

INTERPRETING BRAND CHINA IN MEXICO: IMPACTS OF CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC
DISCOURSE ON PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS IN TIJUANA, MEXICO

By

Marcela Katherine Omans McKeeby

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Anthropology – Doctor of Philosophy

2023

ABSTRACT

The rapid development of the People's Republic of China (China) from an impoverished, communist country to an economic and geopolitical power has challenged existing economic and geopolitical paradigms dominated by western nations. Part of this change has been China's increased diplomatic and economic engagement abroad and a pointed effort to foment positive public opinions of the country abroad. Under the current leadership of Xi Jinping, this campaign to win hearts and minds of the public has evolved into a comprehensive discursive strategy that includes a highly curated and cohesive set of narratives about China's past, present and future that is deployed abroad to tell the "China story". This story presents China as a new kind of world power which is naturally aligned with the global south therefore if countries cooperate economically or diplomatically with China, they will have a different and better experience than if they were to engage with western world powers. These narratives frame China as a global leader that offers viable alternatives for multilateral collaboration that will bring new opportunities and benefits for participating countries and by extension the world.

There are multiple other actors simultaneously contributing different narratives about China that may or may not align with the curated story preferred by the Chinese state. Some of these narratives are direct rebukes of the "China story", others may repeat past historical narratives about the country and culture, while others may reflect experiences with entities associated with China but not controlled by it, such as Chinese corporations or Chinese diaspora communities. Thus, China's image abroad and the Chinese state's power to change this image is not as simple as the dissemination of this curated story and its uptake or rejection by foreign audiences. Instead, it is a dynamic process of negotiation of these multiple narratives on China with the different audiences that inform their opinions on China. To contend with this

complexity, I conceptualize China's national image as a "brand" that is strategically curated and deployed by the brand liaisons (such as diplomats) to foreign audiences that is then negotiated within these locally-specific political, economic, and social terrains to create a unique image of China. China's national image is therefore multitudinous rather than monolithic and China symbolizes many different things for different people regardless of the efforts of the Chinese state to present a harmonious and cohesive "China story".

Therefore, in this dissertation I explore how China's brand image is formed in Mexico, and more specifically for the public of Tijuana. Tijuana is a city at the crossroads of transpacific relations and hemispheric relations that has seen a large influx of Chinese migrants, Chinese capital, Chinese businesses, and Chinese diplomatic visits. I combined ethnographic methods with critical discourse analysis and survey methodologies to examine different arenas of meaning making, where new actors had the opportunity to take up various narrative threads and reconfigure them to suit their own priorities or perspectives. In doing so, I illuminate how new interpretations and understandings of China are created within the Mexican public that ultimately shape public opinions on future relations. Pragmatically, this approach allows me to identify which parts of its positive image campaign are the most salient and where and why public views may diverge from the official narratives on China. From a broader perspective however, this research allows me to raise questions about how we measure and identify China's discursive power. I conclude that its power is produced in these moments of new meaning making in which individuals who are the recipients of China's brand messaging incorporate parts of it into their own understanding of the world which may expand the limits of what they believe is possible under current global and national conditions.

Copyright by
MARCELA KATHERINE OMANS MCKEEBY
2023

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Adam McKeeby, and my parents, Jim and Diane Omans. Thank you for always being my biggest supporters throughout my various life journeys that led me here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first say thank you, *gracias*, and 谢谢 to all of the people across the US, Latin America, and China who have taught me important lessons about life and participated in this dissertation research. I am grateful for the mentorship of Dr. Jamie Monson who introduced me to the literature on China and the world. I would like to thank Dr. Chantal Tetreault who helped me reframe my research questions and methods around discourse and Dr. Elizabeth Drexler who has provided me with a strong core anthropological education and provided invaluable insights into how my research fits into broader anthropological conversations. I deeply appreciate the support of Dr. Monica Dehart whose expertise on China-Latin America relations was invaluable and whose input led to this final iteration. I also want to thank Dr. Andrea Louie who has been a great teacher and friend as I have developed my research project over the years and her expertise in Chinese diaspora communities that she has helped me develop and share with her classes and colleagues. Finally, my advisor and mentor, Dr. Laurie Medina has helped me not only develop this research project and edited innumerable drafts of grant proposals and this dissertation but also encouraged me to pursue this more unconventional line of research from the start. I am also grateful to Dr. Carla Guerrón Montero and Dr. Patricia Sloane-White of the University of Delaware who encouraged and mentored me through my first foray into anthropological research.

I also would not have made it through graduate school without the help of the Graduate Secretaries Joan Reid and Cathi Pierce or the comradery of my MSU friends, notably, Sara Tahir, Livy Drexler, Juan Carlos Rico Noguera, Kiana Sakimehr, Cara Jacobs, Anna Martínez-Hume, Eddie Glayzer, Brian Geyer, Emily Milton, Marwa Bakabas, Aubree Marshall, Alice Lynn McMichael, Heather Brothers, Daniel Fandino, Evgeniya Moskaleva, Melissa Dale, Kassie Garrett, Emily Groth, Lauren Wisnieski, Emily Mackey, and Nathaniel Nessia.

My graduate studies and research have been funded by Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships from MSU Center for Asian Studies and MSU Center for the Advanced Study of International Development, the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, MSU Department of Anthropology, MSU Center of Latin American and Caribbean Studies Pre-Dissertation Research Grant and the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award. I am also grateful for the support of Dr. Lawrence Taylor at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Dr. René Andrei Guerrero Vázquez at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California and my research assistants, Brenda Damaris Flores Hernández and Mayerling Velázquez Cruz. Finally, I am deeply indebted to Nerli Paredes Ruvalcaba and her extended family, especially, Victor Ruvalcaba and Alejandra Cardenas who opened up their homes and hearts to me.

I would not have made it this far without the support from afar of my best friends, Germantown community and my extended Omans, Eberz, McKeeby, and Wilson families. I am forever grateful for the G-Town crew, Syed Ali, Zoya Belkat, Erich Bacchus, Thomas Magnuson, Kishore Radhakrishnan, and Raakhee James who always had an open door and spare room for our whirlwind visits. I am indebted to the unconditional long-distance friendship of Annie Davis Schoch, Elizabeth Snow Cangialosi, Ellen Nigro and Kelsey Holiday. I am extremely grateful for my Anndyke Way family and trivia team, including Hannah Mazjanis, Emily, Erica, Esther, Christiana and David Weiner and Bill, Nadine, Elizabeth and Random Ward. I am deeply grateful to my parents, James and Diane Omans, brother, David Omans, and grandparents Gerard and Margaret Eberz, for being my biggest cheerleaders and always believing in my ability to achieve all my goals through life. Finally, I want to thank my partner and husband, Adam McKeeby, for leaving our friends and family behind by moving to Michigan with me to pursue this degree and building a new life for us as I traveled across the globe and taking care of our dear pup, Cleopatra.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
INTRODUCTION: BRAND CHINA IN A CHANGING WORLD	1
“China’s Story” as a Vehicle for Chinese Discursive Power	4
Defining China’s Brand: Beyond the China Story	10
China’s Story Unbound: The Dialogic Formation of China’s Brand	14
Mexico: A Unique Partner in Latin America	18
Dialogism and Critical Discourse Analysis	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY	27
CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPING THE BRAND OF CHINA	32
Tenet 1: China is Different than the West	34
Tenet 2: China is a Part of the Global South	50
Tenet 3: China has Followed its own Path.....	57
Conclusion	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	67
CHAPTER 2: CHINA’S ENTRY INTO THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE	75
Hemispheric Orientalism: No Space for Asians in the Modern Latin America?	77
China’s Commodity Boom and Alternative Funding for Latin America	85
Latin America’s “Pink Tide” and China’s Chance for Increased Political Engagement.....	92
The Rise of China as a Threat to US Hegemony: LAC Caught in the Middle or Has Multiple Options?.....	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY	110
CHAPTER 3: RECONFIGURING BRAND CHINA IN MEXICO.....	121
Who is the Spokesperson of China in Mexico?.....	122
Andrés Manuel López Obrador: A New Leader Requires New Solutions	124
Mexico’s Turn Towards China under the AMLO Administration	126
Comparing Priorities for China-Mexico Relations.....	127
China-Mexico Government Relations: Building Bilateral Governmental Relations for What?	130
China-Mexico Economic Relations: Realizing who’s Economic Vision?	137
China is a World Power, but what Kind of World Power?.....	148
Conclusion	153
BIBLIOGRAPHY	155
CHAPTER 4: TRANSLATING THE CHINESE BRAND OF COOPERATION FOR MEXICAN AUDIENCES IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE BRI AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC.....	160
Promoting China’s Brand Abroad.....	161
Encoding China-Mexico Engagement as <i>Cooperación</i>	165
China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Cooperating for the Future	170
China-Mexico Relations during the COVID-19 Pandemic	176

The Evolution of Chinese Cooperation in Mexico	184
BIBLIOGRAPHY	188
CHAPTER 5: BRAND CHINA RECONFIGURING VISIONS OF MEXICO'S	
FUTURE	191
Public Opinion Polling on China in Latin America.....	192
Tijuana: A Microcosm of China-Mexico Relations and Changes	195
Surveying the Public	198
Who Took the Survey?.....	201
Views on China in Tijuana.....	203
Thinking about China to Imagine Mexico.....	209
China is Different than the United States: A Threat or Friend?	210
China is a Leader for Development: Complimentary or in Competition?	215
China-Mexico Relations: Embracing Chinese Culture or Chinese People?	221
Conclusion	225
BIBLIOGRAPHY	228
CONCLUSION.....	230

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPC Communist Party of China

LAC Latin America and the Caribbean

NAFTA North America Free Trade Agreement

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

BRI Belt and Road Initiative

AMLO Andrés Manuel López Obrador

CNP Chinese Nationalist Party

USSR The Soviet Union

Mercosur The Southern Common Market

PRI Partido Revolucionario Institucional - Institutional Revolutionary Party

PRD Partido de la Revolución Democrática - Party of the Democratic Revolution

MORENA Movimiento Regeneración Nacional - National Regeneration Movement

CELAC Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease of 2019

Op-eds Opinion editorials

INTRODUCTION: BRAND CHINA IN A CHANGING WORLD

At the beginning of the 21st century politicians, economists, the media and more began to raise questions of a “rising China” and how the recently impoverished, communist country that was rapidly developing economically and slowly exerting more geopolitical power on the global stage would challenge existing economic and geopolitical paradigms dominated by western nations. A quarter of a century on, the People’s Republic of China (China) is indisputably a world power, and analyses of this meteoric rise have focused on multiple aspects of its increased foreign engagement from diplomatic visits, financing initiatives, and geopolitical strategies. A key approach of China’s increased international engagement has been to foment better public opinions of China abroad to ease potential bilateral and multilateral engagement. To do this, the Chinese state has developed a curated and cohesive set of narratives about China’s past, present and future that it strategically deploys abroad to tell the “China story”. In this narrative, the Chinese state frames China as a new kind of world power which is a natural ally with the global south. Therefore, if countries cooperate economically or diplomatically with China, they will have a different and better experience than if they were to engage with western world powers. This narrative frames China as a global leader that offers viable alternatives for multilateral collaboration that will bring new opportunities and benefits for participating countries and by extension the world.

However, there are multiple other actors simultaneously contributing different narratives about China that may or may not align with the curated story preferred by the Chinese state. China has been exoticized in western media as the oriental other and valorized as descending from an ancient civilization, painted as both a “red threat” and a beacon of communist revolution during the Cold War, associated with both the miracles and dark underbelly of rapid

industrialization coupled with globalization, and now projected as a peaceful rising power or a threat to western hegemony. Some of these narratives are direct rebukes of the “China story” from other state actors looking to tell a different story. Others may repeat past historical narratives about the country and culture, be associated with various political ideologies or instead reflect experiences with entities associated with China but not controlled by it, such as Chinese corporations or Chinese diaspora communities.

Thus, China’s image abroad and the Chinese state’s power to change this image is not as simple as the dissemination of this curated story and its uptake or rejection by foreign audiences. Instead, it is a dynamic process of negotiation of these multiple narratives on China with the different audiences that are interpreting these narratives and forming their opinions. To contend with this complexity, I conceptualize China’s national image as a “brand” that spokespeople of the Chinese state strategically curate and deploy to foreign audiences. The foreign audiences then negotiate the brand within the locally specific political, economic, and social terrains to create a unique image of China. China’s national image is therefore multitudinous rather than monolithic and China symbolizes many different things for different people regardless of the efforts of the Chinese state to present a harmonious and cohesive “China story”. Rather than regarding this as a failure by the Chinese state, I instead consider how the proliferation of messaging of China’s brand and people’s interactions and interpretations of it create new visions of China and potentially the world.

To investigate this complex process, I combined ethnographic sensibilities with critical discourse analysis and survey methodologies to examine different arenas of meaning making, where new actors had the opportunity to use various narrative threads and reconfigure them to suit their own priorities or perspectives. This research agenda is theoretically undergirded by the

Bakhtinian theory on language which emphasizes the dialogic process of meaning making in discourse (Bakhtin 1981). In other words, I consider China's political and diplomatic discourse as deriving meaning and by extension power within the multi-sided and multi-vocal interactions between the "speakers" and the "listeners" with the former being spokespeople for the Chinese state and the latter being the Mexican public. In doing so, I illuminate how the Mexican public comes to create new interpretations and understandings of China that ultimately shape public opinions on future relations.

I first identified the core narratives of China's brand and then traced its unique articulations as various brand liaisons (such as diplomats) disseminated the message on different platforms to the Mexican public. This analysis begins by identifying the existing narratives about China in historical frameworks of economics and geopolitics and how they have transformed in the last century to make up the current China brand. I then explore how the regional particularities of Latin America have allowed for specific framings of China's brand to become more prominent in that region. I then investigate how Chinese diplomats curate this messaging for Mexican audiences by Chinese diplomats and at the same time how the Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, incorporates the brand messaging into his own political discourse. I follow this by examining the underlying narrative arcs of the Chinese ambassadors' accounts of two major events, the Second Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative and the COVID-19 pandemic, in published opinion editorials in Mexican national newspapers which frame China as the pragmatic and morally superior alternative for international cooperation. I finally discuss the findings from a city-wide survey I disseminated in Tijuana, Mexico and designed to gauge the saliency of different narrative threads used by the Chinese diplomats and the Mexican President to talk about China. I found that individuals were incorporating parts of

China's brand messaging into their own conceptualizations of Mexico's economic and geopolitical position and therefore envisioning new possible futures for Mexico. Therefore, I conclude that in discussions of China's discursive strategies abroad we must consider these more covert ways that it is impacting world views and potential political possibilities.

These findings challenge conclusions often drawn from public opinion surveys which frame favorable or unfavorable views of China as an indicator of the success of China's soft power initiatives in changing hearts and minds. While this is certainly the desirable outcome for Chinese diplomats, perceptions of China and shifts in these views are much more complex and layered than these conclusions draw. Pragmatically, this approach allows me to identify which parts of its positive image campaign are the most salient and where and why public views may diverge from the official narratives on China. From a broader perspective however, this research allows me to raise questions about how we measure and identify China's discursive power. I conclude that China's discursive power emerges in these moments of new meaning making in which individuals who are the recipients of China's brand messaging incorporate parts of it into their own understanding of the world which may expand the limits of what they believe is possible under current global and national conditions.

“China's Story” as a Vehicle for Chinese Discursive Power

China is not alone in its national image promotion abroad; all nation states participate in this kind of international positive image promotion. World leaders use these identities and labels to stake claims, forge alliances, and allow for the grouping of nation states in conceptualizations of geopolitics and the world order. These labels and identities help to make sense of international relations and provide a shorthand for much more complex economic, political, and social intricacies that lead to worldwide change, such as referring to the “allied” and “axis” powers in

World War II, or the stratification of the first, second and third world countries during the Cold War. Government leaders therefore have a vested interest in cultivating the identity of their country and using it to promote a specific image abroad that incorporates their world-wide economic and geopolitical interests.

Chinese leaders have long had a vested interest in shaping their national image for both foreign and domestic audiences, especially since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1948. China is still under the one-party authoritarian rule of the Communist Party of China (CPC) which has enabled rather consistent and prolific efforts to foment a positive national identity through decades of propaganda. The CPC applied these national identity formation efforts abroad especially after the 1978 Opening up and Reform and as China gained more economic and geopolitical power on the global stage the global public diplomacy campaigns it engaged with became more robust and proactive.

Scholars who examined China's diplomatic push outward in the early 2000s deemed its array of soft-power programs as a "charm offensive" which China implemented through trade incentives, cultural outreach programs, education exchanges, high-level government meetings and visits (Kurlantzick 2007; Dreyer 2005). Notable efforts in this endeavor were the multi-faceted conservation of giant pandas and their loans to zoos abroad and the proliferation of Confucius Institutes as centers for education and cultural promotion (Hubbert 2019; Songster 2018). As China gained greater economic and geopolitical power it increased its efforts of national image promotion. The ultimate spectacle of this national image reformulation was presented at the 2008 Beijing which the CPC saw as a chance to broadcast an image of a new modern and "rising" China with a rich culture, economic power, and plenty to offer the world in television sets across the globe (Chen, Colapinto, and Luo 2012; Berkowitz et al. 2007).

While China was looking to promote a more positive image of itself abroad, China's newfound status as an economic and geopolitical superpower that does not follow western-led norms of international relations has elicited strong rebukes and condemnations of China's activities on the world stage. Western media and politicians have long framed China as first an "oriental" other and then a communist threat in modern history, but not a direct hegemonic threat to existing world powers. However, once it began increasing its international engagement and integration into both the world economy and international relations, waves of criticisms and warnings on China's activities also became more prominent. Some of these criticisms included claims that it was engaging in "debt-trap diplomacy" and acting as a "rogue donor" which both point to a central concern that China's way of engaging in international relations was subversive to western-led international norms and therefore a threat to the world order (Brautigam 2009; Singh 2021; Benabdallah 2015). Additionally, China's soft power projects such as Confucius Institutes have had a number shut down in more recent years over increased scrutiny and concerns of being just a conduit for the priorities of the CPC (Hubbert 2019).

The focus in China on curating its image abroad became even more pointed after the ascension of Xi Jinping and his 2013 speech to the Twelfth Collective study session of the CPC in which he called on the audience to "tell the Chinese story well" as a discursive strategy to leverage China's unique history, culture and model to improve the national image of China and combat what the CPC deems the "China threat" narrative (Klime 2018; Lams 2018; Hartig 2016). Chinese scholars in the government and think tanks therefore also looked to further this effort and looked to the concept of "soft power" and reimagined it to suit the priorities of the Chinese state. Soft power is a term originally coined by Joseph Nye (Nye 2004) and differentiates nation state's "hard power" as nations' ability to "coerce" while "soft power" is a

nation's ability to "persuade" to get a resultant desired behavior or outcome for the country. However, in its original formulation it was referring to the public diplomacy efforts and cultural promotion efforts of liberal democracies, which China is certainly not (H. Li 2018). A key part of this effort has been to foment a standardized and cohesive story of China's past, present and future that both legitimizes the CPC and reframes world paradigms in the party's desired framework (Callahan 2015). Importantly, there is a well-establish "research-policy interface" between the academic researchers and policy makers of China, so the public diplomacy campaigns are designed specifically with communications strategies aimed at supporting state diplomacy and leveraging foreign relations research to realize this (Hartig 2016).

The Chinese state has captured "China's story" in multiple slogans and initiatives such as the "Chinese Dream", the "China model" and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Regardless of the slogan, the "China story" has persisted across initiatives to present core messaging on China that the CPC wishes to promote both domestically and abroad. These core messages consist of the following: China is a different kind of world power than western powers that has reached this status due to the leadership of the CPC, China is a natural ally to the global south and thus still a developing country, and finally that these parts of its identity mean that it is the rightful and better leader for global development initiatives. These narratives have been identified in multiple analyses of Chinese political discourse both domestically and abroad such as in recent policy papers on the Polar Silk Road (Woon 2020), on China's relation to Central Asian countries and south Asian countries (Dadabaev 2020; Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi 2018) and in relation to various African countries (Alves 2013; Batchelor 2019; Benabdallah 2020, 2016)

Importantly even in foreign-facing venues, a primary role of Chinese political discourse is to cultivate national cohesion and support within the Chinese populace that reifies the state

under the leadership of the CPC as the natural and good “destiny” of China after going through its unique path (Sun 2023). The CPC leadership envisions foreign and domestic soft power building initiatives as one in the same, they design these efforts to support CPC rule and gain international recognition and therefore legitimization (Klime 2018; Callahan 2015; Y. Yang 2020). The deployment of the “China story” is therefore both a domestic and international project that requires legibility and cohesion across China and the world.

The CPC can conduct this project due to the sheer control that the CPC has over curating the messaging of spokespeople of China. While the specifics of the language used may shift to support new priorities of the CPC, the party officials ensure that they cohesively integrate new narratives about China into the existing discourse so as not to retroactively delegitimize the legacies of its founders and past leaders. The curation of this messaging is therefore highly standardized and even dictates the specific metaphors or verbs used (Jing-Schmidt and Peng 2017; Zhang and Bates 2017; Y.E. Yang, Keller, and Molnar 2018), the historical events and framings chosen to support China’s stances (Sverdrup-Thygeson 2017; Mawdsley 2012), or even changes done in translations from written Chinese to English (T.P. Li, Feng 2020). These word choices and shifts are very intentional; official Chinese policy papers and speeches are translated and published by the Chinese state in both Chinese and English (and sometimes other languages depending on the relevancy) by highly-trained translators and writers and these versions are both vetted and sanctioned by the CPC (Woon 2020; Chang 2017).

The most studied example of this intense curation is the evolution of the discourse on the BRI since 2013. At first, it began with a call for a New Silk Road with the Silk Road Economic Belt in Kazakhstan and a Maritime Silk Road to Indonesia (Sidaway and Woon 2017). Initially these projects taken together were known as the “One Belt One Road” initiative which is a direct

translation of the Chinese characters in the name of the project, Yi Dai Yi Lu.¹ Some phrases used by the Chinese government retain the wording from the original Chinese such as the “one country, two systems” that is frequently repeated in English coverage of China’s policy towards Hong Kong and Macau. It uses a sentence structure that is typical in Chinese and potentially strange in English, it is an example of Chinese English which is when specific phrases are translated directly into English without conforming to standard English grammar or norms as to still maintain a “Chinese essence” (Chang 2017). In the original translation, the phrase “One Belt One Road” retained its original grammatic structure but the meaning of this construction in Chinese does not translate in sentiment to English. In Chinese, Yi has multiple meanings depending on context and “Yi A Yi B” is a common grammatical structure used to indicate harmonious action of both *A* and *B* (Chang 2017; Sidaway and Woon 2017).

