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***The Dragon's Flight to the Tropics:
China's Involvement in the Caribbean***

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
International Studies

By
Kellie O'Boyle

Under the mentorship of *Christopher M. Brown, Ph.D.*

ABSTRACT

In 2008, the United States experienced an economic crisis that ultimately caused it to take a step back from its involvement in the Caribbean, in particular. This vacuum left by the United States was swiftly filled by China, which shifted the balance of power in the region and provided China a strategic foothold. This event allowed China to expand its influence, as well as challenge US interests through the use of soft power such as trade and investments in infrastructure. While this symbiotic relationship benefits both parties, there is usually a trade inequality in China's favor. China's traditional use of hard power in places like the South China Sea is at odds with its current use of soft power in the Caribbean. China's opening prompted a need for resources to support the populace's desire for economic prosperity. Could these factors indicate a shift in Chinese foreign policy? Looking at Trinidad & Tobago, I analyze evidence of Chinese influence and economic ties in relation to change in foreign policy.

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Introduction

It is no secret that China is furthering its involvement around the globe and influencing other countries in various ways including economically¹. Economic involvement equates to trade, economic partnerships, infrastructure development and more. Chinese investment in Africa started in 2004 with road investment in Angola, but by 2009 it became the largest trade partner of Africa with billions of dollars in trade (See Appendix A) (Pozzeban 2015).

China has also been predicted to play a role in the world today, which was why it was termed a BRICS nation. Dependent on population and production, the BRICs nations of Brazil, Russia, India, and China were forecasted to become the main suppliers of raw materials or completed products. These countries are emerging economies in the world and they are thought to share a similar path of economic development (Mazzei 2016). But why is any of this important? China's rise to a position of global influence is vital as the United States is debating whether they will be friend or foe. As Lao Tzu said: "Knowing others is wisdom, knowing your self is Enlightenment," (Lao Tzu n.d.). One of the ways to "know" China is to view their behavior and actions in the Caribbean. Their involvement in the Caribbean could be a sign of a change in policy and it is critical to understand a potential policy shift. My question is: is China's involvement in the Caribbean indicative of a foreign policy shift?

Since the early 2000s the government of China has been encouraging businesses to invest in the Caribbean in the forms of trade and construction projects. And while

¹ deLisle, J. & Goldstein, A. 2017. China 's Global Engagement: Cooperation, Competition, and Influence in the 21st Century. Brookings Institution Press.

China hope to build ties with the countries in the region, it also hopes to take advantage of decreased US and European involvement and influence. Chinese businesses started investing and establishing trade around 2008, which is also considered the beginning of the declining Western influence, as that was when an economic crisis occurred. As shown in other regions, China's economic actions dovetail with political and diplomatic goals (Campbell & Valette 2014).

With the easing of the US embargo on Cuba and greater global interest in Cuba, it will be interesting to see what happens as the US will be interested in trade and other financial opportunities (McWhinney 2016). However, that is not the only area of concern as China has been heavily involved with the other Caribbean, Latin American, and South American countries. Their heavy involvement can be compared with the declining involvement of the US and Europe, which is important to note. During an interview with NPR, President Obama was asked about China's presence in the Caribbean. The President said "if China is making investments that are building up infrastructure or improving education or helping the people, then we welcome that. We think that's great. The only thing is, you got to make sure you look at what strings may be attached" (NPR 2015). It is also important to note that the Caribbean is a region of the world where recognition of China is split between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, which we commonly refer to as China. China has usually vied for the "One China" policy, but many Caribbean nations still have some sort of tie or recognition of Taiwan (Menéndez 2014).

My project is relevant to the academic community because it will focus on Chinese involvement in the Caribbean and examine to see if China is strategically positioning themselves in the region. Because of China's global role and their growing

economy, it is important to determine what their intentions are. A change in Chinese foreign policy would be vital to many, as it could mean a change in Chinese diplomacy and how other countries would engage with the Chinese government.

Literature Review

Regarding the topic of China in the Caribbean, other researchers have looked at how the China-Taiwan issue has shaped relations, particularly the One State vs Two State policies. Researchers also have looked at the economic role China has played, especially Chinese FDI in the Caribbean. The role of China in Latin America has also been examined by numerous people. The purpose of this case study is to determine foreign policy shift. Due to the concepts of foreign policy, hard power, and soft power, I wanted my Literature Review to reflect and provide background to provide exigence. I incorporated sections on China in the Caribbean and South China Sea to provide context in regards to soft and hard power.

