China's Improvised Mask Diplomacy in Chile

Francisco Urdinez
China's Improvised Mask Diplomacy in Chile

Francisco Urdinez
CONTENTS

China Local/Global
Introduction
Chinese Mask Diplomacy Is More Mosaic Than Monolith
How China Leveraged Local Players to Channel Aid
Mask Diplomacy as a Learning Process
Conclusion
Appendix 1. Top Ten Recipients of Chinese Aid in Latin America Early in the Pandemic (February to June 2020)
About the Author
Acknowledgments
Notes
China Local/Global

China has become a global power, but there is too little debate about how this has happened and what it means. Many argue that China exports its developmental model and imposes it on other countries. But Chinese players also extend their influence by working through local actors and institutions while adapting and assimilating local and traditional forms, norms, and practices.

With a generous multiyear grant from the Ford Foundation, Carnegie has launched an innovative body of research on Chinese engagement strategies in seven regions of the world—Africa, Central Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, the Pacific, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Through a mix of research and strategic convening, this project explores these complex dynamics, including the ways Chinese firms are adapting to local labor laws in Latin America, Chinese banks and funds are exploring traditional Islamic financial and credit products in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and Chinese actors are helping local workers upgrade their skills in Central Asia. These adaptive Chinese strategies that accommodate and work within local realities are mostly ignored by Western policymakers in particular.

Ultimately, the project aims to significantly broaden understanding and debate about China’s role in the world and to generate innovative policy ideas. These could enable local players to better channel Chinese energies to support their societies and economies; provide lessons for Western engagement around the world, especially in developing countries; help China’s own policy community learn from the diversity of Chinese experience; and potentially reduce frictions.

Evan A. Feigenbaum
Vice President for Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Introduction

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, China has been forced to adapt its foreign policy agenda to respond to Western accusations that it both exported the virus and covered up its origins. In response, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce developed a policy of donating health supplies across the globe. The international press dubbed this outreach “mask diplomacy.”

Many observers argue that China has a one-size-fits-all approach to diplomacy: settling on a singular model and then exporting it, largely at the direction of the central government. This is certainly the expectation that many analysts have held for China’s mask diplomacy, a high-profile diplomatic initiative closely tied to Beijing’s reputation. In practice, however, that has not been the case.

In fact, Chinese donations during the pandemic to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in general—and to Chile in particular—have not been centralized around a single actor or program. Instead, these donations from China have been channeled through multiple parallel tracks. Ultimately, mask diplomacy is best thought of as a hodgepodge of actions by a diverse cast of Chinese donors rather than the centralized outgrowth of a unitary national policy. In Chile, at least, Chinese actors have displayed considerable improvisation in carrying out this mask diplomacy.

This adaptive, decentralized approach also reflects the unique conditions of Chile, a country whose system for receiving foreign assistance has been shaped by its prior experience dealing with frequent earthquakes. When the coronavirus pandemic arrived, Chile’s track record on international disaster relief gave it an advantage over its Latin American neighbors in terms of distributing Chinese donations to community health centers in affected areas. Chilean officials were able to quickly develop and shape fruitful public-private partnerships between the Chilean Embassy in Beijing and a diverse array of Chinese companies and foundations.

Notably, Chile—a country with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of roughly $15,000 dollars—is not a net recipient of foreign aid, unlike others in the region such as Bolivia, Colombia, or Haiti. Prior to the pandemic, Chinese aid to Chile was virtually nil. In the early months of the pandemic, however, Chile was among the top recipients of Chinese donations to Latin America and the Caribbean. Between February to June 2020, Chile received medical supplies worth $9.5 million in donations from various Chinese companies, foundations, and provinces as well as the Chinese central government. This made Chile the third-largest recipient of Chinese medical assistance in Latin America, behind only Brazil ($23 million) and Venezuela ($43 million).
This paper—drawing on original data sets, in-depth interviews, and secondary literature—explores the diverse cast of Chinese actors that donated to Chile and the motives behind their donations. It also examines how the Chilean government organized to solicit—and then distribute—this Chinese aid and how Chilean government officials shaped the choices and actions of the various Chinese players in the process. Finally, the paper looks at the broader policy lessons stemming from this mask diplomacy for both China and the recipient countries.

**Chinese Mask Diplomacy Is More Mosaic Than Monolith**

Like in many other countries, Chile found that masks, ventilators, and other health equipment were in short supply in the early months of the pandemic. The Chilean government turned to a variety of Chinese actors to help fill the gap during the pandemic’s first wave.

**The Challenges of Tracking Chinese Aid**

In early February 2020, it quickly became apparent that it would be difficult to gauge which actors in China were donating which medical supplies amid the first wave of the pandemic because there was no single, centralized source tracking these donations. Between February 11 to June 20, 2020, the author and his collaborators scraped the web each day for news, tweets, and social media posts, including official communications, referring to Chinese donations to any of the thirty-three countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.9

Another challenge in tracking these donations was the frequent conflation of donations and purchases, especially in the press. In Chile, for example, the line between donations and purchases was so blurred that even ministers and ambassadors confused them at times. To compile accurate records, the author and his research assistant triangulated sources and, for the most confusing cases, consulted government agencies with detailed questions by email.

Ultimately, the resulting data set comprised 537 donations in thirty-three countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, with detailed information about the donors, receivers, dates, and contents of each donation.10 Each donation was georeferenced at the city level since cities were the final destinations for each Chinese donation. These donations were divided into five categories by kind: non-N95 masks, N95 masks, test kits, ventilators, and other supplies (such as chloroquine tablets, ambulances, thermometers, and so on). To compare donations, the compilers standardized
the values of these donations to the equivalent amounts in U.S. dollars. To do this, the data set defined a reference list of twenty-six different products with their corresponding values (in U.S. dollars) that considers the average costs by product on the top Chinese e-commerce retailer Alibaba on the date of the donation.