However, this symbolism is not portrayed in the English term of “One Belt, One Road” so it was changed to the Belt and Road Initiative to be more legible to western audiences and actually indicates the broad sense of not a singular Belt and Road but rather the ideology of a “Belt and Road” to unite the world (Xin and Matheson 2018; Sidaway and Woon 2017). In this case, by changing the term to “The Belt and Road Initiative” it still signaled the unique Chinese approach to development but was reformulated to better suit the sensibilities of foreign audiences. Terms such as this one, may refer to specific projects and policies but also are defined and redefined consistently across time and contexts to balance the need to relay information to a foreign audience while also maintaining the messaging of China’s story (Shi 2014; T.P. Li, Feng 2020; Chang 2017).

China is also setting up more robust networks for the dissemination of its messaging in

¹ 一带一路 is the simplified Chinese for this phrase.

more recent years and has more charismatic speakers deploying it in a new generation of diplomats. This has included the real expansion of Chinese media infrastructure abroad in what has been deemed “China’s media offensive” that includes increasing the presence of its own media networks and news outlets in an attempt to more actively influence narratives on China abroad (Kurlantzick 2023). One of the prevailing perspectives in Chinese academic circles as to why China’s image is so poor abroad is that western media hegemony circulates these negative stories and perpetuate misconceptions (Hartig 2016). However, despite these efforts to expand its influence, Kurlantzick (2023) indicates that the results from these efforts are rather lackluster and increased attempts to intercede in foreign media spaces, especially in non-Chinese language media, often only brings more backlash and distrust.

Defining China’s Brand: Beyond the China Story

The 2008 Beijing Olympics was a watershed moment in the literature on China’s national image promotion as a “brand” (Brownell 2013; Berkowitz et al. 2007; Barker 2013). In discussions of brands, one usually thinks of multinational corporations such as McDonalds or Coca Cola with catchy slogans to sell their accessible products worldwide or luxury companies such as Cartier or Louis Vuitton which curate an exclusive image and sell to an elite consumer base. For many studies that examine China’s “brand” specific initiatives or events are said to be promoting Brand China through these soft power endeavors and particularly denotes the use of marketing concepts and methods to promote the image for foreign audiences (Schroeder 2015; Keimetswe 2023; Brownell 2013). In these instances, the use of “brand” denotes the manufactured aspect of China’s image campaign and the assumed desire to sell a product, or in this case the country, to a global audience. I contend that this is but one of four key aspects of China’s brand that impacts how it shapes public opinions.

The second aspect is the context into which the Chinese diplomats deploy this messaging; it is not a discursive vacuum. Rather, there are multiple other contributors to narratives about China which already influence the perception of China's brand. The image of China and narratives about China already exist and are circulating around the globe which may detract from the official government narratives or add another aspect for people to consider in their assessment of China. There are multiple actors that contest China's brand story such as other world powers, politicians, and general detractors of China which contribute narratives on China that may shed a negative light on China. There are also the existing narratives on China that it itself has promoted in the past which are no longer part of its official narrative or that pertain to its historical legacies and images such as racialized images of Chinese people under global racial ideologies. A major contributor to these extant narratives is the news media and online social networks which may support or refute narratives of China's brand or add new narratives to the public discourse about China. For example, analyses of Colombian newspaper coverage of China in the 2000s revealed how China was seen as a "Janus-faced" partner and depending on the political leaning of the newspapers their concerns either centered around on China's human right abuses or potential economic competition (Armony 2012).

Additionally, in thinking about China, individuals may identify a multitude of actors that they associate with China outside of the Chinese state, or what Monica Dehart (2021) conceptualizes as the "multiple Chinas". In her case these were members of the Chinese overseas community of Central America, the individuals and institutions representing Taiwan and those representing China (Dehart 2021). In different contexts these multiple Chinas may include different groupings of actors which are all associated with China, regardless of their actual affiliation with the People's Republic of China. Their own activities and advocacy may also

contest or support the “China story” but just people’s interactions with these different actors can also impact their perception of China such as an experience at a Chinese restaurant, employment at a Chinese corporation, or use of Chinese-made technology. All these encounters with “China” in all its forms ultimately impact the reception and interpretation of China’s brand.

This brings us to the third aspect of China’s brand, which is how Chinese officials contend with these “excesses of social meaning” or what Nakassis (2013) refers to as “surfeits” which are, “those material forms that, to varying degrees, exceed the brand's authority and legibility...(and) the immaterial excess of social meaning that emerges out of engagements with branded goods (“original” or otherwise) but cannot be fully reduced to the brand concept” (112). The multitude of narratives of China circulating and perpetuated across languages and across countries are untamable by the Chinese officials and thus in curating the brand image of China for foreign audiences, they must conscientiously contend with these surfeits.

In certain countries some of the framings of China may not work as well than in others. For example, in the mid 2000s the discourse used by Chinese spokespersons to describe bilateral relations between China and other countries was differently received depending on the context of the country’s relation to China (Strauss 2012). In Peru, there was little contention in the use of the basic rhetoric of “friendship” and “mutual benefit” and the phrases were quickly adapted in the overall bilateral discussions between the two nations. The Chinese officials could not use the term “mutual benefit” so easily in the Brazilian context, because the Brazilian public perceived China and Brazil as equals on the global stage and both considered emerging rather than developing economies. This increased interaction led to increased competition in certain sectors, meaning the simple “win-win” rhetoric was no longer sufficient. This meant that the rhetoric had to change from mutual benefit to mutual cooperation and the balancing of power between the

two nations (Strauss 2012). This means that while the messaging of China's brand may be consistent and cohesive, within the boundaries of its core tenets, the specific language and framings may still shift to suit different situations or audiences, indicating the brands simultaneous consistency and variability.

These first three aspects of China's brand are all still confined to the messaging of the brand, but to be a "brand" also implies China's incorporation with and effect on global economic systems under capitalism as a "logo of the global economy" (Lury 2004). Lury (2004) expands the definition of brands to consider how they function as symbols of the specific articulations of economic, geopolitical, and social terrain under capitalism and globalization. Thus, brands of all kinds do not just represent a single brand or company but sets of ideals and values that are all deemed valuable under these world systems. In this way they are also containers of meta-semiotic meaning and become "an indexical icon of the virtual nature of the global capitalist economy itself" (Manning 2010). Semiotic chains of meaning allow for China to begin indexing not just the country, government, and the people who reside there, but also more abstract notions of development models, world power responsibilities, and technological innovation, to name a few. These more abstracted notions of China are only possible because discourse on China is inextricable from discourse on international relations between other countries, economics, development, and geopolitics in which China is both aligned and differentiated from various countries or groups of countries.

This is very pertinent in the case of China's brand since many of the shifts in the global economy of the past 40 years emerged in or around China. Before the 1978 reforms, China prioritized agricultural development and participated minimally in global economic systems but the shift in economic policies led to it becoming a manufacturing powerhouse that was at once

dramatically increasing China's economic power and shifting global production chains while also laying bear the environmental and social consequences of this kind of development. From there it shifted policies and began looking to offshore these more hazardous industries while shoring up its high-tech manufacturing infrastructure, expanding its global financing role, and campaigning for entirely new paradigms of global economic development. These shifts in its own economic development coincided with its increased influence on the global economic systems and so China also began to be associated with global economic paradigm shifts such as globalization and development finance. Thus, the China brand that Chinese spokespeople may promote has to also contend with the multiple other layers of symbolism that China invokes.

The fourth aspect of China's brand is the intersection of all these factors which impact the actual public opinions formed, that is the actual brand image of China formed for the individual. Since everyone's experiences and local context are different, the ultimate image of China's brand, its value to them, and overall favorable or unfavorable opinion of it will not only widely differ but also stems from different assemblages of factors stemming from their personal identities and experiences along with the specific economic, social, and political context in which they live. This is the juncture of meaning making that I am the most interested in because it will reveal not just what China wishes its image to be but also the image of China that the public holds and a range of factors that impact the brand image the most.

China's Story Unbound: The Dialogic Formation of China's Brand

From my definition of China's brand, there are multiple factors that account for shifting narratives of the brand and multiple opportunities for different actors to influence and reshape it as they disseminate to the Mexican public. To theorize this multilayered process I consider Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on discourse which contends that discourse is through and through a

social phenomenon in all its aspects from its conception to utterance to its reception to its interpretation and to its eventual echoes (Bakhtin 1981). Due to this social nature, every utterance of language is therefore dialogic and happens in relation to other utterances, other people and importantly the various ideological systems and historical precedents of other utterances. At the core of this theory is the concept that there are two forces in language, the unifying (centrifugal) force of language systems and their limits of possibility and the decentralizing (centripetal) force of languages' inherent social heteroglossia, or rather the multiple voices that exist at different positionalities in the established social terrain (Bakhtin 1981, 271-272). Bakhtin therefore contends that meaning is produced in these dialogic interactions, or rather in the interaction between the utterance itself and its multiple refractions with the different voices and unique socio-ideological terrain of the listener or reader.

What is useful about this schema is that Bakhtin does not confine these forces to one scale of engagement or within one kind of interaction, instead one can conceptualize the unifying force of language systems broadly such as the language of Spanish or as specific as the language of a school classroom (Bakhtin 1981, 271). Additionally, heteroglossia does not entail multiple individual humans but rather can also include the “voice” of popular literature or historical narratives (Bakhtin 1981, 272). Therefore, with Bakhtin's understanding of how someone will interpret discourse, he envisions it as inextricable from this heteroglossia, or as he states, “the living utterance...cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue” (Bakhtin 1981, 276). In other words, in interactions with China's brand story, individuals are compiling and interweaving it into the pre-existing narratives on China that stem from their context and lived experiences which gives it a unique

shape. Bakhtin's theory of discourse also helps us make sense of how meaning making happens both between people but also between texts since it theorizes the discourse happening on the page as part of these complex dialogic relations.

In considering the diplomatic discourse of China there are multiple arenas in which we can identify and investigate the dialogic tension between the unifying force of the language with multiple voices. First, we can see how the extreme curation of the specific phrases and terms of China's brand story are unifying, however there is not one spokesperson for China but multiple who work at stratified levels of the organization in different capacities who all contribute to this story telling. Some examples being the difference between a speech given at the United Nations General Assembly by Xi Jinping compared to tweets of "Wolf Warrior" diplomats on social media. Or instead, one of the opinion editorials published by the Chinese ambassador to Mexico in Spanish for readers of the national newspaper. These varied actors and the texts they produce all contribute to China's brand but have varying messaging depending on both the context in which different actors deploy them and the audience which receives and interprets them. In addition, the Chinese state is not the only purveyor of narratives about China and outside actors also contribute narratives. Therefore, it is within this tension between the norms and standards of China's curated diplomatic discourse and their unique articulations by the different spokespersons of the Chinese state that contend with outside narratives that new meanings and new brand narratives emerge. This therefore also implies that when looking to China's brand story we are missing the entire picture if we focus on only one kind of speech or one facet of its public diplomacy discourse, instead the brand story emerges as a sum of its parts.

A second framing of a similar dynamic is the tension produced when we consider the unifying language of global development paradigms led by western world powers and

institutions. Their discourse on global development sets standards and boundaries on what is and is not possible for these initiatives. Yet there are multiple different voices that provide aligned and alternative narratives on this issue, China being a major one. The brand language of China actively pushes against these paradigms and offers up China's model as a viable alternative. This tension is therefore not just passively happening due to a multitude of voices or narratives, as I will reveal in the different analyses of my dissertation, the Chinese state is keenly aware of the difference in the point of view that they are promoting from global norms. Bakhtin posits that both authors and readers or speakers and listeners are aware that there already exists a complex terrain of narratives associated with different words or ideas which make up a person's "conceptual horizon" and internal belief systems and therefore they have the agency to strategically or artistically curate their utterance to meet less resistance in the message's dissemination (Bakhtin 1981, 275).

I therefore contend that China's brands' discursive power is the most salient in these types of interactions in which spokespersons of the Chinese state strategically frame and deploy utterances about China to engage in less friction on the "conceptual horizon" of the intended audience, in this case foreign publics. Bakhtin contends that there is both externally authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse, with the former only being meaningful to those who already agree with it and know it, while the latter can transform their conceptual horizon by interweaving into their ideological framework. He describes this type of discourse as, "Internally persuasive discourse – as opposed to one that is externally authoritative – is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with 'one's own word' In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half ours and half some else's" (Bakhtin 1981, 345). By reframing my examination of China's diplomatic discourse and brand image

using this dialogic understanding of discourse I offer a distinct perspective on how we conceive of China's discursive power efforts. Instead of asking whether people view China favorably or unfavorably, I ask what about China's brand has influenced their perceptions of the world and its future possibilities?

Mexico: A Unique Partner in Latin America

China is increasing its engagement across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and yet I chose to focus this research on Mexico and conduct my survey in Tijuana. Mexico is uniquely situated in the dynamics of China-LAC dynamics because of its close economic and geopolitical ties to the US as its southern neighbor and as the second largest economy in the region. This strong connection to the US has therefore shaped the discourse on China-LAC relations in Mexico. Mexico was one of the first countries to recognize the PRC in 1971, yet this early recognition did not actually launch any meaningful government or economic collaboration.

Second, many LAC countries viewed China's rise as a manufacturing power as a threat to their own manufacturing industries. However, Mexico's economy was the hardest hit due to the economic reliance on exports to the United States based in the paradigms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Dussel Peters 2020). This meant that even when China began engaging more with other countries in the region, it was politically unviable for Mexican national leaders to make overt overtures to China and instead they would implement anti-dumping laws and tariffs (Hearn 2016). Additionally, other countries across the region were pushing against the neoliberal economic norms purveyed by the United States with a wave of left-wing political leaders looking to China as a viable alternative but Mexico has not had a successful national-level left-wing movement until nearly 20 years later (Palacios 2008). These initial inroads in the region led to increased Chinese funding going into large infrastructure and

resource extraction endeavors across multiple countries, but once again, Mexico did not receive even a fraction of this funding or realize these projects (Gallagher 2016).

Researchers of public opinions often cite these experiences with China as the reason for high or low favorability of China in each country, contending that increased investment leads to higher favorability or national scandals with infrastructure projects lead to unfavorable views (Kang 2015; Carreras 2017). While these may be factors which individuals consider in their opinion about China, they are certainly only a fraction of the multiple images, narratives and experiences that inform this opinion. In places such as Mexico which did not go through these same regional trends then, it is even more difficult to point to potential influences of these opinions. I was particularly interested in exploring the specific narratives and understandings about China circulating in Tijuana due to the assemblage of factors that could be impacting individuals' views on China.

Tijuana is a Pacific coastal city directly on the borderlands of the US and Mexico; San Diego, California is so close that you can see it over the border wall while driving along the highway that circumvents the north of the city. It is on these borderlands that Mexico's economic development has become intertwined with China-Mexico relations three times in the past 150 years. As Mexico and the US became modern nation states and looked to transform this region into agricultural land, Mexican companies and US investors funded the building of irrigation infrastructure and developed the cotton industry in the region (Lopez 2015). They hired a group of Chinese immigrants to work on the projects and then work the land. Additionally, since the Chinese diaspora community had already established themselves across the coast of California, other Chinese immigrants came seeking new work opportunities in the developing frontier (Hu-Dehart 2002). Therefore, Chinese migration and labor directly shaped the development of

Mexico's northwestern borderlands. Decades later this population remained and grew despite anti-Chinese riots and movements in other parts of the borderlands (Gonzalez 2017).

The second time was in the economic restructuring of Mexico's economy after the 1982 debt crisis in which the country defaulted on its foreign loans and was the first country to go through the International Monetary Fund promoted economic restructuring program (Sheppard 2011). Mexico's economy became export-reliant, particularly to the United States consumer market, and after the 1994 signing of the NAFTA, this economic model became even more entrenched and an entire manufacturing sector sprung up in the borderlands to take advantage of the proximity and trade relations (Hufbauer, Schott, and Orejas 2005). China was also becoming a global manufacturing power and after its entry to the World Trade Organization largely disrupted Mexico's primacy over exports to the US (Dussel Peters 2020). However, despite this becoming a national political issue, in Tijuana, there was a contingent of Chinese-Mexico entrepreneurs and eager government officials who established economic trade ties with mainland China anyways (Hearn 2016).

This brings us to present day, in which Chinese companies are looking to expand not just their markets but also their foreign manufacturing infrastructure. Tijuana is an attractive gateway for new Chinese businesses entering Mexico due to its historic Chinese population, strategic position in Mexico and existing friendly environment towards Chinese businesses. A report in 2019 claimed that 70 Chinese companies had expressed interest in setting up business in a new business park opening up (Anda 2019). Large international corporations such as Huawei has set up a headquarters in Tijuana and manufacturers such as Hisense have opened factories in the nearby city of Ensenada (Guerrero Vázquez 2018). It is with this historical and urban milieu in which people of Tijuana would be making judgements on China and incorporating narratives on

China to include in their conceptual horizons.

While there conducting pre-dissertation fieldwork, I saw how these disparate and complicated experiences with things, people, activities, and corporations associated with China led to people having vastly different opinions on China's influence in Mexico. In discussions of my research interests some people would hold up their Huawei phone and gush over its affordability and excellent quality. Others would mention their desire to learn Chinese or that they enjoyed the local Chinese restaurant near their homes. While some people would tell me of their experience working for a Chinese company or repeat narratives of China's threat towards Mexican manufacturing. All these anecdotes of China represent the multifaceted and sometimes contradicting brand image of China that individuals may be forming in the city that may stem from their own experiences and the specific context of Tijuana within the complex terrain of China-Mexico relations.

Dialogism and Critical Discourse Analysis

With this background of the context of Mexico and Tijuana and this theoretical viewpoint on the dialogical production of China's brand, I put together a multi-level study to capture moments of significant dialogic tension in China's brand production as Chinese spokespeople disseminated it to the Mexican public. I also had to contend with the limitations of conducting ethnographic fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic. In my original proposal I had planned to spend a year in Tijuana going to events and spaces associated with China, interviewing people in the city about their perspectives on China and the Chinese community there about their experiences. However, the pandemic delayed my research and limited the amount of time I could spend in the city by the time I got there in winter 2022. I had wished to use ethnographic methodologies to provide the proper depth and breadth of data on how and why individuals came

to hold certain opinions about China. Since I was unable to do this, I turned to online sources and linguistic analysis methodologies that could provide alternative avenues for understanding how the brand of China is both configured for Mexican audiences and taken up there.

I therefore looked to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) because of its assertion that to understand power and discourse we must include an “understanding of the relations between discourse and other elements of social life” (Fairclough 2015, 5). In my conceptualization of China’s brand and its discursive influence, the context of its deployment and agency of actors disseminating it and receiving it are all part of this equation. A cornerstone of CDA is situating discourse analyses within explanations of social and ideological contexts without which the words really would not have much power. In this sense, the “critical” aspect of it denotes seeking explanations for *why* discourse is the way it is and looking to the multifaceted context and power relations in which various actors use it (Fairclough 2015, 7). To properly contextualize discourse within its social conditions and to make interpretations on the potential social factors that are influencing it, we therefore need a set of data that is representative of more than one moment in time, or to set up a corpus of data that includes multiple texts. Proponents of CDA have suggested that one way to compile a corpus that would lend itself to CDA is to collect them around a specific social practice or event (Farrelly 2020).

Therefore, in the construction of my study I ultimately wanted to examine how people in Tijuana interpreted the brand image of China, identify the possible influences on this perspective, and finally explain the impact of these interpretations of China on their overall opinions on China-Mexico relations. To reach these goals I constructed a multi-tiered research study that seeks to analyze the brand discourse of China in multiple arenas of meaning making that would reveal how this discourse came to be, how different actors articulate it to suit different

goals, and how the public of Tijuana, Mexico grapples with this discourse to come to their own conclusions.

The first tier of this analysis takes place in Chapter 1, *Developing the Brand of China*, which is an examination of the specific discourse of China's brand and its historical development and curation alongside globally significant ideological paradigms. I identify three core narratives that make up the argument of China's brand story, which are: China is different from the rest of the world but most importantly the west, China is part of the global south and therefore naturally aligned with other countries of the global south, and China, due to this simultaneous difference and alignment, is the optimal choice for leading the world in development goals for a better future. Through a genealogical examination of these narratives, I demonstrate how Chinese officials have strategically curated narratives about China to leverage these different ideological frameworks such as orientalism, racism, anti-communism, and neoliberal economic development to frame a positive and non-threatening brand image of China. The ultimate illustration of this delicately woven image is the discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which started as a proposed mega-infrastructure initiative funded by China, but Chinese officials now tout as an alternative multilateral cooperation platform for realizing China's vision of global prosperity outside the purview of western powers.

In Chapter 2, *China's Entry into the Western Hemisphere: Mexico's Unique Path*, I provide the needed social, economic, and political context of existing relations of the western hemisphere and how China's relation to the region has developed within these dynamics. I discuss the three hemispheric developments that China-Latin American and Caribbean studies scholars have identified as central for the entry of China into the hemisphere in modern times and how Mexico's relationship to China followed or did not follow these trends. The first of

these is the colonial practices which led to the immigration of Chinese workers to the Americas and how the development of western views of race alongside national identities which led to a type of hemispheric orientalism that casts Asians as perpetual foreigners and regulates borders to maintain their exclusion (Lee 2007). Mexico went through its own development of anti-Chinese racism but the migration and community building efforts of the Chinese immigrants in Mexico have laid the groundwork for better contemporary relations with China in some regions over others of the country. The second is the neoliberal economic restructuring of LAC which eventually led to many countries relying on the export of raw materials while simultaneously requiring funding for social programs and infrastructure. China was actively seeking new sources of raw materials and established alternative financing institutions to proffer deals at the same time which led to the China Commodity Boom (Gallagher 2016). Third, correlated with this economic shift, was a wave of leftist leaders in LAC called the “Pink Tide” which leveraged these economic alignments to find alternative funding sources from the United States. Mexico, despite being a big oil producer, did not receive or need many these Chinese-backed loans due to its closer ties to the United States and relatively recent turn to the left at the level of national politics. These factors have led to China-Mexico relations developing in a more piecemeal fashion which has allowed for different regions to form specific relations with Chinese investors, companies, and immigrants while also setting the stage for a more peer-to-peer relationship between China and Mexico at the national level.