Foreign Policy

While foreign policy can broadly be defined as a government's plan or strategy in how they interact with other nations, there is much more to it than that. Petrič (2013) gives foreign policy a simple definition of: "an activity of the State with which it fulfills its aims and interests within the international arena." According to Petrič (2013), Rosenau, who has been considered a leader on the topic of theory of international relations and foreign policy, has said that foreign policy can be defined as a systematic decision-making process by authorized officials of the State. These officials are authorized by the constitution or other such legislation to make decisions. These simpler

definitions often exclude many important facets of foreign policy, although other scholars have used shortened methods for simplicity's sake. Taking that into account, vital aspects of foreign policy involve the circular process of policy that considers the initiatives of the State and possibly asserts that stance, balancing the interests of other States, and being aware of current restricting factors. Petrič (2013) intones that foreign policy is ever changing, as well as the idea that geopolitics influences a State's foreign policy. Overall, Petrič (2013) includes a State's geopolitical area, how much power it has, government stability, opinion from the public, political climate in the State, and tension with groups and their interests.

Hard vs. Soft Power

The usage of hard power or soft power in foreign policy has been a debatable topic for quite some time. Hard power consists of persuasion by force or military forces, while soft power consists of trade, economic involvement, diplomacy, and other less aggressive actions. While both have their advantages, each send their own message when utilized properly (Petrič 2013).

A historical use of soft power exemplified by China is detailed by Pleschová & Fürst (2015). A 2009 visit by then Chinese President Hu Jintao to Slovakia was interrupted when humanitarian protesters were attacked by a group of Chinese civilians (Pleschová & Fürst, 2015). The main focus of this paper by Pleschová & Fürst is on similar incidents around that time in Europe, as well as Chinese soft power. The authors state that previous incidents have been viewed as state supported nationalism among a Chinese population. Soft-power and nationalism via Chinese expatriates are theorized to

be two tools China is currently using in their foreign policy. This study uses numerous sources to examine the events of that day. Government material, YouTube videos of the incidents, television and print news sources, personal interviews, and first-hand experiences are some of the information used by the authors in their article. The study bases its findings on qualitative finding such as the tendencies of China and its government.

How States Decide Foreign Policy

Overall, there is no specific method to how countries decide their own foreign policy. According to Petrič (2013), who references Vukadinović, important factors that have been considered include influence from inside the country, as well as outside stimuli from the international community. When a foreign policy decision is analyzed, looking at the influences, who decided on the policy, the effects of the choice, and the stages of making policy choices are all reviewed. Furthermore, a decision-maker of foreign policy may be influenced by personal views, personal values, pressure put on them by outside parties, and their country's standing in the international community. These can all factor into a decision making process, especially the country's position in the world, as that involves their relationship with neighboring countries, the current atmosphere in their region, and how developed they may or may not be (Petrič 2013).

China in the Caribbean

In regards to economic impact, China's growing global influence is felt especially in the Caribbean. Bernal's (2010) aptly named study "The Dragon in the Caribbean: China-CARICOM Economic Relations," is focused on how China interacts with the

Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (2010). These countries include Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Chinese economic relations with these countries include trade, as well as economic assistance on the front of development. As Small Island Developing States (SIDS), these mostly island nations usually face population, resource, and developmental issues. It is important to note that the economic aid from China cannot be separated from its geopolitical aspirations. Bernal (2010) additionally makes the case that the CARICOM nations are turning to China in absence of aid and attention from closer countries such as the United States of America and Canada. Bernal's closing remarks include that the Chinese foreign investment and aid will eventually lead to a decrease in American influence in the Caribbean.

In regards to the Two State policy and relations with Taiwan, Badri-Maharaj (2016) said China had historically attempted to gain favor among Caribbean countries with financial incentives in order to keep them from forming ties with Taiwan. This has changed in recent years, as Chinese policy is not only focused on blocking Taiwan. The current economies of the Caribbean have made it a ripe ground for Chinese patronage. While the entire Caribbean is not devoted to relations with Beijing over Taipei or vice versa, there are a small portion of Caribbean nations that recognize Taiwan. These nations, including Haiti, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent, the Dominican Republic, and Belize are six out of the twenty-three countries worldwide who have ties to the Taiwanese government in Taipei. Although it seems key that these nations are in the same geographic area, China's economic patronage has been widespread throughout the

region, independent of who supports whom. During a visit to Trinidad and Tobago in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping revealed plans to make available eight million USD worth of loans and grants available to the region to a group of leaders from other Caribbean countries including Jamaica, Guyana, the Bahamas, Suriname, Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Grenada. This announcement came at an opportune time, as the US has not been as financially generous in recent years.