Further, the data set classified Chinese donors into eight categories: the Chinese central government, Chinese provincial governments, Chinese municipal governments, Chinese universities, Chinese companies (state-owned and private), Chinese private foundations, and members of Chinese diaspora associations living in the recipient country.11

Key Trends

According to the author’s estimates, the amount of donations each country received is positively associated with mortality rates during the first wave of the pandemic to some degree (see figure 1). In other words, countries with the highest mortality rates also tended to be the top recipients of Chinese pandemic-related aid. However, there were exceptions to this general pattern. For example, Venezuela and Paraguay both suffered similar levels of mortality, but Paraguay received little aid compared to Venezuela. There is an obvious political explanation for this: Venezuela is a strategic comprehensive partner of China. The two countries have a robust relationship at the government level, and Venezuela is the main destination of Chinese credit and fourth in Chinese investment throughout the region.12 Paraguay, by contrast, is the only country in South America that still recognizes Taiwan diplomatically.

And although Chile had higher mortality rates than Cuba, the two countries received similar levels of assistance. Again, political affinities seem to account for this: Cuba, the only communist regime in the Western Hemisphere, was the first country in Latin America or the Caribbean to recognize the People’s Republic of China in 1960 and continues to have a strong relationship with Beijing.

A forthcoming article co-written by the author found that, regardless of the lethality of the pandemic’s coronavirus strain, China’s mask diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean was strongly affected by political variables.13 The diplomatic status afforded to China’s strategic partners and adherence to the One-China policy were important country-level drivers of aid from not only the Chinese central government but also other participating donors, such as cities, companies, and foundations.
The political actors and motivations behind Chinese mask diplomacy, however, should not be misrepresented as monolithic. In fact, this mask diplomacy best resembles a mosaic. Although China set up its official aid agency, the China International Development Cooperation Agency, in 2018, it was just one of the many players involved. Among the top ten aid recipients in Latin America and the Caribbean, China’s different mask diplomacy strategies are striking (see figure 2). China’s great adaptability in taking advantage of its established channels for donations to various countries around the region are quite evident. For example, Venezuela alone received 65 percent of donations from the central government, while Brazil and Chile together received 75 percent of all corporate donations; meanwhile, Cuba garnered 38 percent of all provincial donations, and Mexico got 20 percent of all foundation donations (see appendix 1 for more information).
China took advantage of the links that Chinese provinces, cities, companies, foundations, universities, and diaspora communities had in each country to achieve a greater influx of donations. Take, for example, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, which received the highest share of corporate donations over total donations according to figure 2. These are, coincidentally, the countries that have attracted the largest amounts of Chinese investments over the last five years, and figure 3 shows an exponential relationship between previous Chinese investment and company donations. This indicates that Chinese companies, both state-owned enterprises under the wing of the Chinese government oversight body known as the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission and private companies alike, took advantage of their prior knowledge of the countries where they were already operating to deliver donations.

**FIGURE 2**

Origins of Chinese Donations Among the Leading Latin American Recipients

![Bar chart showing the percentage of donations from Central Government, Provincial Governments, City Governments, Enterprises, Foundations, Universities, and Diaspora Communities for various Latin American countries. The countries are Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Peru, Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador. The chart covers Chinese donations from February 11, 2020, until June 20, 2020.]

**SOURCE:** Author’s data.

**NOTE:** This graph covers Chinese donations from February 11, 2020, until June 20, 2020.
How China Leveraged Local Players to Channel Aid

For its part, Chile managed to secure a share of Chinese pandemic aid disproportionally larger than its modest population size. With a population that represents 3 percent of the region, Chile managed to capture 11 percent of the total aid from Chinese cities, 21 percent of the total donations from companies, 88 percent of total donations from universities, and 86 percent of total donations from diaspora organizations (see appendix 1 for more details). It is worth highlighting the precise ways that China’s mask diplomacy in Chile was adaptive to the country’s unique institutional and political conditions. Most notably, China used companies with investment interests in Chile to make and distribute the bulk of its pandemic-related donations there.

In the ten weeks covered by the database, an average of 1.4 Chinese donations to Chile were recorded per week. More than a dozen Chinese actors made donations. These donations were channeled through three main hubs. The majority of Chinese donations of all types (97.5 percent) came

---

**FIGURE 3**

Chinese FDI in Latin America and the Caribbean and Mask Diplomacy (2015–2020)

**SOURCE:** Data on aid from Chinese enterprises is from the author’s data set. For FDI data, see Derek Scissors “China Global Investment Tracker,” American Enterprise Institute, https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker.

**NOTE:** The axes are log-transformed to better visualize the relationship between the two variables. The FDI data is from between 2015 and 2020.
through the Chilean Embassy in Beijing, including all of the donations from Chinese companies and foundations. Chinese provinces and city-to-city donations, meanwhile, made up just 2 percent of the total donations (see figure 4). The Chinese Embassy in Santiago was the least used channel, responsible for just 0.5 percent of total Chinese donations to Chile.

**FIGURE 4**

Three Streams of Chinese Donations to Chile

![Graph showing the distribution of Chinese donations to Chile through city-to-city diplomacy, Chinese enterprises and foundations, and the Chinese Embassy in Beijing.]

**SOURCE:** Author’s data set.

**NOTE:** The magnitude of the lines denotes the proportional size of the donations. Green denotes city-to-city donations or donations made by Chinese diaspora communities in Chile. Orange denotes donations made by Chinese enterprises and foundations through the Chilean Embassy in Beijing. Red denotes donations by the Chinese central government. For more information, see table 1.

