotion.

For its part, The Kremlin has for decades been concerned with regime survival, and how soft power tools can be effectively used toward that goal. Long before soft power became a catchword among Russian elites, the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation noted that an essential goal in the coming years would be "[...] forming a positive perception of Russia abroad and a friendly attitude to it." Soft power is used to bolster regime survival using two interconnected strategies: a) responsive, which includes suppressing democratic waves in the post-Soviet space by invoking, depending on the audience, either ethnic ties with local Russians or a common Soviet heritage with non-Russians; b) pro-active, bolstering authoritarian practices by creating an image of a "strong" leadership in the Kremlin. The responsive tactics serves as a preventive measure against the regime change in the Kremlin and Kremlin-friendly countries in so-called Near Abroad. The focus is on eradicating any activity "aimed at forcible change of the foundations of the constitutional system" as well as "foment[ing] social, racial, national and religious strife and spread[ing] [harmful] ideas in the media" (Lankina and Niemczyk 2015, 103).

In this constellation, Russia aims to balance against US soft power in its Near Abroad by placing institutes in neighboring countries that might give birth to unfriendly regimes. Laruelle (2015, 10) suggests that this approach seems to be driven by Moscow's perception that a series of color revolutions created a setback for its interests, ushering in more investment into soft power. Accordingly, Moscow has initiated a plethora of GONGOs, think-tanks, foundations and public diplomacy groups throughout the post-Soviet space aimed at preventing the United States from instigating regime change in Russia and its near abroad. The key objective of Russia's "charm defensive" is to connect these seemingly disparate agencies into a network that could penetrate neighboring regimes and societies (Krastev 2005). Nikolai Patrushev, former head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), essentially defined the role of this network as 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 spread to the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States" (Popescu et al. 2006, 2).

As a continental and declining power faced with NATO expansion that is perceived as a threat, Russia seems to be using the sphere-of-influence logic to spread its language institutes in neighboring countries with a large ethnic Russian population. This course was prepared in the aforementioned Foreign Policy Concept, which suggests the Kremlin "to form a good-neighbour belt along the perimeter of Russia's borders". But its origins go back to Russia's centuries-old engagement with the West as a part of a common social universe. As a long-standing member of the great-power club, Russia is no stranger to *realpolitik*. In fact, numerous authors have suggested that the essence of Moscow's foreign policy behavior is the need to constantly reaffirm its great power status, and that includes the use of the balance of power politics. The Kremlin has repeatedly sought to balance against the United States from the opposition to the Second Gulf War to its intervention in Syria. This should encourage Russia's oppositional attitude toward the incumbent powers even when it comes to its soft power.

In contrast, China's experience with the West is filled with the sense of exploitation, invasion, and division. This appears to generate the pursuit of recognition of sovereign status from the dominant actors in the international system as one of the dominant narratives (Fitzgerald 1999; Callahan 2009). (Zhang and Cameron 2003) notes that Beijing has been particularly concerned whether Western powers approve of its role in the international system. Some go as far as to suggest that the West provides sort of a guidance for Chinese leaders how to become a full-fledged Westphalian state (Shih 2003). The goal of "behaving like everyone else" seems to be aimed at international acceptance. Shih (2012, 80–81) argues that this pattern of role-taking is also evident in China's emulation of the Soviet Union as the model of socialism. If this logic is extended to soft power, then China uses language institutes to appear more attractive to foreigners. Contrary to Russia's focus on excluding US from its perceived sphere of influence, China's charm offensive seems to be aimed at adapting to Western preferences (Ibid). This includes opening up the Chinese culture rather than downgrading cultural interaction between the West and China (Edney 2015).

Such an inclusive approach to soft power resonates with China's proclaimed policy of avoiding

traditional balance of power politics (Deng 2009, 64). Along these lines, Johnston (2003, 5) argues that China "is more integrated into, and more cooperative within, regional and global political and economic systems than ever in its history." The Chinese leadership studied the US to emulate its techniques, and created Confucius Institutes to promote Chinese culture, set up an international television station, and expanded and modernized Xinhua news agency with an aim of presenting China as a benign neighbor and responsible international actor (Leonard 2008, 92–95).

