

## CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# The coverage of China in the Latin American Press: Media framing study

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**Abstract:** This study examines the image of China in Latin America and intends to determine the audience perception toward it based on a content analysis approach. Informed by media framing theory, linguistics, and functionalist sociology, the study of five Latin American Media outlets in countries holding diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) or Taiwan displayed a common pattern in the growth of number of articles about the PRC. This analysis exposes a dynamic and multifaceted image of the PRC. Although under economic and investment categories, China is portrayed as a favorable partner, still there are highly negative sentiments related to environment, copyrights, democracy, and military development. A content analysis reveals that the main source of articles related to China in Latin media are written by American or European news agencies. Framing techniques in Latin America have been influenced by foreign stereotypes as the contact between South America and Asia has been mediated by international media outlets. The results of this study suggest implications for diplomacy and media research and may contribute to deep understanding diplomacy between China and Latin American countries.

**Subjects:** Intercultural Communication; Mass Communication; Development Communication; Discourse Analysis

**Keywords:** online media; intercultural communication; soft power; Latin America; China; media framing

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jhon Deyby Ospina Estupinan

Jhon Deyby Ospina Estupinan's latest research focus on Sino-Latin American relations in the areas of diplomacy (Soft power) and media. He is a Colombian PhD candidate at Tsinghua University (Beijing). He finished his MA studies in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at the Beijing Language and Culture University. In 2006, he obtained a BA in English Philology and Languages at the National University of Colombia. In 2011, he was awarded the Distinguished International Student Scholarship by the Chinese Scholarship Council.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

During the last two decades, political and economic power balance has been shifting back to the east. The People's Republic of China (PRC) used this momentum to reinforce the knowledge of its culture, language, and traditions to create a positive image (Soft Power) around the world and promote its initiatives with less resistance. This Soft Power campaign in Latin America has taken different shapes, as 12 countries in this region do not recognize Beijing as the legitimate Government of China. Informed by media framing theory, linguistics, and functionalist sociology, this research focuses on five Latin American media outlets, and studies their news frames to depict the PRC during the year 2014. This study exposes a dynamic and multifaceted image of this country. Frames present China as a rather favorable partner in economy and investment, but reflect some negative sentiments in areas related to environment, copyrights, democracy, and military development.

## 1. Introduction

The Latin American media outlets have developed in parallel to European and American media, and as the coverage of China grows in those regions, so too does it grow in the Latin media; this although there has been relatively little contact historically, culturally, and linguistically between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Latin America (LatAm). "Communication in the global community (has always reflected) shifting balances of power among nations and thus changing paradigms in international affairs" (Dicken-Garcia & Viswanath, 2002). The media outlines a nation's reputation having an impact in its influence in economic, cultural, and political status in the international context.

Since Latin America colonial times, a large amount of international news have been sourced from European and North American media outlets; they have had an important impact on the Latin media (Tables 2, 3, and 5). Some of the concepts and ideas brought from foreign sources were consciously (or not) influenced by framing techniques carrying historical stereotypes. The perception one country holds of another one defines its views (friend, enemy, etc). Kunczik (1997) defined National Image as the cognitive perceptions an individual has of a given country, toward its people and state. These perceptions direct to latent relations such as friendship, cooperation, hostility, potential invader, control, and exploitation.

## 2. China and Latin America

Relations between the PRC and LatAm have been forming only since a few years ago. Before the 1978 reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese presence in LatAm was insignificant and it remained unchanged for more than a decade. An illustration of this fact is that about 25 years ago, Taiwan was more heavily involved in trade with Latin America than the PRC. On the contrary, in present times, Taiwan's trade balance in the area is decreasing, and cannot be compared to the Chinese trade numbers. During 2014, the PRC was Mexico's fourth largest export market and its second trading partner. In the last decade, Mexico and China have raced on their exports to the United States market. Also, the PRC is the second largest trading partner of Colombia and Peru, only surpassed by the United States commerce in the region. China is still not recognized by 12 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean region (Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, Belize, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis). The respective governments of these 12 nations each recognize Taiwan as an independent country, nevertheless *the People's Republic of China considers Taiwan to be a rebel province subsumed within its own sovereign territory*. As this paper is focused on Latin American media outlets, the comparison between the visibility and framing of these areas will be present. The five outlets chosen are the online versions of the largest (or second largest) circulation non-sports daily newspapers in Colombia (*El Tiempo*®), Peru (*El Comercio*®), Mexico (*El Universal*®), El Salvador (*El Diario de Hoy*®), and The Dominican Republic (*El Nacional*®).