Chinese Involvement in the South China Sea

Contrary to the use of soft power and financial aid in the Caribbean, China's foreign policy in the South China Sea directly contrasts in comparison. One point to keep in mind, is that the South China Sea debacle has been framed as a security threat and is a reason why their policy exhibits the characteristics of hard power, instead of the soft power seen in the Caribbean. There continues to be much debate among the international and academic community whether this claim by the Chinese in the South China Sea is justified. According to the US government, as stated by the Committee of Foreign Affairs, China has become interested in developing naval power in the South China Sea, as well as becoming more aggressive toward Japan, a known ally to the US (US 2012). However, it must be noted that Sino-Japanese relations have historically been inconsistent and plagued with violence, which is why many Chinese citizens continue to harbor hatred for Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his political faction recently passed legislation to expand Japan's Defense Force against the will of the Japanese populace, an action that will allow the Defense Force to have a greater role in the region.

My contribution to this area of discussion is bridging the gap in literature regarding a change of Chinese foreign policy. Because there is a lack of research on this particular phenomenon, I believe it will be beneficial for me to explore this development in Chinese foreign policy. I also think insights on this topic would be of interest to the international community, particularly the Western powers, as they are interested in China's future actions and plans. With China's strategic positioning in the Caribbean, the balance of power may be disrupted and US interests could be threatened. This research will also see the role the Caribbean plays in Sino-Carib relations.

Theory

The 1802 introduction of the Chinese to the Caribbean consisted of almost two hundred Chinese laborers. These people were brought to Trinidad in the hopes that Chinese labor would phase out slave labor, along with avoiding slave uprisings in the Caribbean (Rajkumar, 2013). The second introduction of Chinese to the Caribbean in occurred in the late 1800s into the early 1940s. With thousands of Chinese being brought over as laborers and abandoning plantation work, the former workers began to set up small businesses and shops.

The importance of this lies in economic contributions, as China's rise as a world power and its economic patronage of various countries around the world is critical. Overall, China is taking on an increasing international role in business, with their outward direct investment growing 36.5 per cent each year since 2000 (UNDP China). Because China is rise to the forefront, it is critical to examine the past and future effects of a Chinese population in a region of Chinese interest. Additionally, there has been

much speculation and questioning of the path China will take. Stratfor (2016) theorizes that conflict between China and the US is imminent, although the time and nature is unknown. If China has shifted their foreign policy, this will hopefully allow for more comprehensive research on the matter and assist in determining if the two powers are on a collision course.

The concept of the “Chinese Dream” is important to mention, as the dream involves China as economically, diplomatically politically, scientifically, and militarily strong, as well as modernized, socially stable, and environmentally healthy. This vision was announced in a 2013 speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping (New York Times 2013). The critical takeaway here is by what actions will that grand dream be accomplished? When Xi visited T & T in 2013, the Trini Prime Minister directly referenced the Chinese dream and expressed support for it, hoping China would be a model country. Considering the actions and policies China must enact to accomplish such an ambitious dream by 2020 and 2049, it is crucial to consider the impact of those actions and who is involved. In consideration are the necessary resources to support a large population; resources that could be supplied by the Caribbean. Others, such as Brandt et al. (2012) believe that Chinese involvement in the Caribbean is a golden opportunity for cooperation from all parties involved.

One of the large questions in this topic is why. Why would China have expanded its influence into the Caribbean or even involve itself in the area? A recent article from Stratfor (2016) includes an interesting perspective of the current mindset in China:

“China’s economic rise has created for it an imperative to secure key trade routes and to protect its overseas resources and markets from foreign intervention. This adds to the three imperatives that have historically define the country’s

geopolitics: the maintenance of a united Han China, control of the country's buffer regions, and the protection of its coastline." (1)

In contrast, Brandt et al.'s (2012) policy paper on Chinese engagement in the Caribbean notes that China's need for resources has caused it to utilize economic partnerships in order to garner resources and diplomacy from countries in the region. Did this need for resources cause China to shift policy? Additionally, Badri-Maharaj (2016) believes that the motive behind increased Chinese involvement in the Caribbean is still unclear, as he believes that the resources the region offers and the possible Chinese market for goods are too limited. Furthermore, Badri-Maharaj (2016) implies that Chinese economic favors are meant to build up their economic reputation, as well as demonstrate "chequebook diplomacy."