If this narrative holds, then China and Russia should also pursue different approaches to the placement of CIs and RMs around the globe. As China strives to appear more attractive to the West, CIs are likely to be growing at high-ranking universities in rich, populous and democratic countries. On the other hand, Russia's focus on a more defensive role of a great power that shields its regional milieu, often in ethno-centrist terms should favor neighboring hosts irrespective of other characteristics such as university ranking, regime type, income or population.

Where China and Russia Placed their Institutes

To explore the placement of China's and Russia's institutes, we have constructed a cross-country dataset on Confucius Institutes/Classrooms and Russkiy Mir Institutes for the period from 2004 to 2015 for the purpose of this study. Drawing on the official websites of these institutes, we report the name of the sponsor (where applicable) and host university, the year of establishment and the total number of CIs and RMs per observed country. Googlemaps was used to determine the geographic latitude and longitude for any given institute. There is a total of 530 CIs at universities and colleges and 631 CCs in primary and secondary schools in 127 countries. Top most CI hosts are the US (470), UK (141), Australia (49), Canada (33), Italy (31) and South Korea (26). On the other hand, there are only 235 RMs in 70 countries. Top most hosts of RMs are Ukraine (21), Bulgaria (11), China (11), Turkey (10), the US (10) and Moldova (9). A cursory overview of these figures indicates that the vast majority of CIs have been established in the Western hemisphere since 2004, whereas the bulk of RMs found their place in countries neighboring Russia.

To analyze the data, we include proxies for the above explanations in the following way:

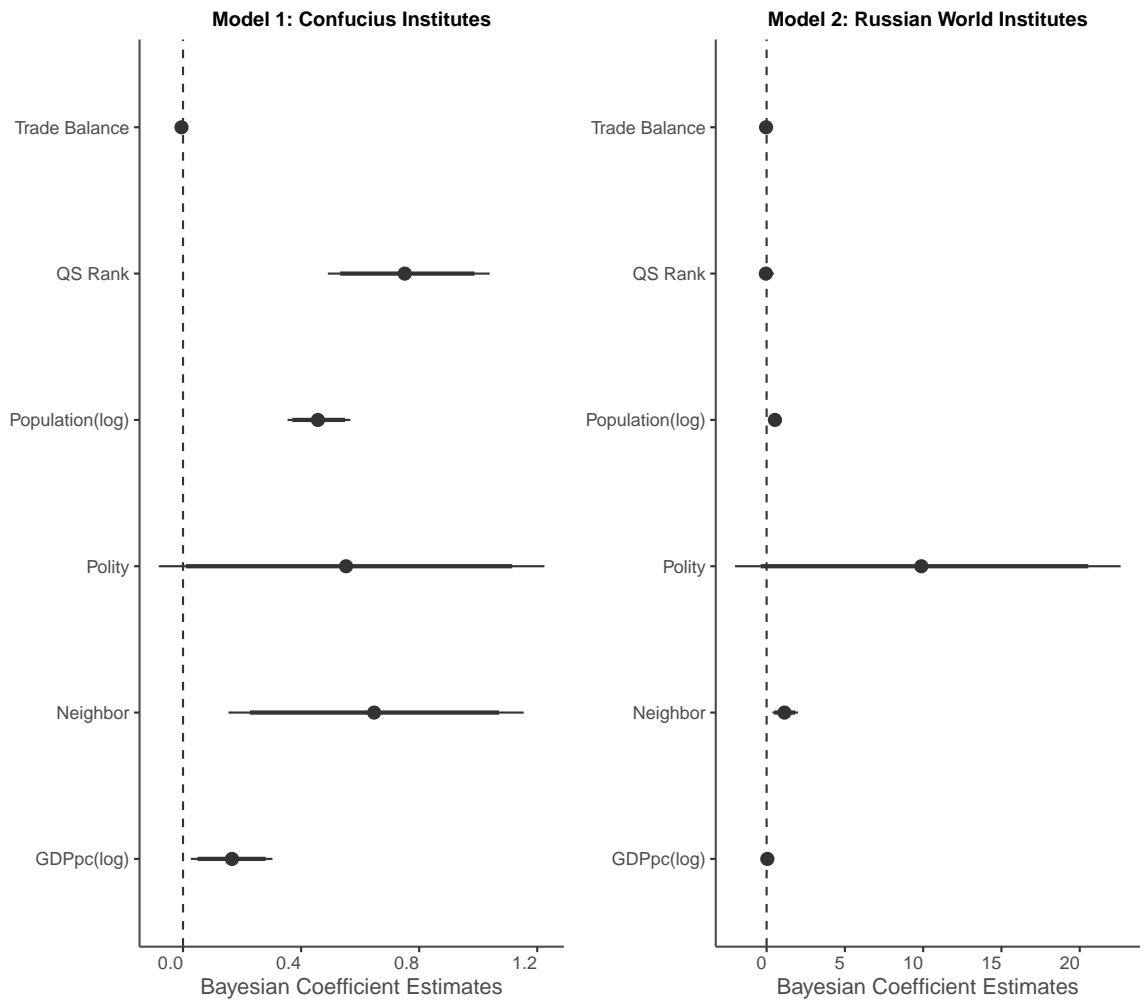
- *Trade Balance* denotes the difference between import and exports between China/Russia and a host country. The data come from (Comtrade 2010).
- *QS Rank* measures the quality of education of universities in the observed country according to QS World University Rankings (Symonds 2015).
- *Population* is a natural logarithm of the number of people for any given host country, and is borrowed from the Quality of Government Dataset (Teorell et al. 2016).
- *Polity* measure the level of democracy on a scale from -10 to 10, according to the Polity IV Project (Gurr et al. 2010).
- *Neighbor* is a host country that shares a land border with China/Russia, following The Correlates of War (COW) project direct contiguity data (Stinnett et al. 2002).
- *GDPpc* is a logged and averaged income per person for any given host country. The data come from the Quality of Government Dataset (Teorell et al. 2016).