The second level of my analysis answers the call of Farrelly (2020) to examine corpuses of data which reflect a certain social practice or event. In chapter 3, *Reconfiguring the Brand of China in Mexico*, I thematically compare the contents of press conferences and reports of the Chinese ambassadors to Mexico during the same period with the daily press conferences done by

the President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), that mention China. I demonstrate that the discourse of the Chinese ambassadors does follow the established narratives of the China brand with emphasis on government-led cultural exchange, economic cooperation, and infrastructure development projects. AMLO engaged with and interpreted the brand of China to suit his own political goals and to legitimize his vision for Mexico as its leader. AMLO's political platform promises the Mexican public an alternative to the status quo of Mexican politics. To further this platform and therefore AMLO's own political brand, China is important for two reasons. First, China is a viable partner and fruitful source of the needed capital and alternative knowledge that Mexico needs for AMLO's economic plans. Second, China is proof that successful development and modernity were possible outside of western-backed norms. Therefore, AMLO was able to use China's brand image to legitimize his own vision for alternative development and pathways to modernity in Mexico.

In Chapter 4, *Negotiating the Chinese Brand with the Mexican Public*, I instead look at the discourse of the Chinese ambassadors in opinion editorials they have published in national Mexican newspapers. In this arena of engagement, the Chinese diplomats can address Mexico-specific concerns as they come up in real time. I found that the Chinese ambassadors used the term of "cooperation" in multiple contexts and used it to begin outlining the unique approach to bilateral and multilateral relations that China purported to uphold. The descriptors and phrases used in relation to cooperation were very consistent, and so in a frequency and concordance analysis may not appear more than repetition of the party line. However, I identified the articles which used "cooperation" the most and they coincided with two major events that were top priorities of the Chinese diplomats, the Second Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative (which Mexico did not formally attend) and the COVID-19 pandemic response. I examined three articles

for each event as a series of interrelated texts to get a deeper understanding of how the ambassadors framed cooperation in relation to these issues. I found that these articles were more than just public relations spins of events and instead presented these issues from an alternative point of view of what international cooperation is and could be if China were the leader. Therefore, these op-eds were moments for not just polishing China's image abroad but also promoting alternative world views and geopolitical paradigms in ways that were directly beneficial and meaningful to the people of Mexico.

Finally, Chapter 5, *How the Public of Tijuana Interprets the Brand of China*, discusses findings from a survey I designed and disseminated in Tijuana, Mexico in Winter 2022 that sought to gauge to what degree individuals agreed or disagreed with the previously identified narrative threads on China used by the ambassadors and the Mexican President. I found that overall people had a positive opinion of China, but not because they completely aligned with the talking points of the Chinese story. To the respondents, China is not just a nation state that is an important economic and geopolitical partner for Mexico but also symbolizes the complexity of global economic development and presents new opportunities for Mexico to reach new possibilities. In imagining potential relations with China, the respondents provided insight into their views of Mexico's past, present and future geopolitical positionality, and economic development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alves, Ana Cristina. 2013. "China's 'Win-Win' Cooperation: Unpacking The Impact Of Infrastructure-For-Resources Deals In Africa." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 20 (2): 207-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2013.811337>.
- Anda, Sonia de. 2019. Setenta Empresas Chinas Interesadas En BC. *Agencia Fronteriza de Noticias*. Accessed February 20, 2020.
- Armony, Ariel C. 2012. "A View from Afar: How Colombia Sees China." *The China Quarterly* 209: 178-197. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741011001536>.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1981. *Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*. edited by Michael Holquist. Austin, United States: University of Texas Press.
- Barker, Carol Mei. 2013. "Emancipating the Image: The Beijing Olympics, Regeneration, and the Power of Performance." *Architecture_MPS* 2 (1): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.amps.2013v2i1.001>.
- Batchelor, Kathryn. 2019. "Literary Translation And Soft Power: African Literature In Chinese Translation." *The Translator* 25 (4): 401-419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2020.1735090>.
- Benabdallah, Lina. 2015. "Political Representation Of China–Africa: The Tale Of A Playful Panda, Or A Threatening Dragon?" *Africa Review* 7 (1): 28-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09744053.2014.977587>.
- . 2016. "China's Peace and Security Strategies in Africa: Building Capacity is Building Peace?" *African Studies Quarterly* 16 (3/4): 17-34. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=120788791&site=eds-live>. .
- . 2020. "Power or Influence? Making Sense of China's Evolving Party-to-party Diplomacy in Africa." *African Studies Quarterly* 19: 94-114. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=b7h&AN=146862115&site=eds-live>.
- Berkowitzc, Pere, George Gjermano, Lee Gomez, and Gary Schafer. 2007. "Brand China: Using The 2008 Olympic Games To Enhance China's Image." *Place Branding & Public Diplomacy* 3 (2): 164-178. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000059>.
- Brautigam, Deborah. 2009. *The Dragon's Gift : The Real Story of China in Africa*. Book. Oxford: OUP Oxford.
- Brownell, Susan. 2013. "'Brand China' in the Olympic Context: Communications Challenges of China's Soft Power Initiative." *Javnost-The Public* 20 (4): 65-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2013.11009128>.

- Callahan, William A. 2015. "Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream." *Politics* 35 (3/4): 216-229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12088>.
- Carreras, Miguel. 2017. "Public Attitudes Toward An Emerging China In Latin America." *Issues and Studies* 53 (1): 1-28. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S10132.51117400045>.
- Chang, Pin-Ling. 2017. "China English: Its Ideological Nature and Implications for Translation and Interpreting." *The Translator* 23 (4): 416-427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2017.1385943>.
- Chen, Chwen Chwen, Cinzia Colapinto, and Qing Luo. 2012. "The 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Visual Insights into China's Soft Power." *Visual Studies* 27 (2): 188-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2012.677252>.
- Dadabaev, Timur. 2020. "Discourses of Rivalry or Rivalry of Discourses: Discursive Strategies and Framing of Chinese and Japanese Foreign Policies in Central Asia." *The Pacific Review* 33 (1): 61-95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2018.1539026>.
- Dehart, Monica. 2021. *Transpacific Developments : The Politics of Multiple Chinas in Central America*. Book. Ithaca [New York]: Cornell University Press.
- Dreyer, June Teufel. 2005. "From China With Love: P.R.C. Overtures in Latin America." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 12 (2): 85-98. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.brownjwa12.34&site=eds-live>.
- Dussel Peters, Enrique. 2020. "The New Triangular Relationship between China, the United States, and Mexico: Implications for Intra-NAFTA Trade." *The International Trade Journal* 34 (1): 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853908.2019.1696256>.
- Farrelly, Michael. 2020. "Rethinking intertextuality in CDA." *Critical Discourse Studies* 17 (4): 359-376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2019.1609538>.
- Gallagher, Kevin P. 2016. *The China Triangle : Latin America's China Boom and the Fate of the Washington Consensus*. Book. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gonzalez, Fredy. 2017. *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico*. University of California Press.
- Guerrero Vázquez, René Andrei. 2018. "Las Multinacionales Chinas y Sus Estrategias de Innovación en México." Masters Desarrollo Regional, Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
- Hartig, Falk. 2016. "How China Understands Public Diplomacy: The Importance of National Image for National Interests." *International Studies Review* 18 (4): 655-680. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw007>. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw007>.
- Hearn, Adrian H. 2016. *Diaspora and Trust: Cuba, Mexico, and the Rise of China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Hu-Dehart, Evelyn. 2002. "Huagong And Huashang: The Chinese as Laborers and Merchants in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Amerasia Journal* 28 (2): 64-90. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS296020&site=eds-live>.
- Hubbert, Jennifer A. 2019. *China in the World: An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, and Globalization*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hufbauer, Gary Clyde, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Diana Orejas. 2005. *NAFTA Revisited : Achievements and Challenges*. Washington, United States: Peterson Institute for International Economics.
- Jing-Schmidt, Zhuo, and Xinjia Peng. 2017. "Winds and Tigers: Metaphor Choice in China's Anti-Corruption Discourse." *Lingua Sinica* 3 (1): 1-26. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s40655-016-0017-9>.
- Kang, Liu. 2015. "Interests, Values, and Geopolitics: The Global Public Opinion on China." *European Review* 23 (2): 242-260. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1062798714000714>.
- Keimetswe, Lesego Alicia. 2023. "The impact of the Chinese Government Scholarship Program and Confucius Institute on China's national image in Botswana: a soft power perspective." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*: 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-023-00305-6>.
- Klime, Ondrej. 2018. "China's Cultural Soft Power: The Central Concept in Early Xi Jinping Era (2012-2017)." *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Philologica* 2017 (4): 127-150. <https://doi.org/10.14712/24646830.2017.45>.
- Kurlantzick, Joshua. 2007. *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World*. Book. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- . 2023. *Beijing's Global Media Offensive: China's Uneven Campaign to Influence Asia and the World*. Oxford University Press.
- Lams, Lutgard. 2018. "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (3): 387-411. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9529-8>.
- Lee, Erika. 2007. "The 'Yellow Peril' and Asian Exclusion in the Americas." *Pacific Historical Review* 76 (4): 537-562. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS396984&site=eds-live>.
- Li, Han. 2018. "From Red to 'Pink': Propaganda Rap, New Media, and China's Soft Power Pursuit." *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 25 (2): 89-105. <https://search-ebscohost->

com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS922712&site=eds-live.

- Li, Tao; Pan, Feng. 2020. "Reshaping China's Image: A Corpus-Based Analysis of the English Translation of Chinese Political Discourse." *Perspectives*: 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2020.1727540>.
- Lopez, Marco Antonio Samaniego. 2015. "Empresas de Extranjeros Oficialmente Mexicanas en la Frontera. Significado e Implicaciones en Torno a la Cuenca Internacional Rio Colorado." *Estudios Mexicanos* 31 (1): 48-87. www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/msem.2015.31.1.48.
- Lury, Celia. 2004. *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* London, UK: Routledge.
- Manning, Paul. 2010. "The Semiotics of Brand." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 33-49. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/stable/25735098>.
- Mawdsley, Emma. 2012. *From Recipients to Donors: Emerging Powers and the Changing Development Landscape*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power : The Means to Success in World Politics*. First edition. ed.: Public Affairs.
- Palacios, Luisa. 2008. "Latin America as China's Energy Supplier." *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United States*, edited by Riordan; Paz Roett, Guadalupe, 170-190. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Schroeder, Jonathon; Borgerson, Janet; Wu, Zhiyan. 2015. "A Brand Culture Approach to Chinese Cultural Heritage Brands." *Journal of Brand Management* 22 (3): 261-279.
- Sheppard, Randal. 2011. "Nationalism, Economic Crisis and 'Realistic Revolution' in 1980s Mexico." *Nations & Nationalism* 17 (3): 500-519. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00472.x>.
- Shi, Xuedong. 2014. "English-Chinese Translation Strategies on Press Conference." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4 (8): 1636-1640. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.4304/tpls.4.8.1636-1640>.
- Sidaway, James D., and Chih Yuan Woon. 2017. "Chinese Narratives on "One Belt, One Road" (一带一路) in Geopolitical and Imperial Contexts." *The Professional Geographer* 69 (4): 591-603. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2017.1288576>.
- Singh, Ajit. 2021. "The Myth of 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy' and Realities of Chinese Development Finance." *Third World Quarterly* 42 (2): 239-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1807318>.
- Songster, E. Elena. 2018. *Panda Nation : The Construction and Conservation of China's Modern Icon*. New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press.

- Strauss, Julia C. . 2012. "Framing and Claiming: Contemporary Globalization and 'Going Out' in China's Rhetoric Towards Latin America." *From the Great Wall to the New World: China and Latin America in the 21st century*, edited by Julia C.; Armony Strauss, Ariel C., 134-156. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- Sun, Shao-Cheng. 2023. "The Confucius Institutes: China's Cultural Soft Power Strategy." *Journal of Culture & Values in Education* 6 (1): 52-68.
<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2023.4>.
- Sverdrup-Thygeson, Bjornar. 2017. "The Chinese Story: Historical Narratives as a Tool in China's Africa Policy." *International Politics* 54 (1): 54-72.
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41311-017-0014-3>.
- Tungkeunkunt, Kornphanat, and Kanya Phuphakdi. 2018. "Blood Is Thicker Than Water: A History of the Diplomatic Discourse "China and Thailand Are Brothers"." *Asian Perspective* 42: 597-621.
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A561882755/AONE?u=msu_main&sid=AONE&xid=d1c9ad23.
- Woon, Chih Yuan. 2020. "Framing the "Polar Silk Road" (冰上丝绸之路): Critical Geopolitics, Chinese Scholars and the (Re)Positionings of China's Arctic Interests." *Political Geography* 78. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102141>.
- Xin, Jing,, and Donald Matheson. 2018. "One Belt, Competing Metaphors: The Struggle Over Strategic Narrative in English-Language News Media." *International Journal of Communication* 4248-4268.
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A592665092/LitRC?u=msu_main&sid=LitRC&xid=015989f3.
- Yang, Yi Edward, Jonathan W. Keller, and Joseph Molnar. 2018. "An Operational Code Analysis of China's National Defense White Papers: 1998-2015." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (4): 585-602. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11366-017-9524-5>.
- Yang, Yifan. 2020. "Looking Inward: How Does Chinese Public Diplomacy Work at Home?" *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 22 (3): 369-386.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120917583>.
- Zhang, Chunyu, and Benjamin R. Bates. 2017. "Victory & Peace: The Use of Metaphors in Chinese President Xi Jinping's V-Day Speech." *China Media Research* 13: 37-45.
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A491934957/AONE?u=msu_main&sid=AONE&xid=a62a20f8.

CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPING THE BRAND OF CHINA

As the People's Republic of China has emerged as a world power with both economic and geopolitical influence to wield on the global stage, the rhetoric deployed by Chinese political spokespersons has shifted to account for this newfound power. The Communist Party of China (CPC) under the leadership of Xi Jinping have made a concerted effort to increase China's "discursive power" by telling the "Chinese story" in a curated and compelling way to both its citizens and to the foreign publics. This has resulted in concerted soft power initiatives and image campaigns which promote a sanitized story of China which presents it as a new kind of world power that is different than western world powers due to its status as a still developing country and solidarity with the global south. Through this claim of China's difference and solidarity, it presents cooperation with China as offering new kinds of opportunities and a peer-level relationship that is both a legitimate and superior alternative to western norms of international relations and global development. Chinese diplomats and politicians prop up this brand story through the strategically chosen keywords and phrases across their public diplomacy efforts. These terms and phrases are so repetitive that their public statements may seem like carbon-copies.

However, in this chapter I demonstrate that China's present day diplomatic discourse does more than just reframe China's past to suit current goals of the state. Instead, it is intertextually powerful because the Chinese state has effectively interwoven the existing narratives on China with the brand messaging of the CPC to present a cohesive story of China's past and present which frames it as a new kind of world power that presents new possibilities for the future of the world. In other words, while the phrases and words used by Chinese spokespeople to talk about China are not that persuasive on their own, once they are woven

together and put in the context of past historical framings of China and present-day narratives on China outside of the control of the CPC, the overall story they build and the brand image they paint of China is much more legible to foreign audiences and digestible as the “truth” about China.

This is possible because the brand of China has been intertextually constructed overtime to frame China’s story within certain world paradigms of geopolitical and economic relations. Thus, Chinese spokespersons do not need to constantly refute or rewrite history nor present a “new China” completely divorced from its past, instead they are able to leverage past narratives, even those which may have portrayed China in a negative way, to add legitimacy and legibility to its present-day claims as a new kind of world power. To demonstrate this phenomenon, I have identified three narrative threads that are central to the promoted brand image of China that have historical roots in global discourses and in the history of China. I explore the genealogy of these key narratives that make up the brand image of China and demonstrate how various actors transformed them to suit different domestic situations and were also reflective of the paradigms of world politics of the time. Importantly, the CPC does not solely control the image of China abroad, the worldwide media and other nation states also circulate stories on China which may not always align with the brand promoted by the CPC. The CPC spokespersons have therefore also had to contend with these narratives in constructing the brand of China.

The first narrative line I explore is the contention that China is different from other countries from its orientalist roots to its present-day claim of being a different kind of world power. I then investigate the narrative about China’s alignment with the global south and its claim to be the largest developing country. Third, I look to the narrative about China following its own, alternative path from its Confucius past to “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.

Finally, I demonstrate how these three narrative threads work in concert to set up a specific framing of China's brand for the world and which has culminated in the discourse on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the ultimate platform to promote this vision of China for the world.

Tenet 1: China is Different than the West

The differentiation of the "east" from the "west" and the separation of the world along this axis has persisted for centuries. However, as Edward Said demonstrates in his seminal book, *Orientalism* (1978), the juxtaposition between the East and West is more than just an observation of difference, but rather a defining mechanism, where each region's identity is defined as the what the other is not (Said 1978). This framing of the world has been a key narrative of relations between China and western countries for centuries and continues to shape both western and Chinese narratives on China's identity. This logic undergirded many of the justifications for western expansion and imperialism into East Asia, including China. The differentiation between the east and west also was central to the policy decisions of the Qing dynasty which sought to limit access and influence of the uncivilized west on China. Contemporarily, there is still a constant othering of China and things associated with China in the west that draw on orientalist and anti-communist tropes. However, China now has opened its doors to foreigners and emphasizes its "otherness" as a strength rather than a weakness for foreign publics. Chinese officials weave the various facets of China's otherness into the brand of China and continue to reframe it for new contexts across the last century. This narrative about China therefore naturalizes its difference and legitimizes China's claim of offering alternative relations.

China: Orientalism and China's Image

From the western perspective, tales of the exoticism of Asia date back to the ancient silk

road and frame China and other Asian locales as fundamentally different than the west. This imagery of the exotic Chinese other persisted in the art and literature of the west for centuries in items such as Chinoiserie art of the 18th century and Victorian era “Yellow Peril Fiction” (Degenhardt 2013; Ross 2013). China at the time was a hegemonic power in East Asia led by the Qing Dynasty from 1636 until 1911 which had expanded its empire to include much of the land that is now considered modern day China. As western countries expanded their empires, the Qing dynasty shifted its foreign policy relations to both maintain its control over its territory and deter western intervention which included isolationist policies which restricted entry into China to foreigners and limited both the mobility and financial activities of foreign institutes and individuals. The Qing dynasty rulers framed the west and its interests as barbaric and threatening the Chinese way of life, meaning that the axis of differentiation between the two was also important for their political rule (Luo 2017).

By the 1800s, missionaries and merchants were disregarding these regulations. The British East India Company viewed China as an untapped consumer market, especially for its current mercantile colonial economy that was reliant on trading opium in the region (Gao 2020). Despite the Qing laws against its import into the country, British merchants continued to engage in the illicit trade. For the west, the media narrative was that while the British tactics of flooding China with opium was having devastating effects on the Chinese populace, Britain had the responsibility to force the “uncivilized” China to open its ports to not just western commercial interests, but also western “civilized” influence (Johnson 2012; Gao 2020). This only antagonized the Qing rulers further and in 1839 they seized and destroyed substantial amounts of British-imported opium which marked the beginning of the First Opium War (1839-1842) and led to a Second Opium War (1856-1860).

These conflicts and treaties were the result of the successful lobbying by the British East India company of the British empire to intervene on behalf of its business interests, but the British media instead framed this as stemming from cultural and racial differences between the civilized west and barbaric east, repeating orientalist tropes. They claimed that China was a backwards country in need of help from the west to modernize and therefore in need of domination and “correction” by western powers. The othering and subjugation of Asia in relation to the west is the crux of orientalism which is not just the juxtaposition of the west and east, but rather positions the West’s entire existence “not upon its openness, its receptivity to the Orient but rather on its internal, repetitious consistency about its constitutive will-to-power over the Orient” (Said 1978, 222). The Qing dynasty lost both conflicts and western powers forced them to cede lands, pay hefty reparations, open additional ports, allow foreign embassies in Beijing, and grant increased mobility for foreigners (Gao 2020).

Underlying the logic of needing to forcibly “open up” China is the western-implemented racial system of the time which defined racial groups across the world and placed them in a hierarchy with white Europeans at the top. Chinese people were essentialized under the racial identifier of Asian which reinforced orientalist paradigms that cast them as both different and inferior. This racialization was key in the set-up of the Coolie Labor system in which western merchants hired Indian and Chinese laborers as indentured workers at city ports, many times enticed with false promises or kidnapped, to work in industries that had to find alternatives to enslaved labor on plantations, mining and construction (Cushman 2013). Merchants recruited Chinese laborers because of the racist stereotype that they were docile but hardworking and therefore they would be easier to control while also being productive (López 2013; A.P. Lee 2018; Cushman 2013).

The western orientalist narratives and racialization of Chinese people became more entrenched in the western discourse by the turn of the century with the 1899 Boxer Rebellion that began with a revolt of northern Chinese peasants with the ideals of expelling all westerners from China. In their campaign across the countryside, they destroyed foreign owned property, killed Christian missionaries and Chinese Christians, and eventually converged on Beijing, the capital city, and gained the support of the Qing Dowager Empress Cixi. An Eight Nations Alliance, formed by Germany, Japan, Russia, Britain, the United States, Italy, and Austria-Hungary quickly stopped this rebellion and enacted the Boxer Protocols which included the execution of high-ranking Qing officials and high reparations. Despite this decisive victory, in the west, the image of a Boxer rebel dressed in red, trained in an exotic Chinese martial art and ruthlessly cutting down foreigners and Christians became yet another symbol of China's backwardness and barbarity (Ross 2013).

This fear of an imminent Chinese threat was also present abroad due to the nascent overseas Chinese communities in western countries which had formed from the prior century's outflow of immigrants abroad. The exotic other that was once a tale from the far-away east was now present in their own countries and colonies. This led to a rise in anti-Chinese sentiment that was politicized in mass propaganda campaigns and the term "yellow peril" was coined (E. Lee 2007). The use of "yellow" connotated that this danger was based in the different racial category of the Chinese and came to encapsulate fears of Chinese populations being unable to assimilate to "white" countries, Chinese populations being uncivilized and therefore unhygienic and harboring diseases, and Chinese culture and practices being an existential threat to the very fabric of western civilization (Shah 2010; E. Lee 2010). Ultimately, while western powers were pushing to open China's doors to western interests and influence, they were also limiting the

flow of Chinese immigrants and their implied “Chinese influence” into their own countries with the United States passing the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Similar anti-Chinese sentiments and riots emerged in other countries with large overseas Chinese populations alongside varying levels of legislation to limit or prohibit Chinese migration or employment (E. Lee 2010).