During the last decade, LatAm has started to realize the potential of the Chinese market, see China as a source of investment, and acknowledge its political weight. It is crucial to remember Latin American Governmental positions on the status of the relationship between Taiwan and China has become a focal issue for Sino-Latin American relations. With a high level of annual growth and a higher diplomatic status, the PRC is continually pressuring Taiwan allies to drop their support for the island and accept the One China Policy.

The One China Policy refers to the acknowledgment of Taiwan as an undisputable part of the People's Republic of China, and the political position which does not challenge this standpoint. Countries which do not recognize this policy identify Taiwan as the legitimate government of the Republic of China (ROC). As the PRC considers Taiwan as a rebel province under its political jurisdiction, it holds no diplomatic relations, or sets cultural links (soft power campaigns) in countries recognizing Taiwan as an independent country.

The PRC has implemented a plan to build up its soft power throughout mutual knowledge of the peoples of different countries. Hence, it has invested a large amount of resources in the

development of news agencies and media outlets focused on particular social groups and published in the world's main languages. Soft power is the "use of persuasion and attraction rather than coercion... (it) rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others" (Nye, 2004). Media and communication technologies have dramatically reduced the cost of information transmission, which has enabled large parts of the population to access soft power (Nye, 2008). Nevertheless, the results of the 2013 and 2014 Pew Global research have shown that the perception of China in Latin American people's eyes has improved little since 2007 (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2014). This seems contradictory to the apparent importance Latin America's media outlets give to China judging by the increasing number of articles covering it.

Table 2 shows the total number of publications related to China have significantly increased in *El Tiempo*. Table 4 displays similar results of *El Universal*; for example, in the year 2000 there were 979 articles published this newspaper related to China, while in 2014 it displayed 4,240 articles with this topic.

### 3. International communication and media

Multiple studies and surveys have found correlations between media coverage and public perception of foreign nations in relation with the international news (Ford, Stangor, & Duan, 1994; Neuendorf, Brentar, & Armstrong, 1992; Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996). The media determines its importance in a nation's positioning of soft power not only setting an agenda and generating debates, but also in framing news issues to shape international preferences (Nye, 2002).

A research elaborated by Wanta, Golan, and Lee (2004) revealed a close relation between media coverage of a nation X in nation Y and the feelings of the foreign public toward nation X. The researchers explained the target public attitudes are more prone toward negative news stories rather than to the positive, or even neutral ones. This means, if a nation is framed in a negative way in the media, it will have a higher possibility to be perceived negatively by the target public (Wanta et al., 2004).

Also, once people's attention is drawn by the media, they are more likely to change their attitudes toward unfamiliar topics (Entman, 1989). In fact, public salience concerning a nation is influenced by media salience; this means that a nation would be perceived as more important by the public if it gains more exposure in the media (Kioussis & Wu, 2008). Based on this issue, news media, besides influencing what people think about a matter, also significantly shape how people think about that matter (Entman, 1989). This creates an advantage using media as a vehicle of power via multiple channels of communication to shape the public opinions (Nye, 2004).

Currently, it seems the Chinese international presence and positive image is based mainly, if not only, on its economic achievements (Thompson, 2005). Scholars, such as Tokatlian and Gallagher, tend to view China's powerful economic presence in Latin America as a newer phenomenon that has gained significance, as the PRC has gradually grown into a global economic player during the past three decades (Gallagher & Porzecanski, 2008a; 2008b; 2010; Tokatlian, 2007).

### 4. Framing Concepts

The aim of this paper is to research the image of China in a general sense on the written media, covering multiple selected themes (such as Democracy, Economic Development, Environment, Political Power, Military Development, Copyrights, China as an Investor).

Entman (1993) definition of framing will be used in this research. His definition is the following:

[Framing is the action] to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/ or treatment recommendation for the items described

Media framing is an essential part of meaning-making in the construction of media products (Choi, 2006). Entman (1993) has indicated that in practice, media practitioners frame events, or stories, to highlight differences in their attributes or stages. These media products influence our understanding of the world to different degrees, and therefore the information causes misperceptions through unbalanced or biased reports (Saleem, 2007). Herman and Chomsky (2002) explained in their Propaganda Model how media professionals are limited by cultural, economic, ideological, and political factors.