The findings are presented in Figure 2. As expected, our analysis shows that CIs are overwhelmingly concentrated in populous and rich countries with open societies that have universities with global reputations (see Model 1). Model 2 shows—congruent with our argument—that the only relevant factor for explaining the rise of RMs is whether the host is a neighboring country. All the other factors such as trade balance, GDP per capita, regime type and university ranking do not play a considerable role in explaining Russia’s soft power.

When neighboring country is replaced with ex-Warsaw pact member or the member of the Commonwealth of Independent States the direction and size of the effect is nearly identical. Taken together, these findings suggest that China may be "chasing prestige" by establishing CIs in western democracies at highly ranked universities such as the Columbia University, Stanford University and the University of New York while Russia is more interested in buttressing influence in countries with significant ethnic minority.

As Figure 3 displays, the number of CIs in any given country can to a large extent be inferred from that country’s population, GDP per capita, and number of well-ranked universities. The presence of CIs is also related to the level of host society trade with China—countries that import more from China have more CIs than what their population, level of democracy, and university

Figure 2: Placement of Confucius and Russkiy Mir Institutes Across the Globe (2004-2015)



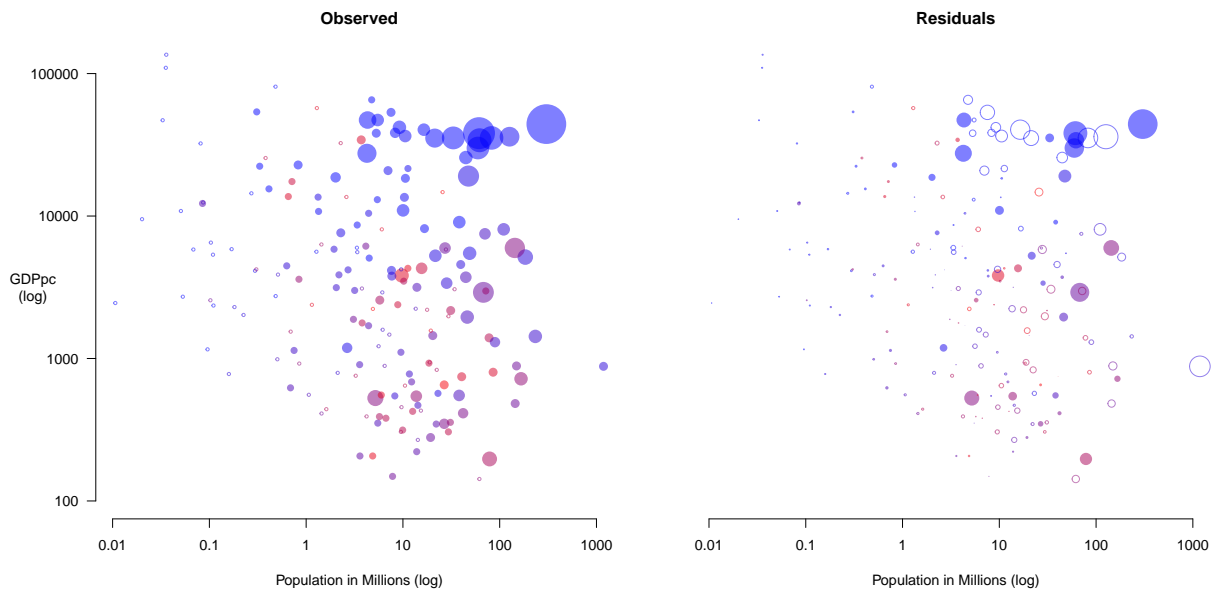
Note: The symbol shows the size of the mean point estimate, the bold line displays a 90 percent interval and the thin line indicates a 95 percent interval.