Chinese Enterprises and Foundations and the Chilean Embassy in Beijing

The largest donations were composed of three shipments channeled through the Chilean Embassy in Beijing totaling about $9.5 million. Many of these donations were made through the China Helps Chile (China Ayuda a Chile) campaign organized by the Chilean ambassador in Beijing, Luis Schmidt, which totaled $8.1 million. In addition, the Chilean Embassy channeled multiple donations from Chinese companies and foundations, including the Jack Ma Foundation and the associated Alibaba Foundation, which donated $530,000 in supplies.15
Schmidt leveraged the fact that 2020 was the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Chile and China to reinforce the symbolic value of Beijing’s national campaign as well as to lobby other Chinese actors to participate in the donation drive.\(^{16}\) Schmidt knew China well and was on his second stint as ambassador to Beijing (2010–2014 and 2018–present). He was also able to draw on his contacts with Chinese investors in Chile during his time as president of Chile’s National Agricultural Society, a large guild association, to encourage donations to the China Helps Chile campaign.\(^{17}\)

Thus, many Chinese companies that had made recent investments in Chile joined the donation drive at Schmidt’s urging. Indeed, it was companies with investments in Chile, not direct Chinese government donations, that became the main contributors to the China Helps Chile campaign (see table 2). One of the donors was Tianqi Lithium, a former local state-owned enterprise that was subsequently bought out by private investors and became the second-largest lithium producer in the world.\(^{18}\) In 2018, Tianqi Lithium acquired a 23.8 percent stake in Chile’s largest lithium company, SQM, for $4.1 billion—the largest Chinese investment in Latin America that year.\(^{19}\) But by 2020, when Schmidt persuaded the company to make a donation of $80,000 to Chile’s pandemic relief effort, the firm was in financial trouble, nearly defaulting on nearly $1.9 billion in loans it had taken out in 2018 to finance its stake in SQM.\(^{20}\) Tianqi followed through on a donation of 120,000 masks despite this financial trouble.

Another donor was the private ride-sharing firm DiDi, which employs about 120,000 drivers in Chile and has grown significantly in the passenger transport market since entering the Chilean market in early 2019, where it competes with Uber and Cabify. Chilean President Sebastián Piñera visited DiDi’s offices in Beijing during his 2019 state visit to China.\(^{21}\)

A third example was Jingdong, a major Chinese e-commerce firm and the second-largest online retailer in China after Alibaba, which contributed an estimated $549,000.\(^{22}\) Jingdong has had a special relationship with Chile because it sells Chilean cherries on its platform. Currently, China consumes 85 percent of all Chilean cherry exports, and Jingdong, together with the Chilean export promotion agency and the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association, organize an annual shopping event called Super Cherries Day to encourage Chinese consumers to buy Chilean cherries.\(^{23}\)

Schmidt leveraged his past relationships with other Chinese firms to secure donations too. As he told the press, “I am very friendly with the president of [the] Changyu winery [a state-owned firm based in eastern Shandong Province], because I was supporting him when they bought [Chile’s] Indomita winery. . . . When I called him to tell him that we were having complications, he . . . [made] a very important donation,” he said. Similarly, Schmidt noted a donation from Joyvio (the food industry subsidiary of Legend, the controlling shareholder of computer maker Lenovo) that in 2018 acquired Chile’s Australis Seafood.\(^{24}\)
Schmidt’s roster of donors exemplifies the diversity of players in China’s economic statecraft in Latin America. China is Chile’s main trading partner and, since 2017, the second-largest foreign investor in the country.25 Chile’s linkages with Chinese business are among the most mature and developed in all of Latin America. Ultimately, according to information from the Chilean Embassy in Beijing, the China Helps Chile campaign received donations from some 140 firms, including both state-owned and private Chinese companies, and was considered a diplomatic success.26

The donors of the Schmidt-led campaign went beyond corporations. Tsinghua University in Beijing, one of China’s most elite universities, also got involved. In 2019, Tsinghua established in Chile its first center in Latin America, partly financed by the family of the businessman Andrónico Luksic, whose family is one of the richest in Chile.27 The center is intended to increase the quality and quantity of applications from Latin American students to Tsinghua.28 This made Chile only the third country in the world to have a Tsinghua-affiliated center outside of China, the others being in Indonesia and Italy.29 Another campaign donor, the state-owned China Construction Bank, opened its first branch in South America in Chile in 2015, which was then designated by the Chinese central bank, the People’s Bank of China, as the first clearing bank for renminbi in South America.30

City-to-City Diplomacy and the Role of the Chinese Diaspora in Chile

While smaller in size than Chinese enterprises’ contributions, donations made by the Chinese diaspora community in Chile were much appreciated because they were made earlier, when they were most needed. Five donations from the Chinese diaspora community in Chile comprised just 2 percent of the total aid received, but this aid does reflect the growing diversity of China-Chile linkages and the sprouts of civic activism in this community.

The first of these pandemic-related donations was made by a group of Chinese merchants affiliated with the Lishui Merchants Association in Santiago, which was established in Santiago on April 6, 2020 (see table 2). The Chinese diaspora community in Chile—mostly from the provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Jiangsu along China’s east coast—has grown considerably over the last ten years, and there are now approximately 15,000 Chinese living in Chile.3132 Since then Chinese president Hu Jintao and then Chilean president Ricardo Lagos signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in 2005, a thriving community of Chinese migrants has emerged, mostly importing consumer goods and technology from China through locally established businesses in Chile. In this way, the FTA helped the Chinese community grow and settle into the country’s wholesale market.

In 2018, the municipality of Santiago launched a project together with Chinese diaspora organizations and the Chinese Embassy to establish a “Chinatown” in a neighborhood known as Meiggs, a wholesale trade zone where the community’s most important businesses are located.33 This growth
and influence in part explains the donations made by place-based community associations between April 6 and April 28, 2020, including shipments from the Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce and the Zhejiang Chamber of Commerce, totaling 120,000 masks (see table 1).

Another reason for early donations from the Chinese diaspora in Chile is that they were intended to help counteract growing discrimination toward people of Chinese descent living in Mejígas, a problem that cropped up during the first weeks of the pandemic in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Former Chilean president and current United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet stated that “the coronavirus epidemic has caused a worrying wave of prejudice against ethnic Chinese and East Asians.”

These place-based donations from the diaspora community coincided with place-based donations from China itself. On May 15, according to Chile’s Ministry of the Interior and Public Security, three Chinese cities joined the effort: Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province in southwestern China; Shenzhen, in the southern province of Guangdong straddling the border with Hong Kong; and Ningbo, in the eastern province of Zhejiang, near Shanghai.

These three cities reflect the core of Chinese commercial interests in Chile. For example, in October 2020, Chile became the first Latin American country to establish a consulate general in Chengdu. And because this city has played a prominent role in the development of the infrastructure-financing efforts of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chilean government sees Sichuan Province, and western China more broadly, as full of business opportunities for its firms. Shenzhen, meanwhile, was one of the cities Piñera visited in 2019, when negotiations between the Chilean government and Huawei, China’s telecoms giant, for the deployment of 5G technology were still under way. For its part, Ningbo has one of the world’s most important ports, through which a large share of Chilean exports of copper, salmon, cherries and other fruits, wine, and other exports enter China. Many of these exports leave from Chile’s most important port, San Antonio, whose mayor visited Ningbo in 2015.