Journalistic principles of objectivity, neutrality, and fairness are possible in a theoretical framework, but in reality they seem unfeasible. Media environment practices also have an impact when conveying salience in a text. These factors influence how a story is presented to an audience, how a reality, *the reality* is shaped. In 1974, the sociologist Erving Goffman theorized about this issue in what it is now called framing. Framing is a process of giving meaning, interpretation, organization, and classification to experiences; these experiences shape cognitive perceptions and mediate in life situations. In 1973, Goffman understood it as an act unpremeditated and mechanical. Other scholars have taken different positions regarding framing as an inevitable activity; for Entman framing is a rather a conscious act.

In this paper, framing theory is applied as an approach to understand the media image of China in a group of Latin American newspapers. Framing techniques will be used to analyze how images are used in the coverage of China during the year of 2014.

Mass media shapes the social reality, a manufactured version of reality, a media reality (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 30). The media does not present events in their total nature, but a part of them, mediated by particular meanings, causal relations, moral assessments, and/or treatments creating a salience in a text (Entman, 1993). Media build an image of the world based on terminological selections, (stereotyping, labeling, persistency, frequency, consistency), selection of material, (editing, inclusion, exclusion, incision), and structure from angles and perspectives (selection, placement). Chong and Druckman (2007) pointed out “frequent exposure to a frame will increase the accessibility and availability of considerations highlighted by the frame.”

Framing can be generic or specific (Druckman, 2001). Specific framing has been implemented in narrow and explicit topics, cases studies, and events. On the other hand, generic framing is used to analyze more complex and broader topics, therefore a thematic generic framing study will serve better to analyze the state of the frames of China in Latin America.

## 5. Research inquiry

In this research, I was particularly interested in exploring and comparing the ways in which Latin American media outlets frame China (in the countries which recognize diplomatically the PRC—The One China Policy—and in those recognizing Taiwan). This comparison might bring to light the results of a worldwide soft power campaign launched by the PRC, but not implemented in the territories which recognize Taiwan as an independent country, such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. Ideologies in media discourses are frequently linked to representations of social actors (Fairclough, 1995) thus, analyzing content and frames can untangle the news discourse ideology. This could lead to make clear underlying categories and semantic values.

This research also focuses on the framing parents implemented by the mass media based on a categorization of perception: positive, negative, and neutral. If a nation is framed in a negatively by the media, there will have a higher possibility to be perceived negatively by the target public (Wanta et al., 2004). Also, the frequency of the articles, in this case those related to China and its frames, are taken into consideration as media outlets use frequency to give a higher visibility to an actor making it look more important than others.

The following questions are the fundamental core of this research project and are intended to:

Q1: How did the framing patterns adopted by the selected Latin media outlets differ based on the nature of their country's diplomatic relations with China?

Q2: What is the visibility of the frames of the PRC by the Latin press?

Q3: What is the favorability of the frames of the PRC in the Latin American press? Are the frames of China in the Latin American region mainly focused on economy?

## 6. Methodology

The methods used in this research were based on a compilation of quantitative data from five Latin American newspapers (online versions) and content analysis on the news released in 2014. The data were collected from the selected media outlets, and supporting information gathered from secondary sources, such as academic papers and online analytic tools. Special attention has been made when selecting the data extracted from the online media outlets as it has been organized under different standards, but the news were filtered to those corresponding to the concepts of "China" (and its variations).

The content analysis section of this research is based on a code sheet. Based on the material selected we found seven recurring frames: opinion, economic development, investor, environment, political power, military development, and copyrights. These frames contained a number of subcategories. Two independent coders received training on coding work. The results were tested following the Holsti reliability formula (Holsti, 1969). In the event of disagreement among the coders, they discussed and agreed on a result. The overall reliability coefficient was the following: *El Tiempo* 0.90, *El Comercio* 0.90, *El Universal* 0.92, *El Diario de Hoy* 0.86, and *El Nacional* 0.89.

Frequency counts of stories connected to the seven frames were calculated to measure their visibility. According to Peng (2004), favorability could be defined as follows:

A positive story referred to the overall tone or prevailing elements in the story that suggest political, social and economic stability/ strength, and progress and improvement, which tend to contribute to a favorable image of China;

A negative story referred to the overall tone or prevailing elements in the story that suggest political, social and economic instability/weakness, conflicts and human rights, religious and other problems, which tend to contribute to an unfavorable image of China;

A neutral story referred to the overall tone or prevailing elements in the story being either a balance of negative or positive, or mixed.