reputations would suggest. Interestingly, none of these factors explain the number of RMs. In fact, the presence of RMs is solely associated with neighboring and populous countries, indicating that Russia uses these institutes to buttress its influence around the border perimeter, as our argument suggests.

Furthermore, the UK and US host many more CIs than what the model would expect based on country democracy, wealth, and size as well as status of the affiliated university. By contrast, countries such as Japan and India contain far fewer CIs than what would be expected based on the first three factors—despite the importance of Japan and India to China as trading partners and regional powers in the neighborhood. This indicates that Beijing may be pursuing "charm offensive" by placing CIs in western democracies where open societies offer more possibilities to

spread soft power. By contrast, Japan and India, and middle powers like South Korea appear under-targeted due to complicated inter-state relations. Despite ranking third in China’s top trade partners list, Japan hosts only 20 Confucius Institutes and classrooms. This supports the notion that the placement of CIs may be serving other aims beyond enhancing Chinese soft power.

Figure 3: Placement of CIs by GDP, Population and Democracy



Note: Each circle is a country. Circle size by the **observed** and **fitted** number of CIs. Hollow circles indicate no CIs. Color by polity score—red means low (autocracy), blue means high (democracy). The model, Negative Binomial log GLM, includes only population, GDPpc, and polity scores on the right-hand side.

In the case of RMs, indicative is over-targeting of Ukraine, Bulgaria and Moldova. In particular, our model expected Ukraine and Moldova to have fewer than five RMs, but in reality they host 20 and 10 institutes, respectively. In contrast, some of Russia’s important trade partners such as Japan, India or BRICS members are under-targeted. This suggests that, unlike CIs, RMs are largely a regional project aimed at countries that fall within a Russian sphere of influence.

Implications of Language Institutes

While China and Russia have invested considerable resources to increase their cultural attractiveness, the results in terms of building a positive image of the two countries have brought mixed results. As Lai and Lu (2012, 100) note, China’s pursuit for soft power

has been constrained by controversies over its poor record of respecting political and

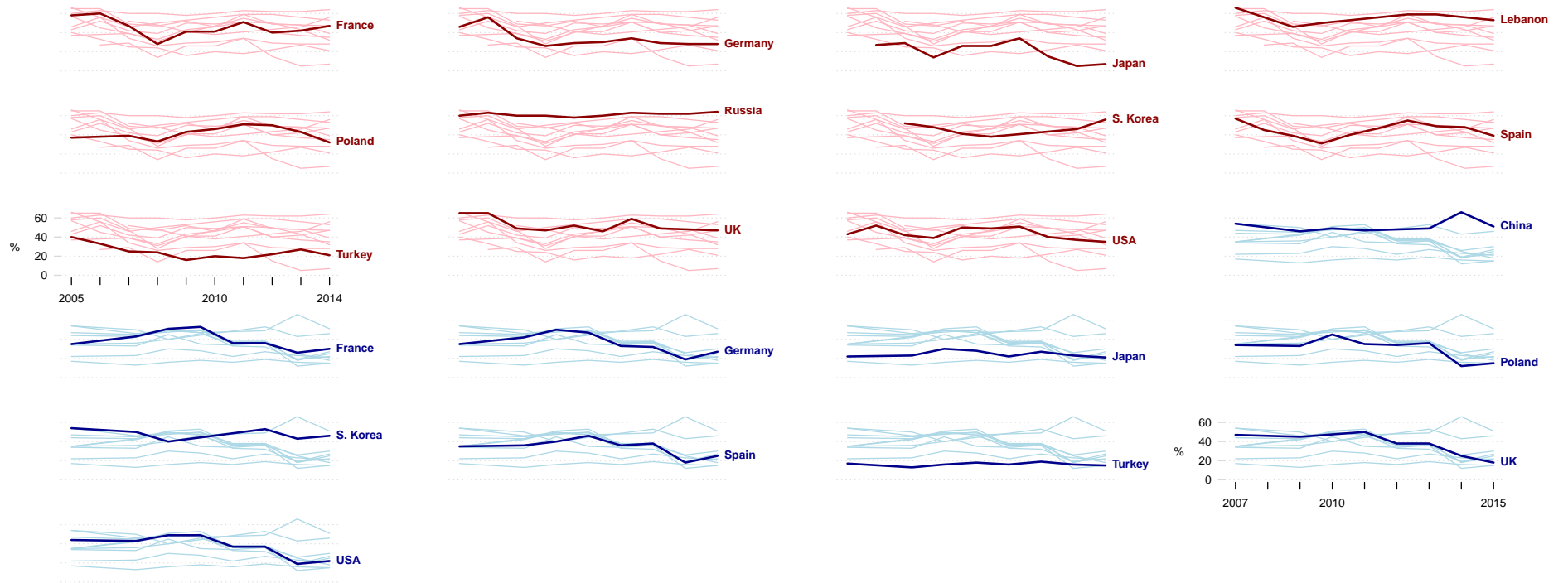
social rights; over a lack of political transparency, rule of law, and independence of the media and artists; and over moral decay.