Keeping those concepts in mind, my research question is: to what extent is China's involvement in the Caribbean an indicator of a shift in their foreign policy? My theory is that the economic involvement, such as Foreign Direct Investment, grants, and loans, of China in the Caribbean and its utilization of soft power shows a change in foreign policy. While there is currently much speculation as to Chinese foreign policy changes in other areas, foreign policy change in regards to the Caribbean will be indicated through the case study and the past applications of foreign policy. It is important to consider that a Chinese presence in the Caribbean was not palpable before just a few years prior to 2008.

Hypotheses:

H₁ If Chinese foreign policy has shifted due to the need for resources, then Caribbean nations in the region will possess and disperse raw materials to China.

H₂ If Chinese foreign policy has shifted to accommodate the various aspects of the “Chinese dream,” then nations in the Caribbean will continue to strengthen ties with China.

Research Design

As the scope of this topic is quite large considering all the Caribbean countries involved, I am focusing on the case of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). I chose the case of T&T after much debate; however, T&T has a significant history with China, starting in the late 1800s, as well as current economic and political ties. Additionally, on my study abroad to T&T last year, I conducted preliminary field observations, as well as gain some insights regarding the Trini-Sino relationship. With twenty-five nations existing in the Caribbean and a limited amount of time to analyze multiple cases, I determined T&T would be a wise choice due to its history.

For analysis, I reviewed newspaper article from multiple sources and locations, including T&T news sources. I also reviewed policy papers and other peer-reviewed articles to ascertain how researchers were viewing this topic and other related ideas. The articles I examined were all written post-2008, but I mainly focused on articles written in the last seven years. In analyzing T&T, I analyzed their history, back to the discovery of it by Columbus in order to give a comprehensive view into the nation’s history and how it relates to current Sino-Carib relations. My variables involving the procurement of resources and strengthening relations in regards to foreign policy change

Analysis

Trinidad and Tobago is located at the southernmost point of the Caribbean, almost touching the furthest northeastern tip of Venezuela (see Appendix B). The earliest inhabitants were the indigenous Carib and Arawak tribes, who were discovered by Columbus' landing in 1492. The two islands were not united until 1888, although both share similar histories of European intrusion. After its discovery, Trinidad remained in Spanish possession, but was attacked during the 1600s by other European nations including England, France, and the Netherlands (The Commonwealth n.d.). The indigenous peoples of Trinidad were enslaved and shipped to other Caribbean islands as laborers (Besson 2011). While there is conflicting history as to when the first enslaved peoples were brought to Trinidad, there is consensus in that the arrival coincided with the arrivals of the French colonial settlers and planters from French Caribbean territories around the late 1770s. The Spanish government offered incentives for new settlers during that time and the settlers brought their slaves with them, along with their other property. The influx of slaves and the land granted to the settlers by the Spanish Crown enabled Trinidad to become a plantation economy that thrived off coffee, cocoa, cotton, and sugar. Toward the end of the 18th century, British slaver ships arrived with enslaved Africans which fed the growing demand for plantation labor. The British captured the island soon after and made it a colony by 1802. The enslaved population of Trinidad doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 in five years under British rule; the slaves made up more than half of the island's overall population (Brereton 2007). As the slave trade ended in 1806 and the slaves were freed by 1834, new workers were brought to Trinidad to fill the gap the slaves had left. Immigrants totaling 150,000 from India, China, and Madeira arrived from 1845 to 1917 (The Commonwealth n.d.).

Like Trinidad, Tobago also had a history riddled with European colonialism. Although Columbus discovered both the islands and their inhabitants, Tobago's indigenous Carib population was decimated completely by genocide and slavery by 1632, as the Dutch and French arrived to settle the island. The ownership of the island changed several times between 1650 and 1814, between English settlers, French nobility, and England, again. During these changes, the island was contested by French and the British via battles and treaties. The economy of Tobago flourished due to the production of sugar by enslaved people, until its downfall due to a devastating hurricane, the cessation of slavery, and French destruction of plantations. Due to these events, Trinidad and Tobago were joined as one possession in 1888 by the British. T&T became an independent country from England in 1962 (The Commonwealth n.d.).