The following are the frames and the sub-frames resulting from the analysis:

(1) Opinion-democracy:

- (a) Democracy,
- (b) Human rights,
- (c) Civil rights,
- (d) Freedom of speech;

(2) Economic development:

- (a) GDP,
- (b) Social development,
- (c) Leading economy,
- (d) International tourism;

- (3) Investor:
  - (a) Trade partner;
- (4) Environment:
  - (a) Environmental issues,
  - (b) Natural disasters;
- (5) Political power:
  - (a) BRIC,
  - (b) World power,
  - (c) Regional leader;
- (6) Military development:
- (7) Copyrights.

Each news article offered an image of China in at least one category. The articles were assigned a value (positive, negative, or neutral) consistent with the view of the PRC presented. Decisions on coding as positive, negative, or neutral were based on lexical and semantic constructions. All the articles were written in Spanish language.

The five news outlets selected for this study were divided into two groups, the first one is formed by *El Tiempo*<sup>®</sup>, *El Comercio*<sup>®</sup>, and *El Universal*<sup>®</sup>; these outlets located in countries which recognize diplomatically the PRC (meaning they are under The One China Policy and had some degree of influence of the Soft Power campaign launched by the China). The second group has two newspapers *El Diario de Hoy*<sup>®</sup> and *El Nacional*<sup>®</sup>, outlets located in a contrasting political context in relation to the PRC. As these last two outlets were not influenced by the soft power campaign they are used as control data sources (El Salvador and the Dominican Republic recognize Taiwan as an independent country).

The online versions of the *El Comercio*, *El Nacional* (Table 1) and *El Diario de Hoy* only had access to the articles, and there was no specific tags that could provide clear information about their sources, number of news per month, or categories where the articles were published without individual examination. In the case of *El Diario de Hoy* ([elsalvador.com](http://elsalvador.com)), there is access to the last 500 articles related to a search, based on the result, it was estimated the total number of articles containing the word “China<sup>2</sup>” was 750–800 (500 articles covered 8 months). Later data correction suggested there are approximately 500 articles related to the PRC, while the others are related to Taiwan during 2014.

Colombia and Mexico online media outlets had a larger and more accessible database (Tables 2–5). The news articles in the online versions reflect their paper content and (depending on the case) could contain extra features, updated news, and content in various media forms. In *El Tiempo*, the total number of articles covering China was between 4,800 and 5,100 in 2014.

**Table 1. El Nacional: The total number of articles with the keyword China (and synonyms) sources and categories in 2014**

Ranking	Category	Number of articles
1	Economy	167
2	Important news	149
3	Opinion	87
4	Sports	85
5	International	65
	Other sections	189
	Total 2014	742
<i>Main sources</i>		
	<i>El Nacional</i> <sup>®</sup>	593 (80%)
	Others	149

**Table 2. Number of times the word “China” has appeared in articles published in Eltiempo.com from 1990 until 2014 (El Tiempo, 2014)**

Year	No. Times “China”	French News Agency (AFP)	Spanish News Agency (EFE)	Xinhua News Agency	Associated Press (AP)
1990	9,854	476	479	0	619
1991	28,822	1,359	1,517	1	1,690
1992	35,964	1,310	2,020	4	1,302
1993	38,920	1,722	2,128	12	1,493
1994	38,909	2,009	1,918	5	1,445
1995	46,676	1,695	1,750	11	980
1996	64,531	2,037	2,221	8	1,182
1997	60,151	1,607	1,760	3	929
1998	64,409	1,364	1,194	11	772
1999	56,312	1,199	1,068	7	641
2000	53,393	2,137	1,715	7	22
2001	47,664	1,988	1,593	13	785
2002	42,193	1,851	1,340	10	1,302
2003	47,426	1,704	1,690	12	1,372
2004	51,430	1,988	1,963	34	1,613
2005	36,150	1,713	1,723	40	1,318
2006	32,205	2,533	1,298	53	1,533
2007	52,219	2,288	3,265	50	1,456
2008	70,817	6,858	9,430	140	4,469
2009 <sup>a</sup>	73,295	8,080	17,987	103	2,720
2010	65,407	5,057	16,092	113	199
2011	43,512	1,545	9,312	24	240
2012	56,817	4,000	9,539	46	481
2013	41,786	4,045	9,511	46	859
2014	50,281	1,715	5,720	60	604

<sup>a</sup>During the year 2010, when the Shanghai World Expo took place, there was a decline on the average of the PRC in El Tiempo. This could point to the fact that the 2009 coverage was partially boosted by an after Olympic Games effect

**Table 3. Analysis of the number of articles with the keyword “China” (and synonyms) per source and section from 1990 until 2014 (El Tiempo, 2014)**