Notably, one reason the donations made by Chinese cities and the Chinese diaspora appear to be such a small share of the total donations is because these more localized donations consisted exclusively of inexpensive regular masks, whereas Chinese companies, foundations, and government actors donated more expensive supplies and equipment, such as N95 masks, COVID-19 diagnostic tests, and ventilators.

The Chinese Embassy’s Limited Activism

In contrast to the Chilean Embassy in Beijing, very few donations were channeled through the Chinese Embassy in Santiago—just two small donations for a total of $60,000, one made in April and the other in June 2020. This seems to be the case because the bulk of donations to Chile came
from actors other than the Chinese central government, including local governments, businesses, foundations, and the diaspora community.

On April 21, 2020, the Chinese Embassy made its only donation to Chile at a public ceremony that allowed the embassy to take credit, an event in which the Chinese ambassador and Chilean authorities jointly took part. The donation boxes were accompanied by a slogan: “Distant Countries, United Peoples” [Países lejanos, Pueblos unidos] (see the photo below). The ambassador handed over the materials, valued at just $50,000, directly to then Chilean minister of health Jaime Mañalich.

But even though the donation was small, it received substantial local media coverage because it was the only time then Chinese ambassador Xu Bu was seen at a public event on pandemic-related assistance and support. He had previously been portrayed by the Chilean media as an exemplar of so-called “wolf warrior diplomacy,” whereby Chinese diplomats engage in aggressive rhetorical posturing and sometimes even threats against host countries. Most controversially, Xu published a harsh 2019 op-ed in the Chilean newspaper El Mercurio after Congressman Jaime Bellolio met in Hong Kong with democracy activist Joshua Wong.40

At an April 21 ceremony, then Chilean minister of health, Jaime Mañalich (left), receives donations from the Chinese Embassy from then Chinese ambassador to Chile, Xu Bu (right).

The boxes of donations list the aforementioned slogan: “Distant Countries, United Peoples.”

Photo credit: Chilean Ministry of Health.
Xu also sparked a controversy due to an ill-timed miscommunication over the donations. In late April, Chile’s minister of health claimed that ambassador Xu had informed him that the Chinese government and some Chinese companies would be donating some ventilators. As detailed in the next section of the paper, this claim was confirmed to be false within weeks when Xu revealed that he had never made such a promise, demonstrating to the public that Chilean authorities were somewhat disorganized and confused in the face of the public health crisis.41

A second Chinese Embassy donation, made without public fanfare, was made to the municipality of Rancagua, facilitated by Chilean parliamentary deputy Issa Kort, who serves as president of the Committee on Political Dialogue with China in the Chilean parliament. This position allowed Kort to develop a close relationship with the Chinese Embassy in Santiago, and he was therefore able to secure from the embassy a roughly $10,000 donation to the city that had elected him as a deputy.42

Despite the formation of this committee in 2005, Chile lacks a strong pro-China parliamentary lobby like those that have emerged in Argentina or Brazil.43 Yet in recent years, many legislators from across the Chilean ideological spectrum have received invitations from the Chinese Embassy in Santiago to visit China, including Senate President Jaime Quintana (Party for Democracy); Senator Ena von Baer (Independent Democratic Union); and deputies like Alejandro Santana (National Renewal), Francisco Undurraga (Evópoli), Javier Macaya (Independent Democratic Union), Pepe Auth (independent, formerly of the Party for Democracy) and Carlos Abel Jarpa (Radical Party). It seems likely that a group of parliamentarians who will publicly defend Chinese investment and loans will emerge, much as such blocs have cropped up in neighboring countries.44

But no such strong, pro-investment parliamentary lobby has emerged yet in Chile, even as a legislative coalition opposed to outside investment has begun to materialize. In 2020, following a major investment deal that secured the Chinese state-owned company StateGrid control of more than half of Chile’s electricity grid, Congressmen Jaime Naranjo (Socialist Party) and Miguel Mellado (National Renewal) introduced a bill to limit foreign investment in strategic sectors, such as energy and minerals.45 This bill, mainly aimed at limiting Chinese investment, is currently the subject of parliamentary discussions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Donor</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
<th>Estimated donation size (U.S. dollars)</th>
<th>Non-N95 masks</th>
<th>N95 masks</th>
<th>Test kits</th>
<th>Ventilators</th>
<th>Other supplies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 6, 2020</td>
<td>Lishui Merchants Association in Santiago</td>
<td>Municipality of Santiago and Chilean Police of Investigations</td>
<td>$44,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 16, 2020</td>
<td>Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce in Chile</td>
<td>Municipality of Santiago and Police Department</td>
<td>$28,000</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 21, 2020</td>
<td>Government of China through Chinese Embassy in Santiago</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security/Ministry of Health</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>6,700</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,000 items (infrared thermometers, goggles, disposable jumpsuits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 28, 2020</td>
<td>Zhejiang Chamber of Commerce in Chile</td>
<td>Municipality of Santiago and Chilean Police of Investigations</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>600 face shields and 1 sanitation tunnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14, 2020</td>
<td>China Minmetals, Chinalco, Youtong, DiDi, Dahua, ChangYu, Joyvio, China Construction Bank, Tsinghua University, among others (through the Chilean Embassy in Beijing) (first batch)</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security/Ministry of Health</td>
<td>$2.9 million</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7,500 pairs of gloves, 9,980 digital thermometers, 900 pairs of goggles, 2 disinfection cabins, 2 temperature kiosks, infrared thermal imaging cameras, and a quarantine epidemic unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14, 2020</td>
<td>Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation (through Chilean Embassy in Beijing)</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security</td>
<td>$530,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
<td>Estimated donation size (U.S. dollars)</td>
<td>Donated materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14, 2020</td>
<td>Jingdong (through the Chilean Embassy in Beijing)</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security/Ministry of Health</td>
<td>$549,000</td>
<td>100,000 pairs of gloves and 15,000 gowns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 15, 2020</td>
<td>Tianqi Lithium (through the Chilean Embassy in Beijing)</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security/Ministry of Health</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 15, 2020</td>
<td>Municipalities of Chengdu (Sichuan), Shenzhen (Guangdong), and Ningbo (Zhejiang)</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security/Ministry of Health</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24, 2020</td>
<td>Chinese entrepreneur’s donation coordinated by the Chilean Embassy in Beijing (second batch)</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security/Ministry of Health</td>
<td>$2.7 million</td>
<td>50,000 pairs of gloves, 16,000 isolation suits, and 10,000 facial protection masks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24, 2020</td>
<td>Chinese entrepreneur’s donation coordinated by the Chilean Embassy in Beijing (third batch)</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Public Security/Ministry of Health</td>
<td>$2.5 million</td>
<td>50,000 pairs of gloves, 16,000 isolation suits, and 10,000 facial protection masks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 15, 2020</td>
<td>Chinese diaspora in Rancagua</td>
<td>Municipality of Rancagua</td>
<td>$14,000</td>
<td>400 boxes with gloves, masks, and disinfectant alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 18, 2020</td>
<td>Chinese Embassy in Santiago (through Deputy Issa Kort)</td>
<td>Municipality of Rancagua</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>Undisclosed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Author’s data set.
Mask Diplomacy as a Learning Process