Today, T&T has a population of 1.3 million people, composed of people of African, Indian, Chinese, European, Indigenous, Syrian, Lebanese, Arab, and Mixed origin and descent. This diverse population has rich and varied cultural traditions that are celebrated within the country. While T&T is one of the wealthiest countries in the Caribbean, one of the downfalls of its economy is oil. Other facets of its economy such as tourism, agriculture, and services have diversified the economy, but hydrocarbons still encompass forty per cent of the GDP and eighty per cent of exports (Index of Economic Freedom 2017). The dominance of oil and natural gas in the economy has shown to be a large detractor, as the lowered price of oil has caused economic downturns for the nation, noting the recession in 1985. The country is still having financial troubles as the low oil prices have restricted the country's budget (Emid 2016).

The importance of this background lies in the key factors that have been introduced in my Introduction, as well as in the Literature Review. Trinidad and Tobago, like other Caribbean nations, has a history of European imperialism and colonialism, diverse populations, and economies that are struggling. As stated in my introduction, the global economic crisis in 2008 was a catalyst for the decrease of economic involvement from the United States, which left the area open to influence. This absence of financial assistance and trading or the “fiscal vacuum” was filled by China (Badri-Maharaj 2016). It is vital to note that the relations built between the T&T and Europe vs. T&T and China are based on different pasts. According to Montoute (2013):

Relations with Europe were based on the historical colonial relationship. Traditional economic relations with China were established from Chinese migrants who came to work in the Caribbean after the abolition of slavery. Current geopolitical considerations and changes in the global economy have led the Caribbean to engage in a new type of relationship with China (111).

This means that the partnership between China and the Caribbean has fundamentally different roots even than the US-Caribbean relationship, which was built with geographic proximity in mind. Additionally, China provides economic assistance, which has come to fruition in the form of investments, loans, and grants. The concept of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) becomes another area of interest, as China’s provision of such can potentially lead to development and the return of growth (Montoute 2013). In all the difference in background is important to consider as a connection to Europe is based on a past of domination, slavery, and colonialism, while China does not have that reputation in the Caribbean. These differing connections, the economic downturns, the fiscal vacuum, and the growth of the Chinese economy has led to the perfect conditions for Chinese influence to take root in the Caribbean.

The fiscal vacuum primarily allowed for the Chinese to make a foothold in the Caribbean and increase influence, but what of China's interest in the Caribbean? Numerous factors include the One China Policy. While only twenty-three nations worldwide recognize Taiwan, with six of those nations located in the Caribbean, the idea of one China has motivated China. As nations do not run on hopes and dreams alone, Taiwan does require support from other nations to receive recognition from the United Nations and the global community, which is why it also offers aid and assistance in building infrastructure (Montoute 2013). In order to sway countries to support China, Chinese financial assistance and patronage have been utilized to cement the Caribbean nations' relationship with China, instead of Taiwan. These economic favors translate easily into the political arena, as these countries continue to accept aid to assist their ailing economies (Badri-Maharaj 2016). In the case of T&T, they have no Taiwanese embassy or any relations. Chinese patronage in the form of loans, grants, and investments have cemented the Sino-Trini relationship. Additionally, Xi Jinping's 2013 visit to T&T was marked with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar speaking on T&T's belief in the Chinese dream (Badri-Maharaj 2016).

China's growing economy and BRIC status also play a large factor. To accommodate a growing economy and population, food security is vital, as well as the energy to fuel an economy. Nations, like T&T, can supply the natural gas and oil required for energy, while others are agriculturally inclined and can grow the needed sustenance. China imports \$27 million USD of petroleum, as well as iron, scrap copper, scrap plastic, hard liqueur engine components, vehicle parts, and acyclic alcohols from T&T (OEC 2014). As a BRIC country, the status as a rising economy and a global power comes with

the idea of globalization. China's influence in the Caribbean and its other global involvement shows its global participation. This participation allows for China to garner new markets, such as in the Caribbean, to sell its products.

Conclusion

China's economic growth only started after the death of Mao Zedong in 1987. Although earlier policies were designed to boost the economy for competition against other nations in the region, the real economic boost to China's economy came in 1992 with Deng Xiaoping's introduction of increased economic reforms. Chinese involvement in the Caribbean and other areas of the world began in the early 2000s, but picked up momentum in 2008, after the recession of the US. Through grants and loans, China has gained favor in the Caribbean as they filled the void left by the US in the wake of the financial downturn. I believe that China's need for resources to accomplish their dreams, the One China Policy, and the Caribbean's strategic position all influence why China came to the Caribbean.