China: The Different Kind of Communist Threat

By the beginning of the 20th century new political ideologies and struggles between groups that supported them shaped the geopolitical paradigms of the next decades. These intellectual and political movements also influenced the intellectual elite of China and led to the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 which overthrew the Qing Dynasty. The revolution found its messaging in a specific kind of Chinese nationalism which called for the overthrow of the Qing dynasty as not only incompetent rulers but also as illegitimate rulers since they are of the Manchurian ethnic group and not the Han majority (Luo 2017). This movement called for the unification of China and the rejection of western or other imperial influences and return to a unified vision of Chinese culture and ideals (Luo 2017).

This revolution was one of many across the globe, with none more geopolitically important than the October Revolution (1917) which eventually led to the founding of the communist Soviet Union (USSR) in 1923. In the aftermath of World War II (1939-1945) in which the USSR and the US were both allied powers, this tenuous alliance crumbled and both countries that had emerged as geopolitical powers began vying for global influence which set the stage for the bipolar paradigm of the Cold War. In western discourse led by US policies, communism was framed as an existential threat to the west’s power and values and thus the US had the responsibility to stop the spread of communism (Offner 1999).

In China at the same time, various political factions were vying for control of China in

the power vacuum left by the fall of the Qing dynasty including the Qing government remnants in the Beiyang Government of the north, the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP), founded in 1919 and with holdings in the south, and the Communist Party of China (CPC), founded in 1921. The latter two united briefly to overthrow the northern Beiyang government but quickly had a falling out which devolved into civil war. While there was a prelude of cooperation to stave off the Japanese Imperial Army after it invaded China in 1937 during World War II, the conflict quickly resumed and ended on October 1, 1949, when Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China under the rule of the CPC and the CNP government and soldiers fled to Taiwan. The political ideologies of Marxist-Leninist Communism greatly influenced the leaders of the CPC, but they maintained a commitment to Chinese nationalism (Xing 2017; Li 2015).

Therefore, in the paradigms of Cold War geopolitics which cast authoritarian communism and socialism against liberal, capitalist democracy, the CPC's triumph juxtaposed China against the west on yet another axis. Harry Truman, then president of the United States, saw China's communist revolution as a mere extension of Soviet interests and disregarded the context of the Chinese civil war, and thus, Chinese communism was still framed within orientalist and racist logics that subsumed it under the global threat of USSR communism and seen as a failure of the US containment policies (Offner 1999; Carney and Prasch 2017). Importantly, anti-communist efforts were a global movement, not just confined to western powers, and led by groups around the globe such as the World Anti-Communist League that formed from the initial alliances of the anti-communist authoritarian rulers of the Republic of China in Taiwan and the Republic of Korea and grew to be a world-wide organization that included authoritarian anti-communist rulers from across the globe (Araujo and Bohoslavsky

2020). Anti-communism was a global movement during the Cold War, even outside of US or USSR influence. In addition, communism was not yet synonymous with authoritarianism.

In China, the differentiation of Chinese communism from other types of communism was foundational to Mao's legitimacy as a leader. He reframed Marxist communist ideals to fit the Chinese situation and envisioned the peasantry as the drivers of revolution instead of the industrial proletariat (Xing 2017). Mao's vision of communism was also staunchly anti-imperial and anti-western, and therefore embraced isolationist foreign policy with the exception of alliances with communist countries (Mawdsley 2012). While China was at first allied with the USSR as a fellow communist country, Mao saw the death of Stalin in 1953 and the thawing of relations with the west as revisionist and ultimately led to the Sino-Soviet split in 1961. This situated China as not aligned with either pole of the Cold War and othered China even further as even implementing communism differently.

The Sino-Soviet split allowed for China to occupy a unique position in Cold War dynamics especially after the failure of the Vietnam War and Korean War at containing the spread of communism (Offner 1999). Due to the split, western leaders framed China as a different kind of communist country, one which despite its communism could be a potential partner and find common ground (Carney and Prasch 2017). This shift in policy approach to China led to the historic visits of both Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon in 1971 and 1972 respectively and the eventual recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1979. The CPC saw this shift in geopolitical positionality as a benefit. They used the closer relation to the US as a counterweight to the USSR and this was leveraged in negotiations between China and the USSR to normalize relations (Chang 1984).

During the last decade of the Cold War during the Reagan administration (1981-1989)

there was a reinvigorated anti-communist fervor which ingrained the discursive alignment of capitalism with democracy and communism with authoritarianism (Kroshus Medina 1998). In this framing, liberal democracy, human rights protection, and neoliberal capitalist economic policies were all bundled together as markers of the civilized western world. Despite this viewpoint, the Reagan administration still viewed China as a potential wild card that it could leverage in any potential confrontation with the USSR rather than an equal communist threat (Hsiung 1984). Therefore, within the Cold War paradigms, western powers cast China as perpetually juxtaposed to western values but also unaligned with the other node of power under the USSR China was an alternative third even in a bimodal paradigm. Even though China was not the “main villain” in the narrative of the Cold War, it was still framed and symbolically cast as the orientalist and communist threat that still failed to embrace “western values” which were now capitalism and liberal democracy.

China: The Manufacturing Threat

China may have become more open to foreign relations and active member in the global community, however, its trajectory in the post-Mao era only continued to differentiate it from the west. The 1980s was the beginning of a global shift in economic relations and structures in the image of neoliberal capitalist models which promoted the shrinking of state power, the primacy of the free market, the privatization of public goods and industries, the lifting of trade barriers and general market liberalization. The fall of the Soviet Union (1991) and multiple financial crises of the 1980s and 1990s, led to many countries seeking emergency funds and support. However, the multilateral institutions that provided a lot of these funds such as the International Monetary Fund would only provide support with the conditionalities of required neoliberal economic and governance reforms. Therefore, from the perspective of these multilateral

institutions and the proponents of these economic reforms, proper economic development and success was also dependent on the support of liberal democracy.

During the same period, China was also going through drastic economic reforms beginning with the 1978 Reform and Opening Up under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. The CPC dismantled the collective work groups and farming communes of the Mao-era and allowed for semi-privatization of some industries to promote rapid industrialization and urbanization (Crane et al. 2018). This was particularly true in regions deemed, Special Economic Zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Xiamen, which were specially designated zones where free market access and foreign investment were allowed to enter and gave incentives such as low tariffs (Bach 2010; Crane et al. 2018). The rapid development of these cities led to China quickly increasing its manufacturing and production power and becoming the “factory of the world”. While China was seemingly embracing at least some of the principles of liberal market reforms, it was not changing its governance model and continued to operate under single party authoritarian rule. Yet, it became a manufacturing powerhouse and the relaxation of trade restrictions in other countries were ripe new markets for Chinese made goods especially after its admittance to the World Trade Organization in 2001 (C. Chen 2009). Therefore, China was once again not following the western norms of economic development even after embracing at least some of the economic norms in ways that would have been impossible under Mao-era China. This has led to unique framings of China’s otherness that correlate to its rise as an economic power despite not following neoliberal economic norms.

The explanations of China’s success despite not following the western norms was intertwined with the old tropes of China being uncivilized and anti-western depicting a new kind of yellow peril, but instead of being the image of a Qing-era Boxer rebel, it was now the ubiquity

of items “made in China” (Obadia 2009). Importantly, these goods, while providing low-cost items for consumers in western countries, also represented the loss of manufacturing jobs across the globe and therefore were framed as a threat to the livelihoods to these citizens (Cornejo, Haro Navejas, and León-Manríquez 2013; Jenkins and de Freitas Barbosa 2012). Additionally, it was not just that these items were replacing western-made items or disrupting production chains, but also the concern that Chinese made goods were of inferior quality and potentially counterfeit (Cheung 2009; Han and Wang 2012; Pang 2008). Accusations of Chinese manufacturing counterfeit goods framed Chinese production as uniquely different than western production because it was not following the legal norms of production and therefore their items were more illicit than similarly made goods in other places. This aspect of China’s development was especially concerning for many non-western countries which had undergone the neoliberal economic reforms which made many of them rely on manufacturing and exporting to western markets that China was now outcompeting them in (Watkins 2013; Jenkins 2015; Jenkins and de Freitas Barbosa 2012; Jenkins 2018).

The imagery of an overwhelming wave of counterfeit and cheaply made Chinese goods came to symbolize racialized and orientalist tropes of “Chinese invasions” and another type of “yellow peril” that once again negatively impacted the public image of Chinese diaspora communities abroad. Chinese individuals were going out and seeking new markets and would leverage their connections to mainland China factories to set up small import businesses across the globe in diverse cities such as Sydney, Lima, Panama City, Mexico City, and Lagos or more disparate markets such as the Andes mountains (Müller 2018; S. Liu 2019; Lausent-Herrera 2011; Ødegaard 2017; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2018; Ang 2016; Sylvanus 2013; Hearn 2016; Siu 2005). In some areas this led to discourse of the “Chinese devils” overtaking local markets

(Sylvanus 2013), the raiding of Chinatowns and targeted policies to reduce these activities (Hearn 2016; S. Liu 2019), and conflicts between different groups within the Chinese diaspora in these locations (Lausent-Herrera 2011; Siu 2005).

Eventually, China's domestic development became an environmental and capacity problem for the country, and they began seeking resources abroad to fuel this development and looking to offshore some of these industries due to the toll they were taking on the environment and society. To deal with this President Jiang Zemin introduced the Going Out Policy in 1999 which was a continuation of the privatization of China's industries (Z. Zhu 2010). This policy encouraged Chinese entrepreneurs and businesses to look for opportunities to move to foreign markets, offshore its production, and create opportunities for production further along the commodity chain to avoid the stagnation of China's manufacturing sector (Brautigam 2009). In doing so, China began leveraging of its infrastructure expertise and cash reserves to support "resource for infrastructure deals" in which China would provide and supervise large infrastructure projects or extended loans in exchange for privileged access to resources (Alves 2013). However, in the west these kinds of deals were seen as a way for China to export the environmental degradation that came with the rapid development and as a hungry resource grab that was looking to unfairly gain access to these resources as a "voracious dragon" (Marton and Matura 2011; Carreras 2017). Additionally, since these deals were seen as underhanded and also did not require the conditionalities of western aid and loan packages, it was seen as subverting western norms of aid and labeled as a "rogue donor" (Brautigam 2009). China was now exporting its subversive development model abroad, which transformed it from a curious oriental or communist threat to an antagonist of western norms. The discourse about China's threat was now also concerned with China's economic and political influence.

China: Reframing Orientalism and the Communist Threat

In past eras, Chinese officials proudly highlighted China's difference from the west to foment domestic support and strengthen ties with ideologically aligned countries with little care for the broader foreign publics of unaligned countries. However, in a 2007 address to the 17th Congress of the Communist Party of China, Hu Jintao stated that a new priority for China should be to foment more positive public opinion of China abroad with the logic being that better public perception of China will aid in the establishment of economic and political deals and projects (Kurlantzick 2007). As China increased its global engagement, it recognized that these negative narratives were sowing distrust of its projects and activities abroad.

The first part of this formula was the need to destigmatize the “oriental other” image of China abroad and did this through government led initiatives to promote Chinese culture in a positive light such as the proliferation of Confucius Institutes which are cultural and educational centers that operate at universities and colleges abroad (Hubbert 2019). The CPC particularly played up the “exotic” nature of Chinese culture to attract interest, as this has always been a point of interest for western audiences. However, these campaigns needed to assuage fears of Chinese culture being a threat because of its difference from western culture. Therefore, the CPC actively promoted cultural icons such as Confucius and region-specific fauna such as the giant pandas to provide new images to associate with China's “exoticness” (Hubbert 2019; Songster 2018). The choice of Confucius was very pointed because with his imagery China could begin framing their difference in cultural values as stemming from these ancient teachings, even though a mere 40 years earlier the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) aimed to destroy the “four olds”, which included Confucian teaching and customs (Hubbert 2019). In doing this, Chinese officials draws a line from “ancient” Chinese empires and culture straight to modern day China

and conveniently obfuscates the major changes and divergences from this past during the 20th century and especially under the China's communist government.

These campaigns also leveraged overseas Chinese communities in cities and countries with which it is looking to forge relations. While in the previous centuries, Chinatowns had developed as ethnic enclaves in many countries abroad that were meant to maintain segregated Asian communities, China has used these overseas locations which are already associated with Chinese people and China to reframe the “otherness” of China as something to admire rather than fear. In some cases, the aesthetic of Chinese architecture are played up and ornate Chinese gates have been donated to existing and manufactured Chinatowns across the globe to signify the “otherness” of China but also its beauty and intrigue (Anderson 2017). This clearly marks these spaces as “Chinese” in these cities but also invokes other stereotypes and popular understandings of what ancient Chinese culture entails such as the idealized virtues of Confucianism that of which many westerners only have a surface level understanding (McDonogh 2013). However, this means that the symbolism of China's otherness is much more centered on its cultural and historical differences instead of the political ones, and the color red which is often associated with Communism in modern times transformed into a culturally important color.

This is however only one part of the negative “othering” of China especially in the wake of all the “made in China” goods becoming symbolic of its disruptive economic rise for everyday consumers. This is a bit trickier of an image to spin. As China's actual manufacturing sector began to shift the industries it worked in to higher-technology parts and goods, the spokespeople of China framed this productive power as an engine for technological innovation. The Chinese state incorporated this reframing into the rebranding of China's “oriental other” image particularly well during the 2008 Summer Olympics which was a turning point in the promotion

of China's image both domestically and for foreign audiences. During these ceremonies, the Chinese state was able to take all the narratives on China's otherness and present them as a pastiche of what makes China not just unique but also a country to be admired. The goals of China's branding for the Olympics were to portray a revitalized and modern China that had both economic and political power and strengths that stemmed from its unique history and which celebrated a perceived "peaceful rise of China" (Zeng, Go, and Kolmer 2011; Ono and Yang Jiao 2008; C.C. Chen, Colapinto, and Luo 2012; Berkowitz et al. 2007). There were multiple overt symbols of China's ancient civilization realized or rendered using impressive technology such as images of ancient Chinese ceramics and artefacts being projected onto an LED scroll, meant to signify its contribution of the invention of paper (C.C. Chen, Colapinto, and Luo 2012).

China continues to promote these framings of China's otherness in its public campaigns by incorporating this messaging into the national branding efforts. However, the framing of China as a threat to the west has also become more entrenched, especially in US political discourse. By the presidency of Barack Obama (2008-2016) there was a recognition of China's economic power and influence in Asia and thus there was a "turn towards Asia" campaign which looked to cooperate with China in the region while also offsetting its influence by engaging more with other Asian countries as well. However, the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States, who won on a populist right-wing platform in 2016, has only reinvigorated the tying of orientalist and racist discourses about China and Chinese people to China's geopolitical and economic activities both in the US and abroad. As Winkler and Jerdén (2023) point out, there has been a discursive turn in US politics. Due to a confluence of other available foreign policy talking points in the US and the populist presidency of Donald Trump, a small group of foreign policy pundits that have wanted to "get tough on China" have taken the opportunity to frame

China as the main ideological threat to the US that is reminiscent of the Cold War depictions of the Soviet Union (Winkler and Jerdén 2023). This therefore has allowed for the discursive space in which politicians can frame China as a “real threat” to the west in ways that it was not during the Cold War and has also created an opening for the past discourses on China being a “yellow peril” and a “communist threat” to become naturalized in foreign policy discussions on China.

Policies of the Trump administration embraced this turn to getting “tough” on China and has continued into the presidency of Joseph Biden (2020-present). The fervor around combatting China’s economic power and unfair business practices came to a head in 2018 when a trade war erupted between the nations with the US placing increased tariffs and other barriers to entice China to change its trade practices and deal with intellectual property theft problems (Z. Chen and Zhang 2020). Chinese multinational corporations have also come under increased scrutiny in the west such as Huawei and Alibaba. These corporations have gone abroad to expand their consumer markets and reach and have been met with wariness and caution, particularly in the west, due to the assumption that they were just carrying out the will of the Chinese state. In fact, Huawei, is banned from the telecom networks of multiple world powers such as the United States, Australia, Japan, and Canada with concerns that the tech could be used to spy on the government and citizens of these countries (Edney, Rosen, and Zhu 2020). Distrust of Chinese technology and Chinese companies has created a techno-orientalist discourse in which the very products and technology are encoded as posing the same kind of existential threat to the west which blend very real security concerns with orientalist imagery of the “yellow peril” making them one and the same (Siu and Chun 2020).

Also, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in Wuhan, China only continued to reinvigorate past orientalist and racist discourse about China and Chinese people. The still

ongoing COVID-19 pandemic quickly spread across the globe and led to the death of millions of people worldwide. The mysterious origins of the disease and long-worn western narratives of China's exotic foods and unhygienic practices were revitalized in reports of the "Chinese Virus" emerging in a seafood market that had butchered animals ready to eat (Zhang 2021). Claiming the "Chineseness" of this virus was a common refrain of western politicians with Donald Trump calling it the "Kung Flu" at a rally in June 2020 (Donald Trump Calls Covid-19 'kung flu' at Tulsa Rally 2020). Other conspiracy theories fed into tropes of anti-communist rhetoric, claiming that the virus was intentionally leaked from a lab in Wuhan as a bioweapon in an effort to upend the world economy and give China the edge (Calisher et al. 2020).

The combatting of the discourse on China's otherness has taken a new turn in the era of Xi Jinping with the introduction of the idea of the "China Dream" which calls for the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by combining traditional Chinese values and socialist modernity (Callahan 2015). This narrative turns to China's history, but instead of pulling softer sounding platitudes and using them to invoke ancient Chinese culture, it instead looks to imperial Chinese discourse on centering a civilized China and portraying outsiders as barbarians (Callahan 2015).

This sharper image of China and one which defines China as what it is not (such as the west) was much more apparent in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. It occurred two years into an ongoing pandemic which led to much stricter regulations, smaller and no audiences depending on venue, and increased danger to the athletes (Boykoff 2022). The rebrand of China's orientalist image was bombastic and shocking in 2008 but by 2022 foreign powers and publics viewed China as not a rising power but rather a real threat to the western-led world order. Multiple major countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, India, and the United Kingdom all

declined to attend specifically due to concerns over China's human rights issues. The messaging was not the same soft image of a peaceful rising power of 2008 but a sharper message of China's success and primacy of the Beijing model of economic development and governance (Cabula and Pochettino 2023).

Combatting orientalist narratives on China is only one piece of the reframing of China for foreign audiences. The shift to framing China in juxtaposition to the west as a strength is also only possible due to the curation of the other two narrative threads of China's natural alignment with the global south and following its own path. China's identity of being always in juxtaposition to the west and western norms supports the legitimacy of these claims that ultimately make up its brand on the global stage.

Tenet 2: China is a Part of the Global South

While the differentiation of China is important for its brand, its solidarity with countries of the global south is a complimentary narrative thread that allows the CPC to reframe this "otherness" as automatic and natural alignment with non-western countries. In the white paper, "China's Development Cooperation in a New Era" (2021), it states, "China's development cooperation is a form of mutual assistance between developing countries" and continues by stating, "It falls into the category of South-South cooperation and therefore is essentially different from North-South cooperation" (The People's Republic of China 2021). From this premise, China is then able to claim that even though it is a world power, it will not treat other countries in the same patronizing manner as other world powers. Instead, China will treat other countries as development peers. To legitimize China's position as a global south country, spokespersons of China use a particular narrative arc of China's continued exploitation by western powers, its continued opposition to this unjust incursion and its eventual triumph that

was only possible due to its continued solidarity with fellow exploited countries. To support this story, Chinese officials have adopted and continue to use specific terminology such as “south-south” and “mutual benefit” that have their roots in specific historical moments in global south solidarity movements which legitimize China’s claim that it has always and still is aligned with the priorities of the global south, regardless of its newfound world power status.

China: A Communist Country in Solidarity with the Global South

This image of China’s solidarity with the global south begins with China’s own narrative about the “century of humiliation” which is a shorthand for the series of disasters of the 19th century such as the multiple military defeats, natural disasters, loss of land and loss of hegemonic power in the region. The imagery of Chinese humiliation by foreign powers is a foundational narrative for the CPC. A mere two weeks before the declaration of the founding of the People’s Republic of China on September 21, 1949 Mao Zedong gave an opening speech to the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in which he framed the CPC’s victory as the remedy to this century of humiliation based in its leadership of the Chinese people as a “nation-wide united front against imperialism, feudalism, bureaucrat-capitalism and their general representative, the reactionary Kuomintang government...” (Mao, Leung, and Kau 1986a). He then ties this domestic victory to China’s position in the world by stating, “Our revolution has won the sympathy and acclaim of the people of all countries. We have friends all over the world” (Mao, Leung, and Kau 1986a). These “friends” therefore were fellow countries and people that also held the same anti-imperialist and socialist ideologies. By 1954, China set up its Office of Foreign Affairs and launched its own outreach to countries which aligned with its communist vision (Barnouin and Yu 1998). The little aid that China did provide was to fellow socialist countries such as North Korea in 1950 (Mawdsley 2012).

At the same time, the western powers post-World War II had set up international aid and cooperation institutions such as United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. These institutions framed the global south as underdeveloped and under the threat of communism and the western countries as the arbiters of proper development and source of the financing needed to achieve these goals. Leaders of countries of the global south recognized the precarious position that they inhabited in this new world paradigm of bipolar Cold War logics. Therefore, beginning with the 1955 Bandung Conference, 29 Asian and African countries met in Indonesia to discuss their roles as “third world” countries amid the Cold War with direct concerns of maintaining peace, decolonialization and economic development. The countries signed a communique that outlined the priorities of these countries which emphasized political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty (which included peaceful co-existence and non-interference in internal affairs), and equality between nations (Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference (1955) 2009). The Non-Aligned Movement expanded on the tenets of the Bandung Conference in 1961 which called on members to “resist subordination to Cold War politics and ideologies”, the “need for a more just, multilateral world system”, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and the encouragement of South-South trade and cooperation (Mawdsley 2012, 61). China gained an observer status in this group and the key terminology and framing of China’s positionality in the world stems from these meetings such as viewing a divide between “South” and “North” countries, mutual cooperation, non-interference, and the importance of sovereignty.