Chile faced two obstacles related to the donation of medical supplies that ended up being economic opportunities for China. The first was the conflation of sales and donations of Chinese ventilators that, at least in part, led to the diplomatic embarrassment that could be termed Ventilator-Gate (see below). The second was the enormous lack of medical supplies—especially masks, gloves, and face shields—in the first weeks of the pandemic. These mistakes offered lessons on how the donations were handled and how the personal ties between Chinese and Chilean businesspeople and diplomats were crucial to mitigating Chile’s shortage of medical supplies and later proved to be pivotal in a successful subsequent deal between Chile and Sinovac Biotech to purchase vaccines.
A Diplomatic Dustup Over Ventilators

The Ventilator-Gate case is important because it shows that the success of Beijing’s mask diplomacy—as a foreign policy overture intended to improve China’s image abroad—did not necessarily depend on the involvement of the Chinese embassies in the recipient countries. In fact, as the Chilean case suggests, direct embassy involvement may have been an obstacle at times.

On March 19, 2020, Mañalich told the press that the Chinese government would donate 1,000 mechanical ventilators after the former health minister had held a meeting with ambassador Xu. In its March 24 Spanish-language news broadcast, the Chinese state-owned network China Global Television Network reported that the donation would be made by the Chinese Embassy in Santiago, leading the Chilean undersecretary of public health, Paula Daza, to “deeply thank the Chinese government.”

But the 1,000 ventilators never materialized—and both the Chilean Ministry of Health and the Chinese Embassy in Chile ended up embarrassed. In an April 4 tweet, Mañalich halved the supposed donation figure to 500, but on April 19 he ended up confirming in a press conference that there would, in fact, be no donation of ventilators at all.

The donation would have increased Chile’s stock of ventilators by more than 30 percent. The failure of this donation to materialize prompted the Chilean government to urgently search for ventilators elsewhere to cover rapidly rising domestic demand. At that time, Chile was five weeks away from the country’s worst moment of the pandemic to date, when it reached 60,000 active cases of COVID-19 on May 30 (see figure 5). The urgent need for ventilators, therefore, together with the botched Chinese donation combined to produce an overhaul of Chile’s logistics system for bringing in various forms of assistance, purchases, and aid.

Simply put, Chilean officials abandoned a government-led effort to purchase ventilators and turned to the private sector. With a committed private fund of around $23 million, the Chilean Confederation of Production and Commerce, a powerful domestic business association, took the lead. Going forward, this meant that Chile began seeking to buy ventilators without the need for public bids, with a private agent donating procured ventilators to the Ministry of Health. This fund, known as Solidaridad e Innovación Empresarial (the Solidarity and Business Innovation Fund) and colloquially called SiEmpre por Chile, administers contributions from Chile’s largest business associations to finance various corporate social responsibility activities and initiatives. Piñera, being a former businessman with close links to Chile’s business community, embraced this idea. From Beijing, Schmidt,
who is a friend of the confederation’s president (Juan Sutil), offered his embassy as an intermediary for storing any equipment in China, since he feared that Chinese authorities otherwise might confiscate these resources and then redirect them to other countries instead.51

These fraught weeks saw an intense battle among buyers from all over the world to get a hold of the few Chinese ventilators that were available for sale on the global market. As a result, a lively black market for ventilators emerged in several Chinese cities to respond to this global demand. Sometimes, Chinese sellers only accepted cash payments.52 With ventilators costing between $40,000 and $60,000, mobilizing cash in bags became a logistical feat for the Chileans and others who sought to procure them locally in China.53 Schmidt went so far as to conceal the route of shipments “for fear that other countries would [commandeer] the ventilators at the airports.”54
Interviewees acknowledge how difficult and irregular such transactions became in what they called the “wild west” of fraying supply chains. Some Chilean private players ended up negotiating with Chinese counterparts completely outside the law in a fragmented marketplace in which many foreign customers were trying to acquire, store, and ship these prized ventilators. Often, the Chinese and Chilean counterparts arranged ventilator deliveries directly in factories or in warehouses located in Chinese industrial districts. In total, the Chilean business confederation purchased 515 ventilators and 485 high-flow oxygen therapy devices in China (see table 2).

### TABLE 2

| Healthcare Supplies Procured in China by the Chilean Confederation of Production and Commerce |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Item                          | Cost (U.S. dollars) |
| 515 ventilators               | $13 million          |
| 700,000 rapid tests           | $4 million           |
| 200,000 polymerase chain reaction tests | $4 million         |
| 485 high-flow oxygen therapy devices | $2 million         |

**Source:** Author’s calculations based on stakeholder interviews and SiEmpre por Chile data. See “Collaborative Initiatives With the State,” SiEmpre por Chile, October 2020, https://siempreporchile.cl/uploads/archivos/VER_DETALLE RECURSOS_General_OCT2020.pdf.