Sections	No. of articles	AFP	EFE	Xinhua	AP
Other news	636,714	27,616	32,957	304	15,897
Sports	179,805	16,088	45,428	29	7,956
Editorial—Opinion	104,599				
Bogota (Capital of Colombia)	88,594	514			289
Country	82,807				303
Economy	71,485	3,047	4,763	45	824
Culture and entertainment	46,063	1,108	2,229	8	633
Politics	35,153	859	1,486		333
International	31,584	8,821	12,352	256	1,751
Justice	26,293	539	1,093		
General Information		1,432	2,117	50	650
Health		453	1,253	1,253	
Actuality (Vida de hoy)			937	8	293
Science and technology				24	
Environment				20	
Travel				9	

**Table 4. Number of articles related to the keyword “China” (and synonyms) published from 1999 until 2014 (El Universal, 2015)**

Year	No. of articles
1999	262
2000	979
2001	2,026
2002	2,250
2003	3,545
2004	3,148
2005	3,299
2006	3,601
2007	3,820
2008	5,228
2009	3,980
2010	3,859
2011	3,586
2012	3,366
2013	3,874
2014	4,240
Total	51,063

**Table 5. Top News Agencies used by El Universal® as sources of news related to China from 1999 to 2014 (El Universal, 2015)**

Rank	Agency	No. of articles	% of total
1	EFE	10,355	20.28
2	NOTIMEX	At least: 7,520	(+)14.73
3	AP	3,136	6.14
4	El Universal®	At least: 2,000	(+)3.9
	Others		+50

### 7. Analysis and results

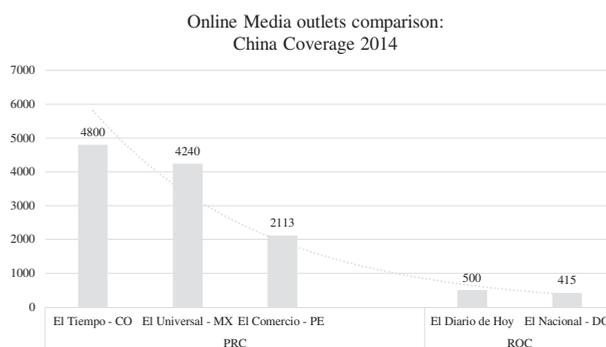
Q1 addressed the framing patterns adopted by the selected Latin media outlets based on the nature of their country’s diplomatic relations with China. The media exposure of China in countries recognizing the PRC is clearly higher than those supporting Taiwan (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the frames the Colombian, Peruvian, and Mexican outlets used are more negative in two (Military development and copyrights) of the seven frames. Also, there seems to be no significant difference in the positive views related to democracy and environment, which had a very low level of positive views in all countries. The most important differences were found in the investor and political power categories.

Q2 examined the visibility of the frames of the PRC by the Latin press. Based on the analysis of data collected, the coverage of the PRC has been increasing yearly, with small fluctuations, with growing accessible data on the printed and online media outlets, reaching peaks in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (Tables 2 and 4). This growth in the information flow has changed LatAm’s perception of China and created awareness on some of the changes the Asian country is going through (Figures 2 and 3). This awareness has made the public more critical about China’s environment, human rights, freedom of speech, and other issues.

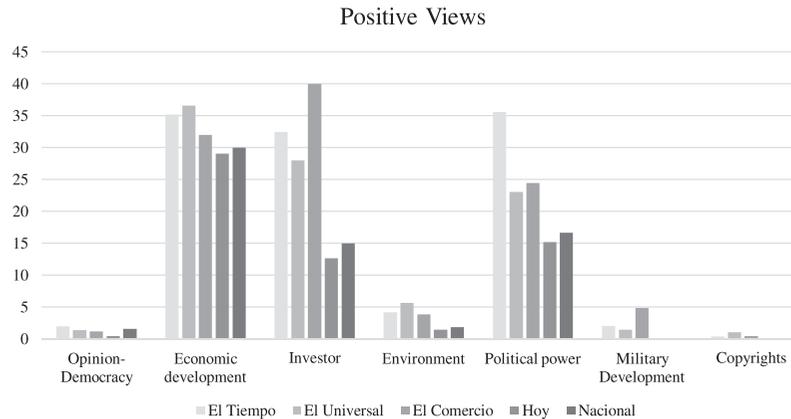
Q3 was concerned with the favorability of the frames of the PRC in the Latin American press. The quantitative analysis of news articles from LatAm’s media outlets for the year 2014 has reflected the significance of the PRC as a trade partner and an emerging economic center. A high percentage of positive views in the categories of *Economic Development* and *Investor* toward the PRC in all the newspapers is remarkable. Colombia, Mexico, and Peru have increased their commercial relations with China. The PRC and Peru signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in April 2009. This agreement came into effect on 1 March 2010 (Forbes, 2009). China, Peru, and Mexico make part of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Although the partnership between the PRC and LatAm has blossomed during the past decade or two in particular, certain problems, mostly economic in scope, have arisen as well (Gallagher & Porzecanski, 2010; Jenkins & Dussel Peters, 2009; Jilberto & Hogenboom, 2010; Sargent & Matthews, 2009). Jenkins and Dussel Peters (2009), for example, points out the trade imbalance in cases such