Using the framing of world geopolitics set forth in the non-Aligned movement, China positioned itself as a fellow country of the global south that shared a history with these countries of colonial and imperial exploitation. While a western power never fully colonized the entirety of

China like most of the countries that were signatories to the Non-Aligned movement, using the century of humiliation narrative of its past allowed it to highlight its similarities in experience to these countries rather than differences. The Chinese foreign diplomacy discourse at the time reinforced this peer-to-peer relationship and solidarity by using terms of brotherhood, friends, and comrades (Mawdsley 2012; Xing 2017). It was ultimately through these cultivated relationships with countries of the global south that in 1971 the People's Republic of China gained recognition in the United Nations, replacing the Republic of China. Countries such as Tanzania that received aid and support under the Mao approach to foreign diplomacy were the deciding vote of this change (Brautigam 2009).

China: Reframing South-South Solidarity as Respecting Sovereignty and Mutual Cooperation

The recognition of China in the United Nations in 1971 was a turning point in the narrative of China's positionality as a member of the global south. It continued to use the keywords of the non-aligned movement, but the ideals of mutual cooperation, non-interference, and sovereignty meant different things to the Chinese leaders by this point. They interwove these ideals into more explicit and hardline foreign policies such as the One China Policy which requires that countries looking to establish diplomatic relations with China do not diplomatically recognize Taiwan as well.

The idea of sovereignty was now extending to the claim of China that it has the right to rectify past violations of its sovereignty such as reclaiming Macau and Hong Kong. This logic played out during Margaret Thatcher's 1982 visit to Beijing, during which Deng Xiaoping rebuked her claims that Hong Kong should remain under British control citing the importance of reclaiming China's sovereignty and rectifying past unjust treaties (Mark 2017). China regained control of Hong Kong in 1997. The notion of sovereignty also includes the concept of non-

interference, which states that no nation should interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries. So, in its relations with fellow global south countries, China requires not only the recognition of the “One China” but also will rebuke any attempts to dictate what China does domestically (Mawdsley 2012; Brautigam 2009). In the South-South framing of international relations, a key point of contrast from South-North relations was this respect for sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs.

China’s approach to mutual cooperation also shifted as its economic and development needs shifted, especially during the 1978 Reform and Opening up. During this time, south-south solidarity turned from being a form of socialist solidarity, to forms of cooperation that Chinese officials framed as “mutually beneficial” deals that aided in the development of both countries. The resource for infrastructure deals mentioned earlier were a key form of this extension of mutual cooperation activity. Importantly, the first of these types of projects were done with countries that China already had built diplomatic and economic relations, especially those in Africa which were looking for new investments and infrastructure development, and China framed these relations as continuing its commitment to friendship and south-south solidarity (Brautigam 2009; Mawdsley 2012; Jiang 2009; Alves 2013).

Additionally, as discussed above, the loans extended in these instances also did not require the same conditionalities on specific economic or governance reforms of western neoliberal restructuring loans (Mawdsley 2012; Z. Zhu 2010). This lack of conditionalities was appealing to countries who were also looking for increased investment and infrastructure development but which did not have as strong of existing relations with China, such as those in Latin America and the Caribbean (Strauss and Armony 2012). Chinese officials cast these deals as a kind of China-specific aid which continued its legacy of south-south solidarity and non-

interference because they presumably provided win-win or mutually beneficial outcomes, wherein China and the partner country both got something meaningful from the deal and it did not require the strict oversight that China portrayed as violating a countries' sovereignty. Thus, these deals as envisioned by the Chinese officials were not exploitative of presumed weaker countries, but rather a viable alternative to western deals that were also more respectful of these countries and coming from a peer relationship rather than as a hegemonic power trying to enforce its will and worldview on other countries' sovereign governments. However, there were some conditionalities based in the One China Policy and the commitment to non-interference in domestic affairs. Therefore, in providing these deals and loans China was also able to enforce its preferred geopolitical relations and persuade countries to switch diplomatic recognition with the promise of alternative and beneficial cooperation relations.

China: The World's Largest Developing Country

The 2021 white paper preface begins with the statement, "China is the largest developing country in the world" and continues by exalting the commitment of China to supporting fellow developing countries, even when it was "short on funds". After a quick synopsis of China's rise from poverty to a world power under the leadership of the CPC, the white paper claims that due to the new global situation and China's new status in the world, "China has been upgrading its foreign assistance to a model of international development cooperation, taking on new initiatives and achieving greater results in this new era" (The People's Republic of China 2021).

In this framing of China's role as a global south country, it is now taking a leadership role that once was the purview of solely western powers. Importantly, China holds power in many of the long-standing international forums such as a seat on the United Nations Security Council and has wielded its influence here to lobby for its own geopolitical priorities using the discourse of

being the voice of the “third world” or the “global south” (Worden 1983; Z. Zhu 2010; Zhengyu and Taylor 2011). With this power however China was also able to extend its definitions of “sovereignty” and “non-interference” even further and now can be seen in its discourse on the South China Sea claims and in its fierce rebuke of any condemnation of the extreme crackdown on ethnic minority groups and autonomous regions such as Tibet and the Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province (Mochtak and Turcsanyi 2021; Davidson 2022).

China has also taken even bigger leadership by helping to form alternative multilateral organizations such as the creation of the BRICS Forum which began with Brazil, Russia, India, and China meeting at the first summit in 2009 and admitting South Africa in 2010 (Mawdsley 2012).² China has also begun to form its own financing institutions such as the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China. Despite this positioning of China as a new purveyor of international norms and global financing paradigms, Chinese diplomats and spokespeople continue to frame these activities as the continued privileging of south-south relations over hegemonic interests and still deems itself as a “developing country”.

Importantly, by labeling itself as a “developing country” China is pointing to its shared history with the global south and oppression by western powers rather than its level of development or economic prosperity in relation to the west. This is a different axis of differentiation, in which China aligns itself with the oppressed instead of the oppressors despite its economic and geopolitical power. In other words, China cannot be a “developed” country because that would imply it has “switched sides” of this dichotomy between the developed west, who it frames as perpetuating unfair and unequal practices. For the discourse of China’s new era of cooperation to make sense, it needs to maintain its image as a non-threatening partner rather

² BRICS is an acronym created from the first letter of each participant country’s name.

than another dangerous and exploitative world power. In using this framing, China can obscure the power imbalances between it and the countries it is engaging in while naturalizing its position as a representative or leader of the global south. Its economic and geopolitical power is therefore an aid for the global south and a threat for the global north.

The COVID-19 pandemic response in China was a clear example of this new type of development cooperation and an opportunity for China to present this image of China to the rest of the world. First, Chinese officials framed the emergence of the virus in China as having a silver lining that China's existing expertise could be used to contain the virus and since China was already committed to promoting international cooperation it would generously share their learned experiences with the rest of the world and provide the vaccine as a "global public good" (Ju, Sannusi, and Mohamad 2023). Second, in 2020, China had one of the only economies in the world to have positive economic growth and Chinese officials used this as proof of the superiority of China's model of domestic economic development and therefore this gave China the legitimacy to share its expertise with other countries on their own development (Cheng ; Q. Zhu 2020). Third, China advertised its mass provision of aid to countries around the globe which included supplies, knowledge sharing sessions, trainings, and medical professionals. This allowed China to demonstrate how its unique approach to international cooperation could function in a crisis to aid countries that other world powers may overlook.

Tenet 3: China has Followed its own Path

The first two tenets of China's brand define its identity as juxtaposed to the west and aligned with the global south, while also being a leader of the global south. These narratives serve to position and define China in relation to other countries. The third tenet of China's brand is that it has followed its own unique path; instead of telling audiences what China is in relation

to other countries, it tells audiences how China got there. This narrative is the final cornerstone of China's brand because it presents the story of China's rapid economic and social changes as part of a logical series of decisions made by the Chinese state that elevated China to its current position. Throughout this story, the CPC maintains its legitimacy and frames themselves as not just competent leaders but as being the only institution able to bring about this miraculous transformation. While the other two tenets build off the frameworks of the world shaped by western ideologies, this narrative of China's unique path is a way of combatting and transforming these narratives to allow for the reframing of China's difference as a strength rather than a weakness.

China's Path: Realizing Maoist Communism

The beginning of China's "unique path" narrative in its modern articulation stems from the rhetoric of Mao during the founding of the People's Republic of China. On October 10, 1949, Mao Zedong laid out the reasons why the CPC was the rightful leaders for China by stating: "The people throughout China have been plunged into bitter suffering and tribulations since the Chiang Kai-Shek Kuomintang reactionary government betrayed the fatherland, colluded with imperialists, and launched the counter-revolutionary war" (Mao, Leung, and Kau 1986b). He enumerated the specific betrayals of the CNP and therefore situates the CPC as anti-imperialist and therefore anti-western capitalist. In this speech, he establishes the heroes and villains of the People's Republic of China's founding and adds legitimacy to the CPC's leadership.

As part of this legitimate leadership, Mao therefore provided a unique version of communism to suit the Chinese situation that privileged agricultural over industrial development (Xing 2017). Under this vision he enacted widespread economic and societal reforms such as the Great Leap Forward (1958) that formed farming collectives across the country. These rapid

changes greatly disrupted agricultural production and economy which coupled with a series of natural disasters led to the Great Famine (1959-1962). This commitment to a specific Chinese communism that was “pure” eventually led to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that continued until Mao’s death. This movement was based around the idea of “destroying the four olds” (old customs, culture habits and ideas) as a way to retain the purity of the communist movement of China and prevent further infiltration and manipulation by the bourgeoisie (Xing 2017). This led to the mass destruction of cultural artifacts and the murder and incarceration of government officials, religious practitioners, intellectuals, teachers and doctors and the ultimate shift of political power to Mao and his more radical faction (Albers 2016). In this era, following “China’s unique path” was synonymous with realizing Mao’s communist visions through the rejection of any western or “old” Chinese ways, despite the disastrous outcome for the Chinese populace.

However, because China was so isolated at this time, and it had in fact got rid of the imperialist influence in the country, dismantled the systems of the Qing dynasty and realized the major reforms of creating farming and industrial communes based in ideals of Mao’s communism, it legitimized the success and expertise of the CPC. These reforms, especially the Cultural Revolution were only possible because the population, especially the youth, had bought into Mao’s vision of communism and were able to be mobilized to enact these changes (Xing 2017).

Mao Zedong and his own ideals, codified in Mao’s Little Red Book and deemed Mao Zedong Thought, were the primary factor in shaping these enormous economic, social, and cultural changes. The CPC therefore framed the development of China into a true communist state using specific Chinese terms and references that did not talk to a universal communism, but

rather a Chinese specific one. For example, in reference to the ideals of agricultural and industrial development there is the Chinese idiom, “In industry, learn from Daqing; in agriculture, learn from Dazhai” which references a specific oil field and farming commune that Mao promoted as the ideal forms of industrial and agricultural reform under his vision of communism (Brautigam 2009). Therefore, China’s uniqueness is an essential part of the legitimacy of the CPC and the cultural and social references for entire generations of the population.

China’s Path: Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Peaceful Rise

Mao Zedong and the Premier of China Zhou Enlai both passed away in 1976, but in Zhou’s last public appearance in 1975 he presented a government report in which he called for economic reforms in agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. This speech became the basis for the Four Modernizations, the ideals from which the massive overhaul of China’s economy stemmed. The main proponent of these changes was Deng Xiaoping, who was the paramount leader of China after Mao’s death after overthrowing the more radical faction of the CCP (Albers 2016). This change in economic development policy came to be known as “Opening Up and Reform” and began with the implementation of market-oriented reforms to its state-controlled, central-planning run economy.

New leaders such as Deng Xiaoping went to great lengths to frame the changes of Opening Up and Reform as the next step in China’s development so to not retroactively de-legitimize the founding of the People’s Republic of China or Mao’s leadership, even though it did embrace some reforms that were more aligned with free-market reforms and did not completely reject working with western powers. From this need, Deng Xiaoping coined terms such as Socialism with Chinese characteristics. Deng used this term for the first time in his 1982

Opening Speech at the Twelfth National Congress of the CCP. He first validates the economic and ideological choices of Mao in past eras, but then states: “We must integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete realities of China, blaze a path of our own and build a socialism with Chinese characteristics -- that is the basic conclusion we have reached after reviewing our long history.” (Deng 1982) In essence, the CPC’s turn to embracing the market economy in certain aspects is not a complete rejection of socialism, but rather the CPC forging a unique, China-specific path of development that still retains the commitment to realize a socialist society.

However, this transformation away from Mao-era communist visions left an opening for what made this a specific “Chinese” approach to socialism besides it maintaining some of the aspects of authoritarian communism while opening to some market forces. Since Mao-era communism would have never allowed for these types of reforms or renewed international relations that also became possible, Chinese leadership needed another marker to use to label this as “Chinese”. This is where the revitalization of many of the cultural icons of China comes in, most importantly the iconography and writings of Confucius; the Confucius Foundation of China was founded in 1984 (Hubbert 2019). While the tenets of Mao Zedong Thought would categorize Confucius as one of the four “olds”, he was now a cultural anchor that allowed spokespeople of China to retain a “Chinese essence” of its economic and foreign policy discourse. The integration of Confucian ideals into the modern-day imagery of China became clear in terms such as “peaceful rise” of China and its commitment to “harmony” (Cabula and Pochettino 2023; Sun 2023). This promotion of a “softer” image of China leveraged the perception of Chinese ancient culture as being an essentialized characteristic of anything “Chinese” and therefore naturalized the geopolitical motives of the Chinese state as a logical

extension of this ethos (Klime 2018). This framing also legitimized China's role as a world power, by calling back to ancient cultural tenets, Chinese officials also invoked the image of an ancient imperial China that had maintained peaceful control over the region for centuries and thus it was only natural for it to continue this legacy (Cabula and Pochettino 2023).

China's Path: The China Dream and the Belt and Road Initiative

In 2013, Xi Jinping became the leader of China, and he introduced the ideal of China's dream and framed it as the next logical step in China's destined path. This discourse revitalized the same nationalist fervor of past generations and focuses more on China's destiny which was tied to its Confucian legacy that subsumes its goals for socialist modernization under this broader narrative arc (Lams 2018; Klime 2018). Importantly, the shift from Mao-era communist ideals to socialism with Chinese characteristics required the focus to be on justifying the continued highlighting of China's commitment to communism despite the reforms.

However, by 2013, China had already successfully realized these reforms and had gained enough geopolitical and economic power to no longer be so subdued and passive in its discourse about China's path. Therefore, Xi's discourse of the Chinese dream was able to recall the staunch anti-western and anti-Japanese discourse of the Xinhai Revolution and reformulate it for modern China (Callahan 2015). China is no longer passively following its own path, but rather is forcefully promoting this vision domestically and abroad.

Internationally, Xi Jinping's China has increased its economic and geopolitical clout and greatly increased its diplomatic outreach to other countries especially under the banner of the BRI (Brown 2020; Sidaway and Woon 2017). The BRI is a multinational mega-infrastructure project that promotes a new era of interconnectedness through infrastructure led by China. Through this project Xi can promote the ideals of creating a global "moderately prosperous

society” and promoting a Chinese model of development that is an alternative to western norms that have left behind countries of the global south.

This is the current evolution of China’s brand that brings together the three tenets of China’s brand. It is the culmination of China’s vision as an alternative kind of leader on the world stage, one which provides the infrastructure and leadership that is different than the west, prioritizes the global south and is distinctly Chinese in its ethos. The BRI is a fully China-led initiative and platform that privileges the involvement of countries of the global south. China claims that it is one step to “building a the building of a Community of Common Destiny” which encapsulates China’s vision for global governance that privileges the values of non-interference and tolerance for different cultural values among different countries of the world (Kallio 2023).

The imagery of the BRI also pulls heavily from the imagery of China’s orientalist global image and harkens back to its key role as an ancient world power by referring to the Silk Road. In May 2017, China hosted a Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation which attracted 29 heads of state, 130 countries and 70 international organizations. In the opening speech for the event, Xi laid out the ethos behind the imagery of the BRI and invoked the ancient past to give legitimacy to China’s current vision on international relations, he states:

“First, we should build the Belt and Road into a road for peace. The ancient silk routes thrived in times of peace, but lost vigor in times of war. The pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative requires a peaceful and stable environment. We should foster a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation; and we should forge partnerships of dialogue with no confrontation and of friendship rather than alliance. All countries should respect each other's sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity, each other's development paths and social systems, and each other's core interests and major concerns.” (XinhuaNet 2017)

Xi frames the platform of the BRI as the unique Chinese approach to international cooperation that is based in China’s ancient past and a commitment to being a leader in promoting peaceful development for the future.

Additionally, the BRI offers a singular platform and therefore signpost to promote China's brand of international cooperation that encompasses the tenets of China's foreign relations brand that the CPC has developed over the previous 50 years. In this quote alone, Xi mentions key phrases such as "win-win cooperation", "respect each other's sovereignty", "non-confrontation", and respect of unique "development paths and social systems". In this way, the CPC lauds the BRI as the realization of China's promises for a different approach to international cooperation that it has been working towards for since the founding of the country. The introduction of the BRI and shift to a centralized platform for international cooperation represents the solidification of China's role as a global leader and economic giant that not only has other opportunities to offer countries, but which can steer international development agendas and has its own set of international norms to follow.

China hosted a second forum only two years later in 2019 and by January 2021 the CPC published a white paper titled, *China's International Development Cooperation in a New Era* and it described the BRI as thus:

"The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road are significant public goods China offers to the whole world and a major platform for international development cooperation. China has joined hands with other countries to promote policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity, to build the Belt and Road into a path towards peace, prosperity, opening up, innovation, green development, cultural exchanges, and clean government." (The People's Republic of China 2021)

At this point, the BRI has become a fully formed platform from which China can offer its unique development vision to the rest of the world. China frames the BRI as the ultimate collaborative effort that is just the culmination of the key principles that have shaped its foreign policy for decades; ones that promote cooperation rather than imposing one countries' point of view and which comes with a motivation of promoting peace rather than conflict. Since China has already established these tenets as its foundation for international relations it is able to elaborate further

on the priorities of this engagement with updated terms such as “green development”, “clean government” and “innovation”. The addition of the adjectives of “green” and “clean” indicate that there are instances in which development is not green and the governments are not clean, further playing up the unique nature of cooperation with China and the positive outcomes one would get from these interactions.

The establishment of the BRI as the nexus for China’s international cooperation has created even more opportunities for China to not just promote its brand abroad at various forums and meetings but also disseminate the messaging through BRI-backed initiatives. At first, the BRI focused on funding for mega-infrastructure projects, but now it encapsulates a slew of different types of international engagement, including training and exchange programs and new types of infrastructure initiatives such as the Digital Silk Road and the Health Belt and Road (Benabdallah 2019; L. Liu, Huang, and Jin 2022; Vadell 2022). Through this diversification of initiatives, the Chinese spokespeople can use the imagery of the Belt and Road to invoke more than just the international mega-infrastructure project and instead allows them to use it to promote China’s vision of the world and global governance of multiple different areas of international cooperation.

Conclusion

It is through the platform of the BRI that China can cohesively disseminate its brand that incorporates multiple narrative threads that serve to differentiate, elevate, and legitimize China’s story about itself and its vision for the world. In the promotion of the BRI, Chinese officials frame China as a new kind of world power because it has the economic and geopolitical power to be able to successfully support this type of multinational cooperation platform. It is also asserting its power by promoting its own sets of values as the driving force behind this global initiative

and highlighting its expertise and leader on these topics. Second, it has maintained the keywords and phrases that tie its values to supporting the global south over conceding to western norms and frames its isolation and resistance of following western norms as a necessary condition that allowed China to have developed its own unique approach to development. Since this development has been successful, China is now able to promote this as proof of how China not following the norms of western countries and western-backed institutions was beneficial and therefore the BRI will be beneficial for other countries as well. Finally, it uses the revitalization of Chinese cultural imagery and orientalist images of China to naturalize and legitimize its alterity as its destined path towards development and prominence. Therefore, China's ability to offer alternatives to western development models and international relations is less about its competition or tension with the west and more due to it honoring its unique context which it will also offer to other countries wishing to follow their own path.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albers, Martin. 2016. *Britain, France, West Germany and the People's Republic of China, 1969-1982 : The European Dimension of China's Great Transition. Security, conflict and cooperation in the contemporary world*: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alves, Ana Cristina. 2013. "China's 'Win-Win' Cooperation: Unpacking The Impact Of Infrastructure-For-Resources Deals In Africa." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 20 (2): 207-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2013.811337>.
- Anderson, Kay J. 2017. "Chinatown Dis-Oriented: Shifting Standpoints in the Age of China." *Australian Geographer*: 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2017.1327791>.
- Ang, Ien. 2016. "At home in Asia? Sydney's Chinatown and Australia's 'Asian Century'." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19 (3): 257-269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915573763>.
- Araujo, Ignacio, and Ernesto Bohoslavsky. 2020. "The Circuits of Anti-Communist Repression between Asia and Latin America during the Second Cold War: Paraguay and the World Anti-Communist League." *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe* 31 (1): 105-125. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=b7h&AN=144799910&site=eds-live>.
- Bach, Jonathan. 2010. "'THEY COME IN PEASANTS AND LEAVE CITIZENS': Urban Villages and the Making of Shenzhen, China." *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (3): 421-458. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01066.x>. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01066.x>.
- Barnouin, Barbara, and Changgen Yu. 1998. *Chinese Foreign Policy during the Cultural Revolution*. Kegan Paul International.
- Benabdallah, Lina. 2019. "Contesting the International Order by Integrating it: The Case of China's Belt and Road Initiative." *Third World Quarterly* 40 (1): 92-108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1529539>.
- Berkowitzc, Pere, George Gjermano, Lee Gomez, and Gary Schafer. 2007. "Brand China: Using The 2008 Olympic Games To Enhance China's Image." *Place Branding & Public Diplomacy* 3 (2): 164-178. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000059>.
- Boykoff, Jules. 2022. "Framing the Games: US Media Coverage of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics." *Communication & Sport*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795221122938>.
- Brautigam, Deborah. 2009. *The Dragon's Gift : The Real Story of China in Africa*. Book. Oxford: OUP Oxford.