Even once the ventilators were secured, transporting them to Chile was a challenge. Despite Schmidt’s dedicated logistics channels, which entailed shipping the ventilators out on the same flights as the China Helps Chile donations, Chinese customs intervened because of an unrelated problem with testing kits sent to Spain. Because Beijing sought to forestall further reputational damage, it “did not allow anything to go out,” including to Chile. Schmidt noted that China’s Ministry of Commerce had “a list of certified companies but reduced the list of companies authorized to export to avoid accusations that donated equipment is not of a high quality,” “When I wanted to send the donations” to Chile, Schmidt recalled, “they asked me to hand [over] certificates of origin, and of course I didn’t have any of that.” Ultimately, permission was granted for these donations and confederation-procured ventilators to be loaded onto a chartered Chilean military plane that delivered these supplies from China to Chile.

Once Chinese equipment was set to head to Chile, the undersecretary for international economic relations at the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs took charge of making the link between the Chilean Embassy in Beijing, the Confederation of Production and Commerce in Chile, and the Chilean Ministry of Health in Santiago. According to several interviewees, the flights from China booked for this purpose included commercial flights by LATAM Airlines, Chilean air force planes, or private charters paid for by the confederation. However, regardless of the type of carrier, officials
from the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs took charge of cargo and instructed stakeholders on the space available on each flight. High-level negotiations were held with Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore to allow the Chilean planes to stop in those countries without having their cargo be confiscated. Some flights were also used to repatriate Chilean citizens in China who wanted to return home or, on the outbound legs, to transfer Chinese citizens who wanted to return to their country. All of this logistical wrangling involved extensive consular cooperation between Chile and China.

The Key Role of Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Importing Supplies

The Ventilator-Gate diplomatic misunderstanding revealed that mask diplomacy was not a monolithic policy dictated by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In fact, the Chinese Embassy played a secondary role in the shipments of donations. Notably, the Chinese diaspora community in Chile played an important role in offering early donations and managing the importing of supplies in the months that followed.

Donations channeled through the Chilean Embassy in Beijing and the smaller number of donations made directly by the Chinese Embassy in Santiago were administered by the National Emergency Office of the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security (ONEMI) with the Central Supply of the National Health Service System (CENABAST). These donations were then distributed to hospitals or public organizations that had the greatest need. CENABAST is the public agency that aims to supply drugs and clinical supplies to Chile's National Health Services System and municipal health facilities; during the pandemic, it was responsible for managing the stock of available supplies. ONEMI depends on the Ministry of Interior and Public Security and was established to respond, in particular, to the earthquakes that regularly affect Chile. ONEMI’s emergency protocols and network of offices throughout the country helped distribute materials in the critical days of the pandemic. Together, these two organizations formed the central core of logistics for the distribution supplies from the China Helps Chile campaign. Yet these donations arrived after mid-May, when COVID-19 cases in the country were already surging and almost two months after the quarantine had started.

Before that, the Lishui Merchants Association in Santiago and the Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce in Chile made the first two donations in Chile in early April, which went directly to the Municipality of Santiago. Dating back to February, there were almost no masks available in Chile because most of them had been sold to Chinese importers, when the pandemic was not yet a problem in Chile. While seemingly a small donation in terms of its market value, the 170,000 masks donated between the two chambers were very valuable at a time when there were no masks on the market. At the donation ceremony, the mayor of Santiago, Felipe Alessandri, expressed his gratitude for the donation, saying that the police did not have enough masks to patrol the city. A few days later, the Zhejiang Chamber of Commerce in Chile donated 50,000 masks and 600 face shields to the Chilean Police of Investigations.
Donations made by Chinese diaspora associations in Chile and donations from Chinese provinces through their commercial offices in Chile were delivered directly to Chilean municipalities, which then directed these donations without intermediary coordination from ONEMI or CENABAST.

CENABAST also bought medical supplies from Chilean companies with direct links to factories in China. Chinese importers in the Meiggs neighborhood benefited greatly from their role as a link between Chilean demand and Chinese suppliers and were able to capitalize on the huge sales throughout 2020. The trade liberalization of the two countries’ FTA helped to make purchasing more agile than in other South American countries. According to Chilean customs data, between March 26 and April 12, 2020, mask imports from China increased by 3,300 percent, shipments of common thermometers jumped by 198 percent, imports of infrared thermometers climbed by 111 percent, and shipments of plastic gowns spiked by 125 percent, compared to the same period in 2019. As the pandemic was brought under control in China and exploded in Chile, the supply of inputs from China flooded the local market. By the end of June 2020, donations became less relevant than they had been in previous months, since masks and other supplies were by then more available in Chile.

Lessons for Chinese Foreign Policy

While in some Latin American countries like Venezuela and Cuba, China-originating donations of healthcare supplies were led by the Chinese Embassies, Chile stands out as a case where the leading actors were Chinese companies with economic interests in the country, and to a smaller degree, the Chinese diaspora in Chile.

The Ventilator-Gate incident shows that the relationship between the Chinese Embassy in Santiago and the Chilean government ended up being more of an obstacle than a boost to the success of China’s mask diplomacy in Chile. Xu paid a high price for the Ventilator-Gate and stepped down as ambassador in October 2020, less than three years after his arrival in Chile. Meanwhile, strengthening business-to-business ties, and the preexisting relations of Chinese business elites with their Chilean counterparts, proved to be more efficient actors in the mask diplomacy than state-to-state ties.