**Figure 1. LatAm’s Online Media outlets comparison: China coverage 2014.**



**Figure 2. Positive news in the LatAm’s online media outlets on the topic China during 2014.**



as the economic relations between Mexico and China, where Mexico exports less to China than what it imports, leading to a wide trade gap as well as a trade deficit. In the last decade, Mexico and China have been highly competitive with each other, especially in terms of their exports to the US market. In 2009, the Mexican Government has accused China of subsidizing their exports, making them cheaper for consumers in The United States, and creating unfair competition. This would explain why *El Universal*<sup>®</sup> has the second largest number of negative frames in the category of Economic Development.

**7.1. Thematic structure**

The thematic structures are the categories and subcategories that are found within frames. Regarding the *opinion and democracy frame* the newspapers turned their attention to the state of democracy, human rights, civil rights, and freedom of speech. In most of the cases, the Latin outlets centered their attention on the controls, crackdown on freedom of speech, and disputes over a number of territories. *El Tiempo* y *el Comercio* also elaborated on stories denouncing Chinese mining companies in Peru for labor exploitation. In terms of the *economic development frame*, a number of articles focused on the growing middle class in China, the increase of their GDP, the improvement of Chinese living standards, and its growing development in the international economic scene.

One of the most positive frames in the five newspapers toward China was the *investor frame*. On the negative side, experts considered Chinese investment could not be considered as positive but negative, as civil, economic, and environmental rights might have been a trade for investment. This frame is, in some cases, presented in comparison with Africa’s current problems caused by Chinese investment; these news stories are aimed to show the audience that investment could not be considered to be completely beneficial. This frame was presented with a high frequency, and focuses mainly on the possibility of a beneficial outcome, even if presenting experts’ opinion against Chinese investment in some areas.

The *environmental frame* was largely focused on the air and water pollution in China, yet one case related to a Latin American country was the focus of the attention for a period of time. The case of the construction of the Nicaraguan Channel was widely mentioned in all the newspapers in this study. This channel will be financed and build by a Hong Kong-based company. In this news story, China was set to destroy environmentally this Central American country in order to “bring economic prosperity.” China had some positive stories regarding its development in green tech, especially in the areas of solar and wind power.

In the *political frame*, China was praised as the leading economy among the BRIC countries, and for getting closer to Latin America in a “South to South” relation, promoting regional and global alliances. On the other hand, its constant disputes with neighbors, especially with Japan and Western countries were portrait in a negative light.

In the *military development* and *copyright frames*, there were not many stories. In general terms, China was questioned as whether it is able to sustain military and political influence on regional and global areas, especially as it holds territorial disputes with neighboring countries. This angle also reflected some fear on whether Beijing’s rise would overturn the international order. On the *copyright frame*, the Asian country was displayed as a competitor of the local companies, as China’s cheap labor and production invaded the local markets and destroys manufacturers and businesses. In *El Tiempo* and *El Universal*, the story of a Colombian ethnic group which produces the Colombian National hat was in the first page as large shipments of similar hats made in China almost destroyed this local economy. The Colombian Government banned this kind of imports and added taxes on similar goods to protect its national industries.

When a story was in the interests of any of the countries or a natural disaster the news report would have an especially long and favorable coverage. This is the case of Chinese companies investing in Peru, Colombia, and Mexico. This is similar in the case of the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, although their stories mention the investment and aid made by Taiwan.