- Brown, Kerry. 2020. "Chinese Storytelling in the Xi Jinping Era." *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 16 (2-3): 323-333. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-BJA10054>.
- Cabula, Michelle, and Stefano Pochettino. 2023. "Emerging Negative Soft Power: The Evolution of China's Identity in the 2008 and 2022 Beijing Olympics Opening and Closing Ceremonies." *International Spectator* 58 (2): 17-34.
- Calisher, Charles, Dennis Carroll, Rita Colwell, Ronald B. Corley, Peter Daszak, Christian Drosten, Luis Enjuanes, Jeremy Farrar, Hume Field, Josie Golding, Alexander Gorbalenya, Bart Haagmans, James M. Hughes, William B. Karesh, Gerald T. Keusch, Sai Kit Lam, Juan Lubroth, John S. Mackenzie, Larry Madoff, Jonna Mazet, Peter Palese, Stanley Perlman, Leo Poon, Bernard Roizman, Linda Saif, Kanta Subbarao, and Mike Turner. 2020. "Statement in Support of the Scientists, Public Health Professionals, and Medical Professionals of China Combatting Covid-19." *The Lancet* 395 (10226): e42-e43. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30418-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30418-9).
- Callahan, William A. 2015. "Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream." *Politics* 35 (3/4): 216-229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12088>.
- Carney, Zoë Hess, and Allison M. Prasch. 2017. "'A Journey for Peace': Spatial Metaphors in Nixon's 1972 'Opening to China'." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 47 (4): 646-664. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12386>.
- Carreras, Miguel. 2017. "Public Attitudes Toward An Emerging China In Latin America." *Issues and Studies* 53 (1): 1-28. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S10132.51117400045>.
- Chang, Parris H. 1984. "U. S.-China Relations: From Hostility to Euphoria to Realism." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 476: 156-170. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.1043941&site=eds-live>.
- Chen, Chunlai. 2009. "China's Economy after WTO Accession: An Overview." In *China's Integration with the Global Economy: WTO Accession, Foreign Direct Investment and International Trade*, edited by Chunlai Chen, 1-18. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Chen, Chwen Chwen, Cinzia Colapinto, and Qing Luo. 2012. "The 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Visual Insights into China's Soft Power." *Visual Studies* 27 (2): 188-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2012.677252>.
- Chen, Zhimin, and Xueying Zhang. 2020. "Chinese Conception of the World Order in a Turbulent Trump Era." *Pacific Review* 33 (3-4): 438-468. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS939116&site=eds-live>.
- Cheng, Jonathon. "China Is the Only Major Economy to Report Economic Growth for 2020." *The Wall Street Journal*, January 18, 2021. Accessed April 2, 2023.

- <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-is-the-only-major-economy-to-report-economic-growth-for-2020-11610936187>.
- Cheung, Gordon C. K. 2009. "Made in China vs. Made by Chinese: Global Identities of Chinese Business." *Journal of Contemporary China* 18 (58): 1-5.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560802431388>.
- Colloredo-Mansfeld, Rudi. 2018. "The Rise and Fall of Cheap Chinese Goods in Ecuadorian Popular Markets: The Limits of Post-Neoliberal Development in Correa's Ecuador." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 23 (1): 37-55.
<https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/jlca.12289>.
- Cornejo, Romer, Francisco Javier Haro Navejas, and José Luis León-Manríquez. 2013. "Trade Issues and Beyond: Mexican Perceptions on Contemporary China." *Latin American Policy* 4 (1): 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12005>.
- Crane, Bret, Chad Albrecht, Kristopher McKay Duffin, and Conan Albrecht. 2018. "China's Special Economic Zones: An Analysis of Policy to Reduce Regional Disparities." *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 5 (1): 98-107.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2018.1430612>.
- Cushman, Gregory T. 2013. *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*. Cambridge University Press.
- Davidson, Helen. 2022. "China Ready for 'Fight' over International Action on Xinjiang Human Rights Abuses; Threat Comes as UN Member States Meet in Geneva Amid Pressure to Take Action on a Damning Report on Abuse of Uyghurs." *The Guardian*, 09/23/2022, 2022. Accessed April 2, 2023.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsinc&AN=edsinc.A719340404&site=eds-live>.
- Degenhardt, Jane Hwang. 2013. "Cracking the Mysteries of "China": China(ware) in the Early Modern Imagination." *Studies in Philology* 110 (1): 132-167. <https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/stable/24392080>
- Deng, Xiaoping. 1982. "Opening Speech at the Twelfth National Congress of the Communist Party of China." Twelfth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Beijing, China, September 1, 1982.
- Donald Trump Calls Covid-19 'kung flu' at Tulsa Rally. 2020. *The Guardian*. Accessed June 20, 2020.
- Edney, Kingsley; , Stanley; Rosen, and Ying Zhu. 2020. "Introduction." In *Soft power with Chinese characteristics: China's campaign for hearts and minds*, edited by Kingsley; Edney, Stanley; Rosen and Ying Zhu, 1-22. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference (1955), Badung Conference. 2009. "FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE ASIAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE." *Interventions: The*

- International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 11 (1): 94-102.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010902752830>.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=36819439&site=eds-live>.
- Gao, Hao. 2020. *Creating the Opium War : British imperial attitudes towards China, 1792-1840. Studies in imperialism*: Manchester University Press.
- Han, Gang, and Xiuli Wang. 2012. "Understanding "Made in China": Valence Framing and Product-Country Image." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 89 (2): 225-243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699012439034>.
- Hearn, Adrian H. 2016. *Diaspora and Trust: Cuba, Mexico, and the Rise of China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hsiung, James C. 1984. "Reagan's China Policy and the Sino-Soviet Détente." *Asian Affairs* 11 (2): 1-11.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.30171960&site=eds-live>.
- Hubbert, Jennifer A. 2019. *China in the World: An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, and Globalization*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Jenkins, Rhys. 2015. "Is Chinese Competition Causing Deindustrialization in Brazil?" *Latin American Perspectives* 42 (6): 42-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X15593553>.
- . 2018. "China's Economic Impacts on Latin America." In *How China is Reshaping the Global Economy*, 271-303. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, Rhys, and Alecandre de Freitas Barbosa. 2012. "Fear for Manufacturing? China and the future of industry in Brazil and Latin America." In *From the Great Wall to the New World: China and Latin America in the 21st Century*, edited by Julia C.; Armony Strauss, Ariel C., 134-156. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Press.
- Jiang, Wenran. 2009. "Fueling the Dragon: China's Rise and Its Energy and Resources Extraction in Africa." *The China Quarterly* 199: 585-609.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741009990117>.
- Johnson, Kendall. 2012. *Narratives of Free Trade: the Commercial Cultures of Early US-China Relations*. Book. *Global Connections*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Ju, Weilun, Shahrul Nazmi Sannusi, and Emma Mohamad. 2023. "'Public Goods' or 'Diplomatic Tools': A Framing Research on Chinese And American Media Reports Regarding Chinese Covid-19 Vaccine." *Media Asia* 50 (1): 43-81.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2022.2081651>.

- Kallio, Jyrki. 2023. "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Ambiguous Model Veiled in Straightforward Pragmatism." *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 40 (3): 229-242. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09400-0>.
- Klime, Ondrej. 2018. "China's Cultural Soft Power: The Central Concept in Early Xi Jinping Era (2012-2017)." *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Philologica* 2017 (4): 127-150. <https://doi.org/10.14712/24646830.2017.45>.
- Kroshus Medina, Laurie. 1998. "The Impact of Free-Trade Initiatives on the Caribbean Basin: From Democracy to Efficiency in Belize." *Latin American Perspectives* 25 (5): 27-49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x9802500503>.
- Kurlantzick, Joshua. 2007. *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World*. Book. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lams, Lutgard. 2018. "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (3): 387-411. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9529-8>.
- Lausent-Herrera, Isabelle. 2011. "The Chinatown in Peru and the Changing Peruvian Chinese Community(ies)." *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 7 (1): 69-113. <https://doi.org/10.1163/179325411X565416>.
- Lee, Ana Paulina. 2018. *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory*. Book. Stanford University Press.
- Lee, Erika. 2007. "The 'Yellow Peril' and Asian Exclusion in the Americas." *Pacific Historical Review* 76 (4): 537-562. <https://search.ebscohost.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS396984&site=eds-live>.
- . 2010. "The Chinese Are Coming. How Can We Stop Them? Chinese Exclusion and the Origins of American Gatekeeping." *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, edited by Jean Yu-Wen; Chen Shen Wu, Thomas C., 143-167. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press.
- Li, Hua-yu. 2015. "From Revolutionary Party to Ruling Party: The CCP's Adoption of a Soviet Governing Structure in the Early 1950s." *Modern China Studies* 22 (1): 29-44. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=99009366&site=eds-live>.
- Liu, Liangtao, Yongli Huang, and Jiyong Jin. 2022. "China's Vaccine Diplomacy and Its Implications for Global Health Governance." *Healthcare* (2227-9032) 10 (7): 1276-1276. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10071276>.
- Liu, Shaonan. 2019. "China Town in Lagos: Chinese Migration and the Nigerian State Since the 1990s." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 54 (6): 783-799. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619845015>.

- López, Kathleen M. 2013. *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*. Book. University of North Carolina Press.
- Luo, Zhitian. 2017. "The Divided West: The International Storm and the Development of Chinese Thought in the May Fourth Era." In *Shifts of Power Modern Chinese Thought and Society*, In Brill's humanities in China library, 250-274. Boston: Brill.
- Mao, Zedong, John K. Leung, and Michael Y. M. Kau. 1986a. "Opening Speech at the First Plenary Session of the CPPCC." In *The writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976*, edited by John K. Leung and Michael Y. M. Kau, 3-7. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- . 1986b. *The writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976*. Book. M.E. Sharpe.
- Mark, Chi-kwan. 2017. "To 'Educate' Deng Xiaoping in Capitalism: Thatcher's Visit to China and the Future of Hong Kong in 1982." *Cold War History* 17 (2): 161-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2015.1094058>.
- Marton, Péter, and Tamás Matura. 2011. "The 'Voracious Dragon', the 'Scramble' and the 'Honey Pot': Conceptions of Conflict over Africa's Natural Resources." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29 (2): 155-167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2011.555191>.
- Mawdsley, Emma. 2012. *From Recipients to Donors: Emerging Powers and the Changing Development Landscape*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- McDonogh, G. W. 2013. "Chinatowns: Heterotopic Space, Urban Conflict, and Global Meanings." *Quaderns de l'Institut Català d'Antropologia* 18 (2): 96-111. <https://www.raco.cat/index.php/QuadernseICA/article/view/274292>
- Mochtak, Michal, and Richard Q. Turcsanyi. 2021. "Studying Chinese Foreign Policy Narratives: Introducing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Conferences Corpus." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 26 (4): 743-761. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-021-09762-3>.
- Müller, Juliane. 2018. "Andean–Pacific Commerce and Credit: Bolivian Traders, Asian Migrant Businesses, and International Manufacturers in the Regional Economy." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 23 (1): 18-36. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/jlca.12328>.
- Obadia, Lionel. 2009. "'Made in China' - Political and Cultural Valuation of Brand Images, Trade, and Commodities: Ethnographic Evidence from Europe and Asia." In *Economic Development, Integration, and Morality in Asia and the Americas*, edited by Donald C. Wood, In Research in Economic Anthropology, 255-282. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Ødegaard, Cecilie Vindal. 2017. "'Made in China'. Contraband, Labour and the Gendered Effects of 'Free-Trade', China-Peru." *The Journal of Development Studies* 53 (3): 346-360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2016.1184249>.

- Offner, Arnold A. 1999. "'Another Such Victory': President Truman, American Foreign Policy, and the Cold War." *Diplomatic History* 23 (2): 126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00159>.
- Ono, KentA, and Joy Yang Jiao. 2008. "China in the US Imaginary: Tibet, the Olympics, and the 2008 Earthquake." *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 5 (4): 406-410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420802416168>.
- Pang, Laikwan. 2008. "'China Who Makes and Fakes': A Semiotics of the Counterfeit." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (6): 117-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408095547>.
- Ross, G. Forman. 2013. *China and the Victorian Imagination : Empires Entwined*. Book. *Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Said, E.W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York, NY: VIntage Books.
- Shah, Nayan. 2010. "Public Health and the Mapping of Chinatown." *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, edited by Jean Yu-Wen; Chen Shen Wu, Thomas C., 168-192. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press.
- Sidaway, James D., and Chih Yuan Woon. 2017. "Chinese Narratives on "One Belt, One Road" (一帶一路) in Geopolitical and Imperial Contexts." *The Professional Geographer* 69 (4): 591-603. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2017.1288576>.
- Siu, Lok. 2005. *Memories Of A Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship Of Chinese In Panama*. Book. Stanford University Press.
- Siu, Lok, and Claire Chun. 2020. "Yellow Peril and Techno-orientalism in the Time of Covid-19: Racialized Contagion, Scientific Espionage, and Techno-Economic Warfare." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23 (3). <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2020.0033>.
- Songster, E. Elena. 2018. *Panda Nation : The Construction and Conservation of China's Modern Icon*. New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press.
- Strauss, J.C., and A.C. Armony. 2012. *From the Great Wall to the New World: Volume 11: China and Latin America in the 21st Century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sun, Shao-Cheng. 2023. "The Confucius Institutes: China's Cultural Soft Power Strategy." *Journal of Culture & Values in Education* 6 (1): 52-68. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2023.4>.
- Sylvanus, Nina. 2013. "Chinese Devils, the Global Market, and the Declining Power of Togo's Nana-Benzes." *African Studies Review* 56 (1): 65-80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2013.6>.
- The People's Republic of China, PRC. 2021. *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China.

- Vadell, Javier. 2022. "China's Bilateral and Minilateral Relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean: The Case of China–CELAC Forum." *Area Development & Policy* 7 (2): 187-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2021.1974907>.
- Watkins, Ralph. 2013. "Meeting the China Challenge to Manufacturing in Mexico." In *China and the New Triangular Relationships in the Americas: China and the Future of U.S.-Mexico Relations*, edited by Enrique Hearn Dussel Peters, Adrian H.; Shaiken, Harley. Mexico: Center for Latin American Studies, University of Miami; Center for Latin American Studies, University of California, Berkley; Centro de Estudios China-Mexico, Facultad de Economía, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Winkler, Stephanie Christine, and Björn Jerdén. 2023. "Us Foreign Policy Elites and the Great Rejuvenation of the Ideological China Threat: The Role of Rhetoric and the Ideologization of Geopolitical Threats." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26 (1): 159-184. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-022-00288-6>.
- Worden, Robert L. 1983. "China's Balancing Act: Cancun, the Third World, Latin America." *Asian Survey* 23 (5): 619-636. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644467>.
- Xing, Lu. 2017. *The Rhetoric of Mao Zedong : Transforming China and Its People*. Book. *Studies in Rhetoric/communication*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.
- XinhuaNet. 2017. Full text of President Xi's speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum. *Xinhuanet*. Accessed April 2, 2023.
- Zeng, Guojun, Frank Go, and Christian Kolmer. 2011. "The Impact of International TV Media Coverage of the Beijing Olympics 2008 on China's Media image Formation: A Media Content Analysis Perspective." *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 12 (4): 39-56. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-12-04-2011-B004>.
- Zhang, Dennis. 2021. "Sinophobic Epidemics in America: Historical Discontinuity in Disease-related Yellow Peril Imaginaries of the Past and Present." *The Journal of Medical Humanities* 42 (1): 63-80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-020-09675-x>.
- Zhengyu, Wu, and Ian Taylor. 2011. "From Refusal to Engagement: Chinese Contributions to Peacekeeping in Africa." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29 (2): 137-154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2011.555190>.
- Zhu, Qingqiao. 2020. "Comunidad, Confianza, Cooperación, Contribución " *El Milenio*, October 1, 2020, 2020. Accessed January 25, 2021. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/zhu-qingqiao/columna-zhu-qingqiao/comunidad-confianza-cooperacion-contribucion>.
- Zhu, Zhiqun. 2010. *China's New Diplomacy : Rationale, Strategies and Significance*. Book. Surrey, England: Ashgate.

CHAPTER 2: CHINA'S ENTRY INTO THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

After decades of Chinese isolationism under the leadership of Chairman Mao, the Opening Up and Reform of 1978 led to China dramatically increasing its international engagement. It began these efforts in regions such as Africa which had a longer history of engagement through socialist solidarity. Engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean however took a bit longer to develop, which some scholars have attributed to the dearth of engagement between China and the region prior to the reforms and the ever-looming presence of the US as a hegemonic presence in the region (Strauss and Armony 2012; Roett and Paz 2008). Mexico was one of the first countries in the western hemisphere to recognize the People's Republic of China, and yet 50 years on, in which China-Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) engagement is higher than ever, Mexico-China relations are relatively more subdued.

In this chapter, I contend that this difference in levels of engagement is due to Mexico's unique historical development in relation to transregional connections to China and within the context of hemispheric development, economics, and politics. Many analyses of China-LAC engagement and on China's bilateral relations in the region have recognized the importance of the US influence in shaping these outcomes, and thus have proposed a triangular framework to understand these relations, with the China as one node, the US as another, and LAC countries as the third (Tokatlian 2008; Roett and Paz 2008; Paz 2012). This is a useful heuristic to demonstrate the undeniable impact that the US policies, priorities, and overall hegemony in the region have on the decision making and activities of both China and LAC countries. Considering the influence of the US is especially important in the context of Mexico, as the US southern neighbor and its largest trade partner. However, the triangular framework prioritizes nation-states as the main actors driving change and the political economy as the terrain of these interactions

and thereby misses both the broader context of hemispheric dynamics and the more nuanced intricacies of regional, local, and individual actors that also impact these relations along with non-governmental influences such as the media and diaspora communities.

Therefore, in this discussion, instead of using a triangle, I conceptualize Mexico-China relations as being situated in two constellations of relations, one being the dynamics of the western hemisphere including the Americas and the Caribbean and the other being the transregional connections between the Americas and Asia, with a special focus on China's relations with the Americas. I demonstrate that the articulation of Mexico-China relations in the present is due to the specific ways that these two constellations of relations, and the diverse set of actors within them, have interacted and formed specific pathways for interaction with China. Doing so allows me to contextualize the possibility and constraints of present-day China-Mexico relations by incorporating historical, social, and cultural analyses into a discussion often confined to the paradigms of international relations and global economic systems.

For this discussion I refer to four hemispheric historical developments that scholars have identified as being major factors that allowed for unique relations between LAC and China. I situate Mexico in each of these conditions and demonstrate how its unique development and relations with the US did not allow for these same opportunities for engagement with China. This instead led to alternative relations developing between China and Mexico which were more piecemeal and initially led by subnational leaders before becoming championed by national leaders much later and on much more even ground between the countries.

The first of these conditions is the creation of hemispheric anti-Asian racism that coincided with the formation of national identities in the hemisphere that were based in the logics of Asian exclusion in both the 19th and early 20th centuries. This paradigm set up

frameworks of border regulation and discrimination that fundamentally shaped migration and settlement patterns of Asian communities in the Americas. The second condition was the economic development of LAC countries under the purview of US hegemony and the resource-extraction model in the 20th century and eventual restructuring of LAC economies under the Washington Consensus neoliberal economic models by the late 1980s. The third condition is the series of political movements that happened in response to domestic and international economic shifts under neoliberal policies and contending with globalization which led to many countries seeking alternatives for economic partnerships and development cooperation outside of the west and western institutions. Finally, I demonstrate that these three conditions and the constellations of relations they created in the hemisphere and across the Pacific with China all contribute to China's more systematic and multilayered strategy in LAC. All the regional trends did not apply to the Mexican context, which has led to a unique configuration of China-Mexico relations that is much more focused on locally specific projects or industries rather than national-level initiatives.

Hemispheric Orientalism: No Space for Asians in the Modern Latin America?

In the 16th century, the Spanish empire established a sea route for their galleons between Manila, Philippines to Acapulco, Mexico to trade silver, spices and porcelain along with small numbers of immigrants from Asia (Seijas 2016; Hu-Dehart 2007). The colonialization of the Americas fundamentally transformed the demographics, infrastructure, society, and connectivity of the region that intertwined its development to colonies across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans and relied on the extraction of resources and labor (Cushman 2013; Espiritu 2018). The nexuses of transpacific connections based in these legacies of exploitation persisted in the region past independence in which many of the former colonies retained the same models of extraction and cash crops that had relied on enslaved or indentured labor. Additionally, while the countries may

have governmental independence many western merchants and companies still maintained holdings in the region.

The eventual abolition of the slave trade and eventually slavery led to an immediate need to find alternative labor sources and so merchants leveraged their transpacific networks to find these new laborers in Asia creating what is now known as the Coolie Labor system. In LAC, Chinese laborers went to work in places such as sugar cane fields in Cuba, guano extraction and mining in Peru, and railroads in the US (López 2013; Cushman 2013; Hu-Dehart 1989).³ Many of these workers decided to stay or were unable to return to China and established some of the earliest Chinatowns in the Americas and over time they became more integrated into society (Lim 2010; Hu-Dehart 2002, 1989; E. Lee 2015; Lausent-Herrera 2011).

Some countries such as Peru actively advocated for and supported the influx of Chinese workers throughout the late 1800s (Ko 2017). However, in other countries anti-Chinese sentiment grew in places where their growing business success and presence in low-wage jobs prompted resentment among the rest of the population and led to slews of laws to regulate the living conditions, appearance, and mobility of the Chinese population (Shah 2010; E. Lee 2010, 2015). In the US this resulted in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which instead of halting the transpacific flow of Chinese migrants to the Americas, merely led to alternative routes, with many more stops in LAC (Siu 2005; E. Lee 2015).

An underlying premise of the Chinese Exclusion Act was racial anxiety of the threat that people of Asian descent posed to the “white” nation of the United States. This was an indicator of what Lee (2007) has coined as “hemispheric orientalism” which that positioned people of

³Asian migration to LAC was not just Chinese workers, but rather consisted of an array of workers from different countries of origin and diverse destinations that led to unique community formations across the region. Japanese immigrants went to Mexico, Peru and Brazil and Indian laborers went to work at colonial extensions of the British empire in British Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad.

Asian descent as a racial other in the west and framed this as a fundamental threat to the entire hemisphere. This became even more important in the 1900s as the underlying racist logics of eugenics entered the elite circles of the Americas and began to inform formulations of national identity that conceptualized the mix of different ethnicities present in LAC as part of a singular “Latin race” that “drew more on cultural than on biological criteria” (Gobat 2013, 1347). The national identities of these countries as envisioned by the political elites included white, indigenous, and black populations but not Asian populations; there was no space in these nationalist identities for people of Asian descent except for as an existential threat (Cushman 2013; E. Lee 2007; Chang 2017; A.P. Lee 2018).