The problem with CIs is that they target democratic, open societies, which nurture diametrically opposed values to those of China. CIs are, therefore, often viewed with suspicion and sometimes even as "euphemism for external propaganda" (Lee and Melissen 2011, 26). This has led to backlash against the institutes. In July 2015, American Association of University Professors castigated CIs as "an arm of the Chinese state" aimed at threatening the "independence and integrity of academic institutions in host countries." A number of western universities, including McMaster University (Toronto), Université de Sherbrooke in Quebec, University of Lyon, Pennsylvania State University and Stockholm University have already closed their CIs—citing range of issues from human rights to academic freedom to security. RMs do not face similar problems mostly because they are overwhelmingly placed in non-western countries where either there is a substantial Russian minority or a ruling regime does not perceive them as a threat.

This leads to a paradoxical situation where both China and Russia enjoy a similarly poor image among the western countries, even though Beijing established far more CIs in these countries. Figure 4 demonstrates, for example, that while China has located a disproportionate number of CIs in US and the UK (nearly a half of the total number of CIs), these two countries both registered a significant drop in positive public opinion toward China by 10-15 points in the last two years. While it is possible that the damage to China's reputation is caused by real world policy concerns—such as China's militarization of the South China Sea, US trade deficit with China, and cyber-attacks (Pew 2015)—the ham handed operation of CIs in the west are (if anything) likely to have reinforced, rather than mitigated, these negative impressions.

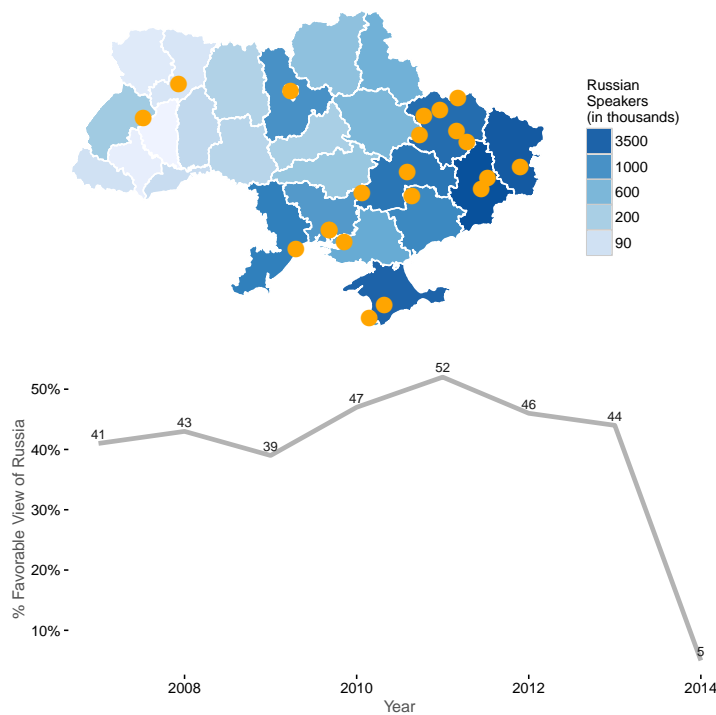
Russia's poor image, too, is a by-product of its role in the Ukrainian civil war, which was met by an extreme disapproval from Western countries.