This lesson has had a huge subsequent impact on the way China and Chile have cooperated during the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Chile. When Sinovac Biotech—a Chinese biopharmaceutical company based in Beijing—began testing its CoronaVac vaccine against COVID-19, Chile was, alongside Turkey, Indonesia, and Brazil, one of the first countries to approve testing. Initially, in June 2020 an agreement was signed between the Catholic University of Chile and Sinovac Biotech, which opened the door for Chile to obtain 20 million doses for three years at a 30 percent discount. Thanks to this initiative, Chile has been one of the most successful countries in the world at
vaccinating its population (together with Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom). One in four Chileans has received at least one dose as of March 15, 2021 (see figure 6).67 This would not have been possible if Sinovac Biotech had not provided the vast majority of vaccines to Chile.68

For China’s foreign policy agenda, the case of Chile is a success story because it served to reinforce Beijing’s narrative that China has made great contributions to the eradication of COVID-19, including the development of a reliable vaccine. By delegating agency to Chinese enterprises, China has been a key partner in the quest for a solution against the pandemic in Chile, something that Beijing has not achieved in other countries in the region due to an impulse to centralize its foreign policy through the channel of ministerial relationships. One way China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs can avoid falling into the trap of overstretch is by relying more on its enterprises, diaspora communities, and substate actors.69

**Conclusion**

China’s mask diplomacy in Chile reveals much about the diversity of Chinese players abroad and how decentralized Chinese activities can be—even on issues the central government in Beijing regards as strategic interests.

In just three months, Chile received donations of medical supplies worth $9.5 million from a diverse array of Chinese companies, local and corporate foundations, cities, provinces, and the central government. Meanwhile, an equally diverse array of Chilean actors leveraged their own long-standing connections to these Chinese players to purchase ventilators and other supplies from Chinese enterprises to the tune of some $23 million (see table 2).

Instead of a story of two governments making big bilateral deals, China’s mask diplomacy in Chile showcases how prior connections forged by local actors can be repurposed and can evolve. This paper fills a gap in understanding China’s foreign policy, particularly on the critical issue of the coronavirus pandemic. This analysis of China’s mask diplomacy in Chile is particularly relevant since it shows how improvisation and adaptation plays a key role in China’s current foreign policy in terms of translating policy guidelines with a global reach into practice. Presumably, other works that study this policy in depth in other countries around the world, in parts of Africa, Europe, or Asia, will also find adaptations to local contexts on the part of China. Such mask diplomacy encompasses an enormous number of different micro-level policies adapted to the realities of each country that has diplomatic relations with China.
Appendix 1: Top Ten Recipients of Chinese Aid in Latin America Early in the Pandemic (February to June 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Total aid (in millions of U.S. dollars)</th>
<th>As a percentage of total Chinese aid (by type)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central government</td>
<td>$63.9</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial governments</td>
<td>$-1.0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City governments</td>
<td>$-1.1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises</td>
<td>$40.9</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>$15.9</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>$0.5</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaspora</td>
<td>$0.04</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Author’s data set.
About the Author

Francisco Urdinez is an assistant professor of the Institute of Political Science and an affiliated professor at the Center of International Studies and the Center for Asian Studies at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile). He is interested in international political economy, with a focus on emerging powers, particularly Chinese economic statecraft in Latin America. His research has been published in the Journal of Peace Research, Comparative Political Studies, the Chinese Journal of International Politics, and Foreign Policy Analysis, among other journals.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Evan Feigenbaum, Nonna Gorilovskaya, Ryan DeVries, and Liming Lin for their editorial assistance; Carsten Schulz, Diego Telias, and Jorge Sahd for their comments on an early draft, and Eliana Jung for her excellent research assistance. The author received support from the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development of Chile through Fondecyt Iniciación, Grant #11180081/2018. The views expressed in this research are the author’s own and do not reflect the views of the Chilean government.
Notes


6 With the exception of a donation of $2 million on February 27, 2020, when Chile was hit by a magnitude 8.8 earthquake (the fifth-largest quake recorded worldwide since 1900). The earthquake badly damaged or destroyed 200,000 homes, and more than 500 people were confirmed dead. The Chinese aid consisted of 700 tents, 10,000 blankets, 100 portable generators, and two water purifiers for a total of 96 tons of supplies. See June S. Beittel and Rhonda Margesson, Chile Earthquake: U.S. and International Response, Congressional Research Service, March 11, 2010, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20100311_R41112_70a1e51b2b8d1fec2e0c930d3f370411ce28e91.pdf.

7 According to official sources, the promised Chinese donations amounted to about $12.6 million, but based on the author’s calculations, only about $9 million of these promised supplies ended up materializing. For more information, see the author’s data set, which is the source of any unsourced numbers throughout the paper. See Diego Telias and Francisco Urdinez, “Mask Diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean (MDLAC) Dataset v. 1.0,” Pontifical Catholic University of Chile UC Center for Asian Studies, https://www.estudiosasiaticos.uc.cl/humanidades-digitales/mask-diplomacy-v-1-0. Also see Diego Telias and Francisco Urdinez, “China’s Foreign Aid Determinants: Lessons From a Novel Dataset of the Mask Diplomacy During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Research Gate, August 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344035590_Chinas_Foreign_Aid_Determinants_Lessons_from_a_Novel_Dataset_of_the_Mask_Diplomacy_During_the_COVID-19_Pandemic.
8 Ibid.

9 February 11 is the date of the first known pandemic-era Chinese donation to a Latin American country, Panama. See “Chinese Ambassador to Panama Attends the Chinese Association of Panama’s Mask Donation Ceremony,” Chinese Embassy in Panama, February 13, 2020, http://pa.china-embassy.org/chn/dbcxx/dbcxx/t1744134.htm. The author stopped tracking news on June 20 after noticing that donations had peaked in late March and had since become sparser. Eventually, by the end of June, donations were quite rare.

10 All unsourced numbers mentioned in the paper are drawn from this data set. Use the following link to find an online interactive map of the data set. See Telias and Urdinez, “Mask Diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean (MDLAC) Dataset v. 1.0.”

11 As a result of the reforms that took place in China in the late 1970s, private enterprises began being allowed to operate. Indeed, this transformation was one of the pillars that allowed China to become one of the world’s largest economies. The gross industrial output of state-owned enterprises in China went from almost 80 percent in 1978 to 26 percent in 2010. (See Nicholas R. Lardy, Markets Over Mao: The Rise of Private Business in China (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2014), 75). This means that today’s private sector in China is responsible for a large part of the country’s economy.