Overall, it is difficult to determine when there was a shift in foreign policy in China, if there was one. The post-Mao economic reforms and the actions of a more prosperous China signal a significant change in domestic policy, but there is still a quandary of if there was an accompanying change in their foreign policy. I think that this topic requires further research as China continues to build connections with the Caribbean. Unfortunately, the scope of the project could only encompass so much, but I believe that this idea should and will be researched in the future. If more time was available, I think it would be beneficial to take a closer look at Chinese foreign policy in

Asia as a whole and complete a comparative study to the foreign policy utilized in the Caribbean.

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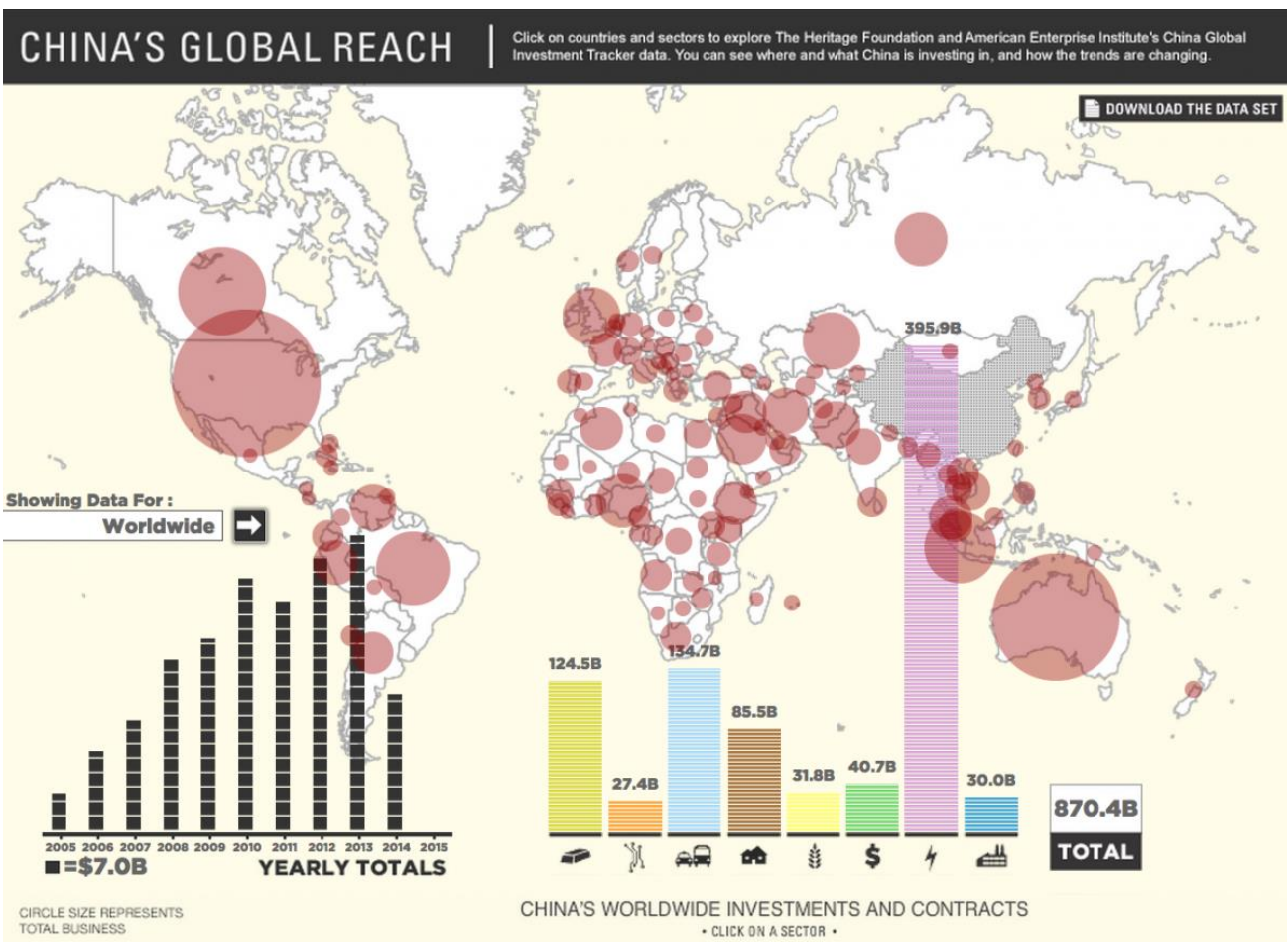
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Appendix A

China's Global Reach Infographic from Pozzeban (2015)'s article



Appendix B

Trinidad and Tobago's position in the Caribbean (CDC 2016)