Figure 4: Percentage of Positive Views of China (in red) and Russia (in blue), Pew Research Poll (2005-2015)



Gallup’s opinion poll for 2014 shows that 23 of the 28 EU member states, the United States, and Canada disapprove of Russia’s leadership (Gallup 2015, 12). While such low popularity might sound an alarm in the Kremlin, our analysis shows that western countries are by and large not the main target for Moscow’s institutes. For this reason, it might be fair to explore Russia’s standing among the top most hosts of RMs such as Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, China, and Turkey. According to Figure 4, China and Turkey demonstrate a constant attitude toward Russia since 2007; China is the country with the most positive opinion of Russia, and Turkey with the least positive across time. On the other hand, Bulgaria is one of the few EU members

Figure 5: and RMs (orange dots) in Ukraine by Russian Speakers (above) and Gallup’s Opinion Poll of Russia (below)



that still has a positive view of Russia, although a recent research indicates a fourfold increase in negative compared to positive views Russia stands much better with the public of the post-Soviet countries where its approval rating does not score below 60 percent regarding favorable views.⁴

⁴According to Gallup (2015, 12), these countries are Armenia (66 percent), Belarus (62 percent), Kazakhstan (72 percent), Kyrgyzstan (79 percent), Tajikistan (93 percent), and Uzbekistan (62 percent).

(ECFR 2015).

Ukraine is an outlier both in terms of the number of RMs (top most host with two times more RMs than second-placed Bulgaria) as well as the change in opinion of Russia. Figure 5 depicts both the geographic placement of RMs, and the attitude toward Russia for the period 2007–2014. Unsurprisingly, Russia has opened the majority of RMs in parts of Ukraine with a significant Russian minority, most of them in the wake of the civil war. Gallup's opinion poll shows that Ukraine's approval of Russia soured 42 percentage points between 2013 and 2014. It is worth noting, however, that the 2014 result excluded the Crimea region and some areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, but included Ukraine's typically more Russian-leaning South and East. While this makes the standing of Russia in left-out regions a subject of speculation, it is noticeable that Russia's soft power—very much like China's—falls short of improving the country's image even in top host countries. We agree with those authors who find that China's and Russia's cultural attraction and soft power are limited at best.

Conclusion

A recent wave of studies claims that authoritarian governments are becoming more competitive in the soft power game. This paper explores how and to what effect the world's leading authoritarian governments, China and Russia, placed their language institutes abroad as a part of their general soft power strategy. While China strives to appear more attractive to foreigners by adapting to the Western preferences, Russia seems to construct a more defensive role of a great power that shields its regional milieu—often in ethno-centrist terms—from a perceived Western soft power threat. The weight of the evidence offers tentative support for this argument. Beijing's Confucius Institutes are largely placed at high-ranking universities in rich and populous western countries, Moscow's Russkiy Mir Institutes are hosted by neighboring countries.

Drawing on Pew Research Global Opinion Polls as well as Gallup's polls, we also find that despite China's and Russia's attempts to project a positive image the western audiences do not hold a pretty favorable view of neither Beijing nor Moscow. Ironically, even though China placed nearly a half of all CIs in the US and UK the favorable opinion of China in these countries has dropped by 10-15 percent points in the last two years. It appears that China's reputation would have benefited more from placing those institutes in countries whose cultures are more receptive

to Chinese values. While Moscow is more targeting neighboring countries, it appears that its behavior in Ukraine has significantly damaged Russia's image abroad. Among the top RM host countries, only China and Moldova have a steady positive view of Russia; Bulgaria, Turkey and Ukraine share a negative opinion of Russia and its leadership.

These findings suggest that China and Russia have either been poor students of western soft power, and/or are more concerned with defending the regime and promoting parochial interests of the leadership and institute's officials than enhancing the respective country's reputation abroad. In light of the negative responses in broader public opinion, CIs and RMs (and probably other instruments of Chinese and Russian soft power) are unlikely to do more than win over the hearts of publics that are already won.

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