However, there are two aspects that differentiate the concept of Chinese private enterprises from their Western counterparts. On the one hand, all land in China is publicly owned, and enterprises access land through long-term leases. (See Barry Naughton, “Is China Socialist?,” Journal of Economic Perspectives 31, no. 1 January 2017: 3–24, 7). Second, the Chinese Communist Party can exert enormous influence over the decisions of these enterprises. It does so by recruiting entrepreneurs into the party and then either influencing or controlling the activities of these entrepreneurs’ private firms (See Lardy, Markets Over Mao, 119). A recent example of the control the party can exert over the private economy is a document entitled “Opinion on Strengthening the United Front Work of the Private Economy in the New Era,” which was released in August 2020 by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. (See Stephen Olson, “How ‘Private’ Are Private Chinese Companies?,” Hinrich Foundation, October 2, 2020, https://www.hinrichfoundation.com/research/article/us-china/private-chinese-companies/). In this document, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party calls for “strengthening the united front work with the private sector is an important way to realize the Party’s leadership over the private economy, an important content to develop and improve the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and an important guarantee to promote high-quality development of the private economy.” (See “CPC Issues Guidelines for Strengthening United Front Work Involving Private Sector,” China Daily, September 16, 2020, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202009/16/WS5f617e66a31024ad0ba79e09.html.)


13 Telias and Urdinez, “China’s Foreign Aid Determinants.”


15 Author’s interviews with the counsel to the Directorate of Multilateral Policy of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (September 30, 2020) and a diplomat at the Chilean Embassy in Beijing (October 25, 2020).
Author's interviews with a diplomat at the Chilean Embassy in Beijing (October 25, 2020) and with the chief of staff of the undersecretary of international economic relations of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (October 6, 2020).

Author's interviews with the chief of staff of the undersecretary of international economic relations of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (October 6, 2020) and with the counsel to the Directorate of Multilateral Policy of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (September 30, 2020).


Ibid.


Author’s interview with a Chilean Embassy diplomat in China (October 25, 2020).


“Estimate of Foreign Persons in Permanent Residence in Chile as of December 31, 2019,” Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2020, https://www.ine.cl/docs/default-source/demografia-y-migracion/publicaciones-y-anuarios/migracion%C3%B3n-internacional/estimac%C3%B3n-poblaci%C3%B3n-extranjera-en-chile-2018/estimaci%C3%B3n-poblaci%C3%B3n-extranjera-en-chile-2019-
This study estimated that in 2018 there were 13,400 Chinese expatriates in Chile. Based on the growth rates of the Chinese diaspora in previous years, the author estimates that, by 2020–2021, the number of Chinese living in Chile would be 15,000. Like in other Latin American countries such as Cuba, Mexico or Peru, in Chile there has been Chinese migration since the eighteenth century, consisting primarily of miners and peasants. See Adrian H. Hearn, Diaspora and Trust: Cuba, Mexico, and the Rise of China (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.) Nevertheless, in Chile, this migration has been very scarce and has mostly taken place in the northern region of Tarapacá. See “Chinese Presence in Chile: A Research in the Archives,” Archivo Nacional de Chile, October 2, 2017, https://www.archivonacional.gob.cl/616/w3-article-80189.html?noredirect=1.) From the 1990s onward, Chile began to receive Chinese migration all across the country due to greater Chilean economic growth.


The Belt and Road Initiative is a geopolitical project launched by the Chinese government in 2013 that aims to finance rail, port, and road infrastructure to economically integrate Eurasia. The project takes up the idea of the ancient Eurasian trade route known as the Silk Road organized from the Chinese silk trade since the first century BCE. China’s western provinces of Gansu, Qinhai, and Sichuan, and the autonomous regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, have developed less economically than the eastern provinces, so the project seeks to stimulate the economies of these regions and reduce the internal development gap that exists in China between east and west. Chengdu, where Chile opened a consulate, is the capital of the Sichuan Province.


Author’s interview with the Chinese Embassy diplomat in Chile (October 20, 2020) confirmed Xu’s statement; and Fernanda Villalobos, “Mañalich Visits Cenabast With Ambassador Xu Bu and Says There Will Be an ‘Important’ Donation From China Which Includes Ventilators,” Emol, April 21, 2020, https://www.emol.com/noticias/Nacional/2020/04/21/983792/Manalich-embajador-Xu-Bu-ventiladores.html

Ilustre Municipalidad de Rancagua, @munirancagua, Facebook post, June 18, 2020, 4:52 p.m., https://www.facebook.com/munirancagua/photos/a-esta-hora-alcaldesoto-junto-diputado-issakort-que-debido-a-su-gesti%C3%B3n-hizo-pos/2802632386654936/.


Leiva, “China’s Intrusion into Chile’s Energy Sector Pushes Deputies to Submit Bill to Regulate Foreign Participation in Strategic Sectors.”


The author’s interview with a Chinese Embassy diplomat in Chile (October 20, 2020) confirmed that the Embassy had not committed to donating these ventilators.


Author’s interview with a Chinese Embassy diplomat in Chile (October 20, 2020); and Villalobos, “Mañalich Visits Cenabast With Ambassador Xu Bu and Says There Will Be an ‘Important’ Donation From China Which Includes Ventilators.”

Author’s interview with an official of the Confederation of Production and Commerce of Chile (September 30, 2020) and a Chinese Embassy diplomat in Chile (October 20, 2020).

Author’s interview with an official of the Confederation of Production and Commerce of Chile (September 30, 2020).


56 Of which 140 are ChenWei CWH-3010, 111 are China Meheco (4 SV600, 45 ACM812A, 45 510S, 17 VG-70), 123 are Jiuxin Medical H-100, 100 are Beijing Medlink (40 ZWH-550, 10 are ZWH-600-C, 50 SH 200), and 41 are Aeonmed (11 VG-60, 30 510S). Data accessible at SiEmpre, 2020, page 2, https://siempreporchile.cl/uploads/archivos/VER_DETALLE_RECURSOS_General_OCT2020.pdf


58 Ibid.

59 Author’s interview with the chief of staff of the undersecretary of international economic relations of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (October 6, 2020) and an official of the Confederation of Production and Commerce of Chile (September 30, 2020).

60 Author’s interview with the chief of staff of the undersecretary of international economic relations of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (October 6, 2020) and with an official of the Ministry of Health of Chile (October 26, 2020).

61 Percentages are derived from table 2.