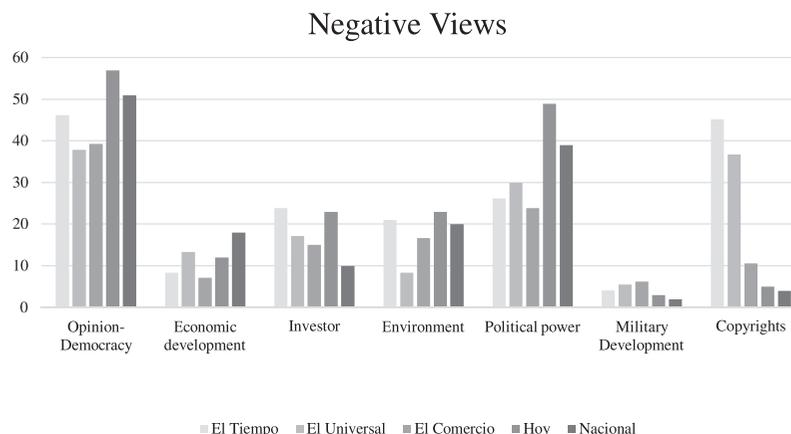
### 7.2. Challenges for China’s soft power development

Despite the fact that LatAm’s media has increasingly covered China from different angles, this has not correlated with strong positive associations among the public. On the contrary, the overall news content (pollution, economic slowdown, human rights, trade inequality, ..., etc.) has created a deep negative impact on the country’s image.

Based on the data collected and its analysis (Figures 2 and 3), Latin countries have a strong belief regarding the Business Potential of the PRC. But, they seem to be critical about the PRC business sustainability, environment, and copyright/intellectual property.

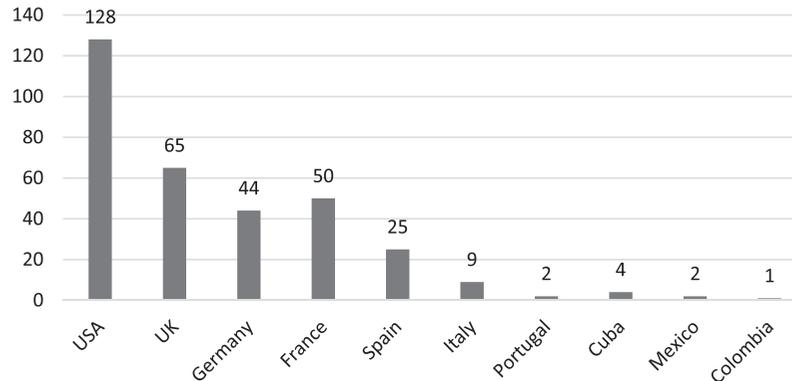
The complex network created by China aiming to improve its international image, has serious faults, but it is capable of succeeding because the PRC represents to many countries as an opportunity, and provides an alternative to the system controlled by the current powers. Based on this study, the effects of the Soft Power campaign China has launched have not created much impact in the Latin main stream media. Media outlets in countries which hold no relations to the PRC, as it is the case of El Salvador and The Dominican Republic seem to favor the PRC equally or in a higher degree than the new outlets in countries holding diplomatic relations to this Asian nation. Figure 2 presents that the positive percentage of frames related of opinion, economic development have similar levels among all the news outlets disregarding the specific immediate political context of the newspapers, but it displays a lesser percentage of negative views related to copyrights, and to some extent, in China’s military development (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Negative news in the LatAm’s online media outlets on the topic China during 2014.**



**Figure 4. Foreign journalists officially accredited in China working for foreign media outlets 2013.**

Source: China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Press Data (Méndez, 2014).



## 8. Discussion and findings

This study examined the coverage of China in five LatAm newspapers. The qualitative content analysis revealed a number of results. First, the five newspapers have increased their coverage over the years. This has created a dynamic image of the Asian country, which has made it closer to the Latin public. The second is that the large investments made by China in order to increase its Soft Power seem not to have motivated the media of countries recognizing this nation to hold more favorable frames. In the analysis of the media outlets in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, there was a similar favorability of frames presented, nevertheless the visibility was lower.

### 8.1. Investment has seduced the Latin media

One significant finding in this research is that Latin American media is quantitatively and qualitatively prone toward economic events. Trade has come to reinforce politics and diplomacy, and became a crucial tool of soft power strategy. Economy is reflected in the LatAm's media as a rather positive element. The Chinese economy, *the opportunity of trade*, investment has seduced the Latin media and (in theory) its audience. The negative representations result from rooted stereotypes of the PRC, and fear of communism. This "fear frames" could be understood (based on a propaganda model) as a way to serve interest of those behind the editorial news and also a way to build identity.

Latin American newspapers give considerable attention to the PRC's politics and engagement regarding LatAm local economies. It is worth noticing that Peru, Colombia and Mexico compete with China in the production and commercialization of similar goods (e.g. shoes, clothes, and fabrics) (Jenkins & Dussel Peters, 2009). These countries are alarmed with the large amount of cheap imports, copyrights, and piracy. The increasing imports of raw materials and natural resources, but not investment in infrastructure or other sectors that might create jobs, and could bring prosperity to the local market. In this background, some of the negative frames in the category of economy are based on the uncertainty in the sustainability of keeping China's economy growing at the same speed and its engagement with LatAm.