Asian migrants were not just a symbolic threat to national identities but were also portrayed as a biological threat to the Latin “race” (through inter-marriage or presumed unhygienic practices) and by the 1900s, as a geopolitical threat due to the expansion of the Empire of Japan (E. Lee 2010, 2007). By World War II, the US invoked a Pan-American vision of “hemispheric security” and multiple LAC countries coordinated with the US to imprison and deport Japanese nationals and ethnic Japanese populations in these countries regardless of citizenship (Miyake 2002; E. Lee 2007). This paradigm of hemispheric anti-Asian laws established the groundwork for continued transpacific dynamics which cast Asia and its peoples as not just perpetual foreigners but as a threat to the security, identity, and welfare of the entire hemisphere. Despite this hostility, Chinese and other Asian diaspora communities continued to live and, in many places, thrive in the Americas.

The Chinese diaspora communities of LAC which formed in response to policies based in hemispheric orientalism are now key footholds for Chinese engagement in the region and have become cultural touchstones of diversity for many countries as well. Prior to China’s robust

engagement in the region, China and Taiwan both vied for support from these overseas communities (Dreyer 2005; Gonzalez 2017). These communities continued to be key for increased Chinese engagement in the region after Opening up and Reform and the “going out” out policy of the 1990s. As Chinese companies and individuals sought new opportunities and markets abroad, they were able to connect to these overseas communities to ease their entry into these countries as whole-sale sellers and merchants trying to find markets for the “made in China” goods (Müller 2018; Lausent-Herrera 2011; Hearn 2016). This influx of goods had varying effects in different countries, but as a whole this caused a reinvigoration of the fears of the Chinese practicing unfair business practices and posing a threat to the local merchants, repeating the same narratives and even the same stereotypes of almost a hundred years prior (Siu 2005). However, in countries where there was a historic Chinese population, while there were rifts between these two different Chinese communities, the ultimate treatment and outcome for the new immigrants were much less hostile than in the previous century. In fact, in Panama the Chinese Panamanian community while at first hostile to the new immigrants eventually lobbied the Panamanian government successfully to not just protect the Chinese immigrants but also get them documentation and legal protection (Siu 2005). Importantly, new immigrants may have faced the same racist stereotypes, but existing diasporic Chinese networks aided their integration and navigation of many LAC countries.

By the 2000s the transpacific connections between the Americas and China only expanded. Chinese immigrants continued to come seeking new opportunities and continuing to connect Chinese factories to whole sellers in LAC, but also Chinese companies and corporations also entered LAC. With them also came high-skilled workers to work at overseas headquarters and manual labor to work at the many large infrastructure projects now funded by China or

constructed by Chinese companies (Dehart 2015; Mazza 2016). This reinvigorated connection between China and LAC also has led to Chinese Latin Americans to leverage their own diasporic connections to China to take advantage of these new transpacific ties and their positionality and knowledge between two countries and cultures (DeHart 2018). Hemispheric orientalism caused severe harm and strife for the Asian populations of the Americas, however, their resiliency and community building in the region created the terrain for future Chinese engagement with LAC.

Hemispheric Orientalism in the United States Borderlands

In Mexico, the story of Chinese migration is the story of the development of Mexico's northern borderlands at a time of turmoil in Mexican history and in contention with the United States. After the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), Mexico ceded Texas and California to the US, and Mexico went through a series of governments and civil war from which Porfirio Díaz emerged victorious and ruled for 31 years (1876-1880, 1884-1911) in an era termed the *Porfiriato*.⁴ During this era, Díaz was looking to consolidate the Mexican states' power over the population and increase the productive power of the land and increase infrastructure development (Topik 2005). The northern territory of Mexico was especially undeveloped and sparsely populated except for the indigenous groups there due to the rough terrain and arid climate (Duncan 1994; Chang 2017).⁵

To change this, Díaz welcomed foreign investment led development and settlement initiatives in the region and US corporate interests that were looking to expand the agricultural land in Arizona and southern California took advantage of this opportunity and funded Mexico-

⁴After the Mexican America War, internal conflict led to the Reform War (1858-1861) and then the immediate invasion of Mexico by the French Empire on the invite of the losing Mexican conservative party. The French intervention lasted until 1866 and the Mexican Republic gained complete control of the country once again under the Mexican President Benito Juarez. Upon the death of Benito Juarez in 1872, Porfirio Díaz, led an 1876 coup in which he became President.

⁵The Yaqui indigenous people had spent centuries defending their land and autonomy and by the late 1800's the Diaz government antagonized the group to revolt so that their land could be taken and redistributed (Chang 2017).

based companies to build up the irrigation infrastructure from the Colorado River (Duncan 1994; Grijalva 2014; Lopez 2015). The government struggled to convince Mexicans or European immigrants to settle the land so when foreign companies were entering, they were allowed to bring their own sources of labor (Lim 2010; Topik 2005). American companies that had relied on Chinese labor in previous projects also hired workers to come and work on an irrigation project that coincided with the expansion of the Southern Pacific Railroad, which transformed the region to a major agricultural and cotton exporter (Topik 2005; Grijalva 2014).⁶

Therefore the Chinese immigrants to northern Mexico did not arrive under the coolie labor system but rather came a few decades later in the 1870s as part of this shift in development paradigms of Mexico (Gonzalez 2017).⁷ Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs also came across the border to take advantage of the newly developed region and set up Chinese fishing companies and a Chinese-owned cotton gin in Baja California (Duncan 1994; Grijalva 2014; Lim 2010). This US-Mexico joint development of northern Mexico was a primary driver for Chinese immigration to the region, especially after the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act (Duncan 1994; Gonzalez 2017; Hu-Dehart 2012).⁸ Chinese immigrants did not just arrive in the state of Baja California but were present in almost every state in Mexico and by 1920 accounted for the second largest foreigner population in Mexico at about 24,000 (Lee 2015, 105).

The Chinese community in the borderlands established strong bonds with the communities there in ways not seen in other parts of the Americas due to segregation and

⁶The Colorado River Land Company and the Compañía industrial Jabonera del Pacífico were two of the primary leaders of this agricultural development and a primary importer of Chinese labor to work on these farms as sharecroppers (Duncan 1994; Grijalva 2014; Lim 2010).

⁷Chinese immigrants had been present in small numbers across Mexico throughout the 1600s-1700s, with a small population in California working as shipbuilders and larger Chinese populations in Puebla, Mexico City and Acapulco (Lee 2015, 24).

⁸The Exclusion Act also led to illegal border crossing, and it is estimated that over 17,000 Chinese immigrants made it to the US from Mexico and Canada between 1882-1920 (Lee 2015, 192).

consisted mostly of small towns and farming communities (Delgado 2012; Lim 2010). However, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) which ended the *Porfiriato*, disrupted the cross-cultural communities that had formed in the borderlands. This was due to multiple new laws and anti-Chinese social movements that emerged at the time as ways to sow nationalism in a divided country. The 1915 Agrarian Decrees led to the redistribution of land and attracted more Mexican migrants to the region displacing some of the Asian sharecroppers and eventually dismantling the few existing Chinese farms (Baitenmann 2005; Grijalva 2014; Lim 2010).

Underlying these reforms were political efforts to foment loyalty to the state and transform disparate groups that made up Mexico into true citizens. The ideological underpinning of this national identity was based in the writings of José Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher, who envisioned Mexico's race as coming from an idealized "mestizaje" and conceptualized a cultural and genetic blending in Latin America that occurred in between the Europeans, the Africans who were forcibly brought with and the indigenous people who they encountered on their arrival (Miller 2004). Vasconcelos deemed "mestizaje" as the antidote to the internal strife caused by the Mexican Revolution and a solution to the problem of integrating the indigenous population into an idealized modernist state, notable excluding Asians from this new national identity despite their integral role in developing parts of the country (Manrique 2016; Miller 2004; Chang 2017).

Anti-Chinese sentiment began to fester in Mexico due to these nationalist ideologies. In Sonora, a northern Mexican state, a group of *antichinistas* grew and focused on the perceived unfair business competition that Chinese immigrants posed to Mexicans (Chang 2017).⁹ The revolutionary leaders were against the *Porfiriato* type of development that promoted trade with

⁹The presence of these groups in the Sonoran cities of Nogales and Agua Prieta was directly tied to the US companies' developing mining and railroad interests at the border (Lee 2015, 105).

the US and welcoming of immigrants, such as the Chinese (Lee 2015). The Mexican revolutionary leaders tied anti-Chinese actions to Mexican nationalism, by participating in this marginalization, people became loyal Mexican subjects (Chang 2017).¹⁰ Local governments enacted their own anti-Chinese laws and in 1927 Mexico had passed its own Asian exclusion act that restricted migration. By 1931, the Mexican government and local governments expelled about 20,000 people of the Chinese population of Sonora, Sinaloa, and Nayarit (Duncan 1994; Gonzalez 2017).

These expulsions did not reach all Chinese communities; in Tijuana there were no anti-Chinese campaigns (Duncan 1994). In places like Mexicali which did have anti-Chinese protests, they did not expel the entire Chinese community. In fact, many remained, developing new transpacific and transborder ties to survive (Delgado 2012; Gonzalez 2017; Lim 2010). Duncan (1994) contends that the Chinese communities in Baja California were able to stay in this region despite this turmoil because the Chinese community had become more economically and socially integrated into this society that fostered more cross-community cooperation rather than competition. After the World Wars and the Chinese Civil War, Mexico originally gave recognition to Taiwan. The Chinese communities of Mexico organized in local Chinese community organizations and it was through these associations that Cold War competition between the governments played out (Gonzalez 2017).

The history of economic development via foreign investment and the immigration of Chinese to the region remains pertinent in Northern Mexico to this day with the largest populations of Chinese Mexicans and Chinese immigrants in Mexico in the state of Baja California. Members of this borderland Chinese community were some of the first instigators for

¹⁰On May 5, 1911, there was a massacre of 303 Chinese in Torreon, Mexico and \$850,000 of damage was done to Chinese businesses and homes (Lee 2015, 106).

increased China-Mexico engagement, a good decade before it was politically viable at the national level (Hearn 2016). The former President of the Chinese Association of Mexicali began personally reaching out to interested Chinese exporters and going on yearly trips to business fairs in Guangdong that both the Chinese and Mexicali government officials eventually recognized (Hearn 2016, 190-192). This activity complimented the efforts of China's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office which looked to leverage Chinese diasporas to better diplomatic engagement abroad and they worked in Mexicali and Tijuana to create the Chamber of Chinese Enterprises of the Northeast (Hearn 2016). It was only through these locally specific engagements that China-Mexico relations could flourish. Other states in Mexico have also initiated these local-level economic cooperation ties such as the Sinaloa Chamber of Trade and Technology Mexico-China which was created in 2008 and now has four regional chapters (Myers 2020).

China's Commodity Boom and Alternative Funding for Latin America

By 1826 all former colonies of Portugal and Spain had gained independence (except for Puerto Rico and Cuba) and established their own governmental, economic, and societal systems as nation states. The US had also gained its independence in 1776 and by this point in time was rapidly expanding its governmental and corporate interests west and south, establishing its dominance in the region. The US codified this regional hegemony with the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and expanded this policy with the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary that highlighted the US role in the defense of human life and property in the region (Scarfi 2016).

These hemispheric policies set the precedent and justification for multiple military and political interventions across the region in support of US corporate interests and the protection of US economic interests. A notable example being the US backing of the Panama separatist group in 1903 from Gran Colombia in exchange for which the US gained control of the Panama Canal

Zone and therefore the key trans-oceanic transportation infrastructure in the hemisphere (Noel and Carlos 2011). Large US corporations also benefited from US protection, such as the United Fruit Company that maintained a monopoly on the banana growing and export industry in Central America (Martin 2013; Jason 2011). US foreign policy throughout the 20th century in Latin America continued to prioritize US government and corporate interests, many times at the expense of local populations and sometimes in defiance of democratically elected governments.

The economic development of all countries across LAC varied, with some facing more intervention from the US than others, especially once Cold War politics added another layer of anti-communist US foreign policy. However, the next regional shift in US economic policy was in response to the 1980s debt crisis, or “lost decade” in which multiple LAC countries defaulted on their foreign debt causing a deep recession and banking crises (Goldfajn, Martínez, and Valdés 2021). The US took this as an opportunity to reshape the financial landscape and economic policies of the hemisphere with the neoliberal policies of the “Washington Consensus” and through its influence of the International Monetary Fund, required Latin American countries in crisis to make multiple structural and policy-level economic changes to their national economies based on the US dictated model (Goldfajn, Martínez, and Valdés 2021; Margheritis and Pereira 2007). These reforms aimed to modernize national economies (in the image of the west) that prioritized macroeconomic reforms, privatization of sectors that were under state control, shrinking of state-funding and austerity measure, and flexible exchange rates (Roett and Paz 2016). Under these measures spending on public goods and services shrunk, private investment increased, and regulations on business and industries loosened (Goldfajn, Martínez, and Valdés 2021).

This created multiple changes in the economic terrain of LAC which allowed for

increased economic relations with China. China was becoming the manufacturing center of the world and entered the World Trade Organization in 2001 while tariffs and trade policies in LAC loosened and therefore allowed for an easier entry of “made in China” goods to the region. This also left domestic industries that made similar goods vulnerable to competition with Chinese goods not just in foreign markets but in their own country as well (Gonzalez 2008). China actively sought to improve its trade relations in the region and obtained observer status in the Association for Latin American Integration, the Organization of American States, and the Inter-American Development Bank (Leon-Manriquez 2016; Leogrande 2007). China also looked to engage with groups forming regional trading blocs such as the Andean Community, the Rio Group, the South American Common Market and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) but these talks have not led to much concrete engagement (Dreyer 2005; Roett and Paz 2016). On the other hand, later efforts to engage directly with countries for Free Trade Agreements was more successful. Chile (2005), Peru (2009), and Costa Rica (2007) signed Free Trade Agreements with China that granted access to China’s market but also lowered barriers for Chinese goods entering these countries (Wise 2012; Dehart 2021).

The second major economic shift came a decade later and was the concurrent change in Latin American countries’ economies to rely more heavily on exporting resources at the same moment that China was “going out” seeking new founts for resources to fuel its own domestic development. Latin America is a resource rich region and Chinese State-Owned Enterprises began testing out the possibility of exporting raw resources in sectors such as mining, oil, and gas. The China National Petroleum Corporation was one such company that began operating in Peru in 1993 with others following and beginning operation in Venezuela (1998) and Ecuador (2003) (Yang 2015; Devlin 2008; Hogenboom 2014). The Chinese State-Owned Enterprises

were the vanguard of China in LAC and were allowed to test out the waters in new regions to learn about the challenges and conditions in the region with support from China (Yang 2015).

The neoliberal restructuring led to many governments of Latin America to privatize or at least ease restrictions on public goods and natural resources of their countries. Venezuela opened its still state-owned oil company to private companies, Bolivia privatized its gas and oil company, and Guatemala lowered mining royalties and gave free access to water in the mining sector (Hogenboom 2012). This ease in restriction and selling of natural resources was also a key part of many countries strategies to fund social initiatives cut under austerity measures. These same spending cuts also stifled the infrastructure development needed for the extraction, transport, processing, and sale of these resources that Chinese financing and Chinese corporations were also able to provide (Gransow 2015). Therefore, China's demand for these materials directly drove up the price of these commodities leading to the "China Boom" between 2003-2013 which also filled these financing gaps of many Latin American countries (Kevin P. Gallagher 2016; Hogenboom 2012).

Once again, the Chinese state supported the leveraging of specific conditions in LAC. In 2004 Hu Jintao went on a diplomatic tour of LAC and made promises of financing deals and the following year Chinese investment began in earnest through the institutions of the China Export-Import Bank and the China Development Bank. In 2005, the China Export-Import bank invested \$30 million to build a stadium in Jamaica and in 2007 there was another jump in financing to \$5.1 billion in loans to Venezuela, Brazil, Jamaica, and Argentina (Kevin P. Gallagher and Myers 2022). A large portion of this financing went into the oil industries and infrastructure for oil extraction and exportation (E.A. Dussel Peters, Ariel C.; Cui, Shoujun; 2018b). This commodity boom and changes in economic approaches of LAC countries led to rapid economic

growth of the region between 2003-2008 (Vidal 2018). By 2011, China became the number one trading partner with all South America, beating out the US (Gallagher 2016).

The influx of Chinese capital into the region directly coincided with the retraction of US finance in the region (Urdinez et al. 2016). Chinese funding also did not have the same level of conditionalities that the countries of the region had become accustomed to under the Washington Consensus and therefore offered a viable alternative, especially for countries not wishing to follow the Washington model. This difference in lending practices was due to China's different approach to lending, which relies on "patient capital" that allows for financial planning with longer term horizons and with more risk and uncertainty (Kaplan 2016). This also meant that the countries receiving the loans were no longer beholden to the budget constraints and governance demands of traditional lending which raised concerns over "debt trap diplomacy" (Kaplan 2016; Singh 2021). However, longitudinal reviews of oil-backed loans revealed that this financing is renegotiable and less conditionalities allowed for countries to have more independence and flexibility to guide their development initiatives (Singh 2021). Analyses of China's lending patterns across the region also show that these practices can better be seen as aligning with "simple commercial interests" and actually prioritized stable political environments because it allowed for lower costs and longer-term stability (Kevin P. Gallagher and Irwin 2015; González-Vicente 2013; Gonzalez-Vicente 2012).

This replacement of financing by China and the commodity boom of the time was so important in the region that it helped stave off the full impacts of the worldwide 2008 financial crisis, during which incomes in the region continued to grow by 2.4% annually but the US and western multilateral organizations continued to shrink investment in the region (Gallagher 2016, 43). China's new role on the global stage translated to different approaches in its first encounters

with partner countries, however the centrality of trade and infrastructure remained the same. China's gradual increased engagement in the region went from tenuous trade agreements to being a primary funder in the region in mere decades and was only possible due to these various instances in which the priorities of LAC countries and China aligned.

Mexican Economic Development in Competition with China

Mexico's relationship with China is intertwined with these shifts of economic policies of the region but there were two key factors in Mexico's trajectory in this regional shift that did not allow for immediate closer ties to China like in other countries of LAC. The first is that Mexico has not turned to China for increased resource extraction backed financing despite having the oil reserves. Second, Mexico signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) transformed Mexico's economy to an export-dependent manufacturing hub that was in direct competition with China's own export-centered economy.

First off, Mexico is the fourth largest oil producer in the western hemisphere, only behind the US, Canada, and Venezuela. State control of oil has continued to be an economic cornerstone of the Mexican economy. The Mexican government leveraged its large oil reserves in negotiations of large international loans which supported sustained state-led industrialization with a focus on strengthening the domestic market and production coupled with protectionist trade and import policies (Kelly 2001). Therefore, a large amount of Mexico's foreign debt were loans backed by projected oil revenue, which meant that when the commodity price of oil fell, Mexico was no longer able to service its foreign debt (Sheppard 2011). When it defaulted it immediately underwent neoliberal economic reforms which shifted the Mexican economy to an export-centered model and opened its market to foreign goods with less trade barriers (Goldfajn, Martínez, and Valdés 2021). President Carlos Salinas de Gotari (1988-1994) did implement

austerity measures and increased openings for foreign investment into Pemex however it has remained under the control of the Mexican government.

Mexico has not relied on alternative funding revenues from China because it has stuck to the neoliberal economic models that make it a more likely to get funding from Western banks and international financing institutes such as the World bank (Kevin P. Gallagher and Irwin 2015). However, of the billions of dollars in loans and financing from China that has gone to LAC, Mexico did received one oil-related loan of a billion dollars in 2013 from the China Export Import Bank for offshore drilling equipment (Kevin P. Gallagher and Myers 2022).

Mexico's succession of presidents since the 1980s debt crisis all embraced neoliberal economic reforms and by the Salinas presidency Mexico signed NAFTA in 1994 (Hufbauer, Schott, and Orejas 2005). NAFTA led to the rapid development of the manufacturing sector in Mexico to take advantage of the relaxed trade restrictions between the US and Mexico, and the "maquiladora sector" developed on the northern border and Mexico's economy depended on the US as its primary export market. Therefore, Mexico's neoliberal economic reforms coincided with a tighter relationship to the United States, where their economy relied on the US export market, and they continued to receive US. financing.

Therefore, at the time of China's increased economic engagement with LAC through the import of consumer goods, Mexico was one of the only countries that had multiple sectors that were in direct competition with Chinese exports, especially in the sectors of textiles and apparel, a major sector of the maquila industry (Hearn 2016; Hufbauer et. al 2005; Jenkins 2018; Liu and Zhao 2017). This resulted in loss of maquiladora jobs, relocation of some of these firms to China and increased competition for new firms in the maquiladora industry upon entry (Hearn 2016; Hufbauer et. al 2005; Jenkins 2018). China's entry into the World Trade Organization only

exacerbated these tensions. In an analysis of trade dynamics between China, the US and Mexico between 1994-2011, Gallagher and Dussel Peters (2018) find that after China entered the World Trade Organization, it essentially had become a fourth member of NAFTA. This was due to its integration into the trade blocs major trade items and outcompeting Mexico in the US and the US in Mexico (K. P. Gallagher and Dussel Peters 2013). These trade concerns were highly politicized and Mexican government responded through a series of anti-dumping laws to protect domestic markets but with varying success (Jenkins 2018; Liu and Zhao 2017). The Mexican government's politicians used these anti-dumping laws as political tools to demonstrate their commitment to protecting Mexican interests in the face of a threatening Chinese economy (Liu and Zhao 2017; Cornejo, Haro Navejas, and León-Manríquez 2013). For many countries in LAC, China filled a financing gap and had many complimentary manufacturing sectors, but Mexico did not benefit from an influx of Chinese financing for their oil, and it was in fact losing its consumer market in the US to China.

Latin America's "Pink Tide" and China's Chance for Increased Political Engagement

The political factors of the Cold War era also shaped the US policing of Latin America. The 1947 Truman Doctrine declared that the US should give aid to countries threatened by communism and began a new era of US military, monetary, and covert intervention in the affairs of LAC. This foreign policy set the stage for the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union (USSR) that played out as multiple proxy wars across the globe, including in Latin America. Within these global dynamics, LAC countries were grouped under the "western bloc" as opposed to the USSR "eastern bloc" and led to the signing of multiple defense treaties and platforms for collaboration (Martinez 2013).¹¹

¹¹One platform was the Organization of American States (1948) which included 21 countries unified under the guiding principles of protecting democracy and defending against communism.