### 8.2. News agencies and media models

The LatAm's media outlets have worked to update and display a current view of the Asian country. News agencies like the EFE, AP, AFP have molded the image of Asia long before China opened its doors at the end of the 1970s.

As it is reflected in Figure 4, the number of Latin American journalists covering China is extremely low compared to the number of other foreign correspondents. This echoes two main significant issues: the first one is the dependence of information LatAm's media outlets have on European and

American news agencies which leads to relying on their frames of China; and second, it also displays the importance this countries are giving to the PRC, in other words Latin counties are still not very interested in covering in depth the issues concerning these two geographical areas beyond the information they can find at hand.

A large percentage of the negative frames opinion (Democracy, Human Rights, Civil Rights, Freedom of Speech), environment, military development, politics, and copyrights come from agencies such as EFE, AFP, AP, and Reuters. As it could be seen in Tables 2 and 5, *el Tiempo* y *el Universal* rely heavily in these sources, with a 15–25% of their articles from China directly taken from these news agencies.

Not all of the stories outsourced to the mentioned agencies are negatively framed, some of them are positive, some of them are neutral, but a large number of the negatively framed are linked with controversial issues such as human rights, geopolitical friction.

### **8.3. How is the Chinese media quoted in the Latin American Press?**

Among media outlets studied there are only a few articles extracted from the Chinese media as a direct source. During 2014, *El Diario de Hoy* displayed the highest number of articles among the study, five news stories from Xinhua news agency; *El Nacional* also presented one story from the same news agency. In the other media outlets, there were no articles originally published by Xinhua, or any other Chinese news company.

In 2014, Notimex, the official Mexican news agency used by *el Universal*, quoted Xinhua in the daily economy news section under the title “Tokyo Stoke Exchange,” this section focuses on news coverage of Japan and other stock exchange centers in Asia; it refers 229 times to Xinhua News agency during 2014; this means that almost 50% of the 483 references to the Chinese news agency belong to this daily article. During 2014, in the economy section<sup>1</sup>, there were 237 articles mentioning Xinhua, 8 of them where entirely focused on China (the other 229 were mentioned above); these 8 articles belong to 4 different news agencies.

Journalists tend to look for large-scale, dramatic and tragic events. *El Tiempo* has a large number of these stories, including titles such as “Chinese millionaire sent to jail for electrocuting tigers before eating them” (AFP, 2014); “Chinese artists will be forced to live in the countryside or coal mines to feel inspired” (EFE, 2014a). These stories are also found in the other news outlets: *El Nacional*: “Chinese group detained after threatening to infect others with HIV” (EFE, 2014b); *El Universal*: “Chinese city prohibits to celebrate Christmas in the schools” (EFE, 2014c); *El Comercio*: “China: An innocent man was executed for raping and killing” (EFE, 2014d).

The fact that countries holding no formal diplomatic relations with China and thus under the soft power media plan tend to quote directly Chinese sources and hold similar positive frames (related to Democracy and Economic Development) or less negative (Copyrights and Military Development) in the four of the six frames studied, reinforces the idea that the soft power campaign launched by China has had limited in Latin America.

## **9. Conclusions**

The image of China is slowly evolving in the Latin American media. The fact that in five Latin American national newspapers the image of a foreign country has several dimensions and have created critic views highlighting the importance of China in the international sphere. In other words, nowadays people know China is an important global player, therefore media increases the news frequency of this actor. This current multifaceted image of China creates a contrast with the monolithic socialist/communist view that it held in the past.

The findings of this research will contribute to our understanding of the mainstream media related to the evolution of the conceptual image of the PRC. This research could be further developed with

the study of other fast developing countries. I would suggest future research on the persistency and frequency of the frames published in the Latin Media but originated in Western News agencies.

The significance of this study goes beyond the Latin American region as the PRC media image and coverage shares similarities and mutual experiences with many nations, especially with developing countries. Consequently, the conclusions and considerations of this research do not only explain a single country's phenomenon, but also reflects the philosophy, media expression, and public diplomacy mechanisms common to a number of nations.

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#### Notes

1. This excludes the finance section where there are more news related to China, and Xinhua is one the sources.
2. Including articles related to the province of Taiwan and the PRC.

#### Cover image

Source: Author.

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