The eventual success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the establishment of a communist government escalated tensions between the US and USSR and shifted US policy in LAC. In 1961 President John F. Kennedy initiated the Pan-American Alliance for Progress which was a \$100 billion 10-year program to promote social and political development in LAC to address the underlying reasons for social unrest before it led to a political revolution (Hickman 2013). Under this new program increased funding went to military training and aid programs that promoted US-backed ideals of democracy and capitalism which shaped the ideology of multiple government and military leaders of the region (Gill 2004). The Cuban Revolution as a successful communist revolution was a clear opportunity for China to increase interaction in the region, but the Sino-Soviet split and the proximity of the US deterred any considerable support (Shixue 2008). Therefore, communist China under Mao Zedong was not engaged with the region for the most part, not just due to its own isolationist policies but also due to the active anti-communist efforts in the region coming from both the US and other Latin American countries (Araujo and Bohoslavsky 2020).¹²

Cold War politics became integral to hemispheric policies and as US interests in the region evolved, they began to bundle anti-communist efforts, with the war on drugs, the protection of democracy, and the protection of human rights (Horace 2019; Kroshus Medina 1998; Neier 1989). It was within this complex terrain of hemispheric politics that China began to slowly increase its engagement with LAC especially once it gained recognition in the United Nations replacing the Republic of China (Taiwan). China had two goals in LAC, to gain diplomatic recognition and set up trade relations. LAC remained the region with the most countries that withheld diplomatic recognition and so became a stage for cultural and economic

¹²China did engage in some trade with LAC in the 1960s; both Argentina and Mexico sold wheat to China during the Great Famine.

diplomacy battle between the Taiwan and China (Dehart 2021; Gonzalez 2017). The institution of trade relations was tied to diplomatic switches and China set up in countries such as Colombia and Ecuador as precursors to formal diplomatic relations (Dreyer 2005). By 1979, seventeen LAC countries had established diplomatic ties with China.¹³ In 1985, China's Premier Zhao Ziyang visited LAC and was more overt in his political pressure and brought up the issue of Taiwan in a meeting with representatives of Brazil's overseas Chinese community (Dreyer 2005). In 1989, the frayed relations between China and Cuba were also repaired and despite the widely-condemned Tiananmen Square Massacre, multiple LAC countries still hosted visits from high-level Chinese officials soon after (Wise and Chonn Ching 2018). Notably, China eventually denounced the Maoist Shining Path of Peru as a terrorist group in 1983 soon after its founding in 1980 as the priorities of China had shifted from promoting global communism (Jian 2021).¹⁴

The economic crisis of the 1980s and the following restructuring was the next stage of political change in LAC. The sweeping neoliberal economic reforms after the LAC debt crisis may have tamed inflation and allowed for the return of private investments into the region but these initial fixes began to falter and led to another global financial crisis that was accompanied by growing public discontent, with many leaders calling for a second market reform (Wise and Roett 2003). On the ground, grass roots movements were also calling for change, but instead of more neoliberal economic reforms, they were looking to upend the entire economic paradigm on anti-neoliberal and anti-globalization platforms, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Landless Worker's Movement in Brazil (Stahler-Sholk and Vanden 2010; Foweraker 2001).

¹³In 1971 Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Brazil, Suriname, and Barbados switched and in 1979 Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Belize, Uruguay, and Antigua and Barbuda followed.

¹⁴Shining Path leaders also disparaged the new direction of China away from "pure communism" under Deng Xiaoping.

Along with these movements there was also a rise in political candidates that were asking for more radical change beyond a second reform such as Hugo Chavez who won the Venezuela Presidential election in 1998. This began what has been deemed the “pink tide” which saw an increase in political candidates that ran on platforms that ranged from condemning US and neoliberal policies to merely suggesting reforms (Ruckert, Macdonald, and Proulx 2017). The level of change implemented in these countries after these elections was a mixed bag with a dichotomy between the “good left” and the “bad left” used by US politicians to distinguish the pragmatic leftist governments such as that of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil from the irrational and dangerous populist-left wing governments such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia (Vanderbush 2011). The US’s hostility to the left in LAC meant that rather than finding tenuous common ground for cooperation with the new left governments, the relations were more confrontational (Leogrande 2007).

While diplomatic relations between the US and LAC became more tense, China’s engagement with the region became more robust. This was building on the tenuous diplomatic relations already formed after recognition in the United Nations and previous diplomatic visits. By 2004, Hu Jintao went on a tour of Latin America to Brazil, Chile, Cuba and Argentina and signed billions in new investment deals and hundreds of agreements for increased cooperation across various sectors (Kurlantzick 2006). China had clearly gained a foothold in LAC, but it still spent much of its diplomatic efforts with having the countries switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. This was the motivating factor behind some of the first infrastructure gifts that China funded in LAC such as the 2007 convention center in Guyana for the 2007 Cricket World Cup and a soccer stadium in San Jose, Costa Rica (Gransow 2015; Dehart 2021).

The “China Boom” discussed in the previous section was also a political lever in

hemispheric relations and contributed to the relative success of countries of the “bad” and “good” left. Many of these countries that were part of the “pink tide” completely nationalized or partially nationalized their natural resources under the premise that the people needed to take back control of their own resources that were just being sold off for cheap to foreign countries (Hogenboom 2012; Ruckert, Macdonald, and Proulx 2017). Venezuela completely nationalized many of the industries, most importantly oil, while countries such as Brazil and Chile had a more varied approach that still welcomed private investors (Ruckert, Macdonald, and Proulx 2017). LAC countries were forging new paths of economic development that defied the norms of the Washington Consensus and looking for alternative partners and were enabled in this endeavor through Chinese financing. Countries such as Venezuela which were political against the US and neoliberalism could not receive loans from traditional lenders and was one of the primary benefactors of early Chinese loans (Palacios 2008). Chinese investment into these sectors directly impacted the ability of these states to expand their coffers to support the new social programs they had promised on populist platforms (Jenkins 2018).

Mexico: The Case of the Delayed Pink Tide

In the fall out of the Mexican Revolution a singular political party, that eventually became the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (The Institutional Revolutionary Party) or as it is often referred to as PRI, held sole political power over the country and held the presidency until 2000. Since Mexico was essentially a single party run state, the ideology of the country depended more on the politics of the Mexican president rather than a commitment by the party to one ideology over the other. While the People’s Republic of China was not recognized by most of the world and international relations efforts of China were minimal, Mao did attract some of the intellectuals from the left to the country and created connections to spread the Maoist vision

(Galway 2021). Notably, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who once was the leader of the labor section of the PRI, left and founded the Popular Socialist Party, which later founded the Sociedad Mexicana de Amistad con China Popular (Galway 2021). Through this organization Mexican and Chinese leaders were able to disseminate information about Maoist China and coordinated trips for Mexican leftist intellectuals to visit (Galway 2021). While the Mexican government did not ban information from communist China, the PRI governments of the 1960's and 1970's were not allies of the leftist groups in Mexico (Araujo and Bohoslavsky 2020). The more covert anti-communist efforts in the government became very apparent in unfounded claims that Maoist Chinese influence was instigating the Mexican Student Movement of 1968 (Galway 2021).

By the 1980s economic reforms, Mexico was the first country to undergo structural adjustment under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (Sheppard 2011). This was a turning point for the PRI and its ideologies with the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid who implemented "Aperatura" policies (market opening) which included the shrinking of state-subsidies, privatization, deregulation, liberalization of trade policies and dramatic cuts to social programs (Sheppard 2011). PRI had discarded the last remnants of its populist foundation and while these reforms may have saved the Mexican economy from further defaults, it negatively affected the welfare of large swaths of Mexican society and was especially devastating to the agriculture sector and the rural, largely indigenous, poor that relied on it (Kelly 2001).

These economic changes and uneven effects on the rural populations led to one of the most prominent anti-globalization and anti-neoliberal movements in the region led by the Zapatistas who appeared as a guerilla army in 1994, on the same day NAFTA came into effect (Collier and Collier 2005). They called for a return to the national protection of Mexican rights

over their natural resources and land, return to the provision of social goods and protections from the state, and the decrease in the use of the military to maintain order (Collier and Collier 2005). The Zapatistas gained popular support in Chiapas and further afar and were now a visible part of popular movements across Mexico that were looking for a challenge to neoliberal paradigms and political change in the country (Shefner and Stewart 2011).

Despite the discontent with neoliberal policies, the watershed moment in Mexican politics in which the first President elected from a different party than the long-ruling PRI was of Vicente Fox in 2000. Fox was of the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party) that was in fact to the right of PRI and further embraced neoliberal economic policies (Shefner and Stewart 2011). This was after the 1988 election scandal in which a left-wing candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, ran and lost to the PRI candidate, Salinas and claims of election fraud were abundant. This led to the formation of Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution/PRD) which sought to unite the major left entities in Mexico under a singular banner (Dag 2013). Despite the losses on the national stage, the PRD did become the second largest political party in both 1997 and 2006 and gained seats in both the congress and the governorship of Mexico City, a significant political post (Dag 2013). However, the internal rifts in the PRD led to no Presidential win for the left until the 2018 election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) under a new left-wing party, Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement) or as it is often called, MORENA. He created MORENA after parting ways from PRD, a party he helped found (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020). The “pink tide” of two decades prior in LAC did not change national politics enough to lead to Mexico to turn towards to China as an alternative to the US.

The Rise of China as a Threat to US Hegemony: LAC Caught in the Middle or Has Multiple Options?

By the presidency of Barack Obama (2008-2016), contending with China became a higher priority in US foreign policy with a “pivot to Asia” which sought to find ways to work with rather than against the rising world power (Anderson and Cha 2017; Campos and Prevost 2019). A cornerstone of this shift to the east, was the negotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an ambitious transregional Free Trade Bloc that was to represent the largest Pacific economies besides China and Brazil and under the leadership of the US (Roett and Paz 2016). The Obama administration continued relations with LAC under the same paradigms of past administrations with a focus on military aid, national security, immigration while also lessening the staunch anti-communism of past administrations and thawing ties with Cuba (Gandásegui 2011).

However, much of the goodwill and regional collaboration fostered during the Obama administration dissolved under the Presidency of Donald Trump (2016-2020). His political platform promised an “America first” change in both domestic and foreign policy and on the campaign trail he created tensions with Latin American countries and China. In relation to LAC, President Trump’s administration took opposing stances to many of Obama’s key LAC policies. First, Trump’s administration re-upped the antagonistic view of left-wing governments in the region such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. This antagonistic stance extended to the administration’s approach to China, and the contention that China was engaging in “economic aggression” that developed into a full blown trade war with both governments imposing escalating tariffs on the other (Ha, Guo, and Chen 2022). The administration also removed the US from many multilateral agreements which also applied to its approach in LAC when Trump

withdrew last minute from the Summit of the Americas meeting in Peru in 2018 (Campos and Prevost 2019). In the same vein, the Trump administration immediately withdrew from negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership and in the act dealt a blow to the partner countries across the Pacific and in LAC (Chile, Mexico, and Peru) that could have been allies against a perceived China threat. The Presidency of Joe Biden (2020-present) has gone back to trying to foster closer ties to LAC countries and renewed commitments to multilateral organizations but the political rhetoric in the US which frames China as the biggest existential threat akin to the discourse of the Cold War has only solidified (Winkler and Jerdén 2023).

While US foreign policy towards LAC and China was flip-flopping over the past 15 years, China's approach to LAC has become much clearer and more systemized which began with the 2008 White Paper on China's Policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean which called for deeper bilateral and multilateral ties with the region (The People's Republic of China 2008). China is systematically engaging the region from multiple levels of strategy that are only possible due to the three aforementioned hemispheric conditions of the Americas: the critical position of Chinese diaspora communities in the hemisphere, the specific pathways of entry of Chinese corporations, goods and capital into the LAC market, and the political positioning of China against the hegemony of the US and use as an alternative partner for economic development. US-led hemispheric trends and conditions therefore shaped China's relation to LAC countries at these times, but now China's has a much more defined position towards LAC which when not in direct tension with the US is at least running parallel to its hemispheric relations. The economic and political relations created in the region between LAC and China have set the precedents for the ambitious plans of China in the region and diaspora community actors play pivotal subnational roles in creating new inroads for engagement in the region.

China only became more entwined in the existing multilateral regional platforms. For example, in 2008 China joined the InterAmerican Development Bank and committed \$350 million (Gransow 2015). In 2013, Xi Jinping presented an even clearer model for China's approach to LAC under a "1+3+6" five year cooperation plan that was enshrined in the creation of the Forum of China and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (China-CELAC Forum) during this visit (The People's Republic of China 2014). This forum is viewed as a platform from which China and the 33 partner countries can collaborate on common development goals and build a "a comprehensive and balanced China-LAC cooperation network" (The People's Republic of China 2016). The plan envisioned "one plan" with "three engines" in "six areas". The three engines are focused on trade, investment, and financial cooperation as the focus of initiatives to achieve a "trade balance of US\$500 billion within ten years" and increasing Chinese investment in the region at a proposed amount of US\$250 billion (The People's Republic of China 2016). The investment was to go to the six areas which included energy resources, infrastructure design, agriculture, manufacturing, technological innovation, and information.

The formation of China-CELAC forum has brought a contingent of Latin American countries in direct conversation with China which has also bolstered not just China's position as a new ally in Latin America, but also the image of CELAC as a unified front for the interests of Latin America (Lehoczki 2015). Importantly, the China-CELAC Forum did not include the US and promotes the idea of China and LAC countries being peers as "still developing" countries and therefore this platform reinforces the idea that China's international relations are based in mutual benefit and respectful cooperation rather than China dictating the activities of the region. This type of engagement and China's continued economic power in the region have become a

a clear motivator for some of the remaining Central American countries to switch diplomatic recognition after long resisting Beijing's overtures to the region. In 2017 Panama switched diplomatic recognition overnight and the following year the Dominican Republic and El Salvador followed suit (Portada III, Lem, and Paudel 2020). Just this March, 2023, Honduras also switched diplomatic recognition seemingly overnight ("Taiwan Recalls Ambassador as Honduras Switches Ties to China" 2023). Only Guatemala and Belize still maintain diplomatic ties to the Republic of China in Taiwan.

Besides CELAC there are multiple other platforms that represent groups in LAC that have had the potential for cooperation with China but due to regional dynamics and China's own priorities have not succeeded. For example, Mercosur, founded in 1991, is a regional trading bloc that includes Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay that has had delayed agreements and has only just state the possibility for a China-Mercosur agreement (de Oliveira 2016; Araujo; and Boadle 2023). Part of the hesitancy of Mercosur to sign a free trade agreement with China is due to Brazil's and Argentina's manufacturing sectors being in direct competition with China's production and an influx of Chinese goods would be potentially devastating and Paraguay still maintains diplomatic recognition of the Republic of China (Lehoczki 2015; de Oliveira 2016). Another of these potential collaborators is the Pacific Alliance founded by Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru in 2011 as a Pacific-ocean focused trade bloc. The alliance has had some success in creating agreements between the countries in the group, but in trying to engage China it has been less successful, and they have not signed any formal agreement (Creutzfeldt 2018; Roett and Paz 2016).

While Chinese government officials vocalized positive opinions of these regional initiatives, they see them as helpful for regional economic integration but when it comes down to

working out agreements, China is looking to form bilateral agreements (Creutzfeldt 2018). The China-CELAC forum, on the other hand, functions more in line with the type of multilateral engagement that China is looking to work under, one in which the platform allows for dialogues between different countries of the region where they can get a region-wide scope of issues but then are able to make “mini-lateral” decisions based on some of the countries needs instead of the plurality (Vadell 2022).

While engagement with LAC-led initiatives have been varied, China is also bolstering its engagement in the region through the creation and promotion of its own multilateral platforms which continue to fill funding gaps from international and US funders. The patterns of investment that began in the mid-2000s took off in 2010; the China Export-Import Bank and China Development Bank provided \$34.5 billion in loans to LAC countries (Kevin P. Gallagher and Myers 2022). China has also expanded the scope of projects it funds in the region first going to infrastructure investment, such as \$1.7 billion to Ecuador’s Coca-Coda-Sinclair Hydroelectric Dam, \$10 billion in Argentina for train infrastructure, almost \$400 million for infrastructure and shoreline reconstruction in Jamaica, and \$39 million for electric utility infrastructure in Guyana (Kevin P. Gallagher and Myers 2022). The same year, the traditional lenders of the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and the US Export-Import Bank limited their activities, so these Chinese loans surpassed them as the biggest lender that year (Hogenboom 2014; Kevin P. Gallagher and Irwin 2015). In 2013 and 2014, FDI from China Export-Import Bank and China Development Bank both went over \$10 billion and while a large amount went to Venezuela for oil, the other projects fell under mining and infrastructure such as a highway in Bolivia and Jamaica, the Coca-Coda Dam in Bolivia, a train line in Argentina, and a Children’s Hospital in Trinidad and Tobago (Kevin P. Gallagher and Myers 2022). In 2015, the funds exceeded \$21

billion and once again a large amount went to Venezuela oil but the rest went to infrastructure projects such as a biomass power plant in Cuba, and soy processing infrastructure in Brazil (Kevin P. Gallagher and Myers 2022).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies this ideal of investing in infrastructure and engaging in multilateral planning and engagement but initiating actions bilaterally and through signed agreements. The BRI in its original conception did not include LAC but in a 2017 meeting with the Argentine President Mauricio Macri, Xi Jinping stated that LAC was “a natural extension of the Maritime Silk Road” and the same year Panama signed a BRI Memorandum of Understanding cooperation agreement after it had established diplomatic relations with China (Vadell 2022; Myers 2018; Oliveira and Myers 2021). As of right now, in 2018, 18 LAC countries signed memoranda of understanding including: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Peru, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, and Uruguay. It is important to note however, that the exact outcomes of these agreements is unclear since it is a non-binding agreement (Serrano Moreno, Telias, and Urdinez 2021). Of the countries that both recognized China and that are part of the China-CELAC forum there were only 5 countries that had not signed a Memoranda of Understanding, Argentina, Brazil, the Bahamas, Colombia and Mexico (Serrano Moreno, Telias, and Urdinez 2021). Noticeably, most of these countries represent some of the largest economies in the region, and as is the case for Mexico and Colombia, they have even closer economic and diplomatic ties to the United States. By including LAC in the BRI platform, China has been able to extend the paradigms of this platform as the norm for engaging in multilateral relations to the region.

As Myers (2018) notes, many of the Chinese-backed infrastructure projects that had

already been underway in LAC fit the image of the BRI such as the Montero Bullo Railway in Bolivia or the Belgrano Cargas Railway in Argentina (Myers 2018, 241). Therefore, some of these projects were rebranded under the BRI and otherwise it has been a piecemeal application (Oliveira and Myers 2021). Oliveira and Myers (2021) suggest that part of this uneven application of the BRI in the region is due to the different political and economic priorities of political and business interests in both LAC and China; they co-produce the implementation of the BRI to suit these needs. Importantly, concerns of how inclusion into the BRI affects relations with the US is a key factor for both LAC and Chinese decisionmakers (Oliveira and Myers 2021, 491). The political over economic benefit of the BRI is apparent when considering that the BRI has not led to an increase in Foreign Direct Investment in the region nor has there been an increase in access to loans or an increase in the number of infrastructure projects that China backs in LAC (Jenkins 2022).

Beyond the multilateral platforms that China promotes, Chinese companies entering the LAC market are also playing a key role in shaping the present-day Chinese engagement with LAC. Chinese construction is one sector of influence since Chinese companies entering bids for construction and engineering contracts has been a key aspect of increased engagement with LAC. There is a surplus of Chinese construction capacity, therefore the Chinese government actively promotes hiring these groups, using Chinese equipment, and hiring Chinese engineers to provide their knowledge for these projects, thus enmeshing Chinese interests into these infrastructure projects even more (Bersch and Koivumaeki 2019). This coincides with a shift in the types of infrastructure projects being funded now that are more focused on the energy sector and telecommunications (Myers 2020). Chinese companies play a key role in investment into LAC and construction projects are a key avenue of this engagement. Finally, as Myers (2022)

notes in an overview of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party China, China's economic growth has slowed down considerably in the last few years and so it lacks the capital to provide financing to the same level as it had in the prior decade, however this just means that China is being more strategic in its investments into sectors such as energy and information technology that it sees as necessary for its continued growth.

These projects but also bring with them increased person-to-person and company-to-person ties between China and LAC countries. This “going local” initiative is a multi-tiered approach that includes “Chinese government institutions, quasi-diplomatic actors, and commercial entities” that engage in ad-hoc relations at the local level (Myers 2020). These types of engagements are harder to track in financial flows but equally important in the web of transpacific relations that contribute to the China-LAC relations. Examples from investigations of the role of Chinese diaspora communities in forging local transpacific relations with China demonstrate how these initiatives could work such as Chinese merchants importing goods and incorporating them into Andean markets or Chinese Mexicans making the first moves to establish trade ties with mainland China (Müller 2018; Hearn 2016).

China-Mexico Relations in the AMLO Era

In 2013, the new leadership of Xi Jinping ushered in a renewed attempt of forging stronger diplomatic ties between the countries as an attempt to find a solution to these economic tensions. Ambassador Qiu Xiaoqi, the former ambassador of China to Mexico was integral to this effort in Mexico and instigated more formalized bilateral engagement between the national governments. In 2013 the China-Mexico relation was raised to the level of a “comprehensive strategic partnership” during a visit from President Xi Jinping and signed a declaration raising the partnership and also establish a High Level Business Group and further cooperation in

energy, mining, and infrastructure (The People's Republic of China 2013). This increased bilateral engagement allowed for the Chinese Development Bank, China Investment Corporation and the International Finance Corporation Asset Management Company, collaborated to form the International Financial Corporation's China-Mexico Fund with \$1.2 billion in capital in 2014 which has supported a telecommunications project and oil extraction company (Myers and Gallagher 2019).

The current president, AMLO was the first left-wing politician to win the presidency in Mexico. He has shaken up Mexican politics and seems to be heralding a second "pink wave" in Latin America. AMLO's campaign promises centered around being an alternative to the corrupt politicians of Mexico's elite and promoting state-led development and infrastructure programs that better the most impoverished (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020). Despite concerns of AMLO enacting sweeping economic changes, AMLO has not upended the neoliberal policies of Mexico and has not turned his back on cooperating with the US as was clear in the eventual negotiation and signing of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement as a replacement for NAFTA (E. Dussel Peters 2020b). Additionally, in the new agreement there is specific language prohibiting the partner countries from signing free trade agreements with "non-market economies", thus blocking Mexico from signing an FTA with China anytime soon (E. Dussel Peters 2020a).

Regardless, there were more opportunities for China to engage with Mexico at a bilateral level. At the beginning of the AMLO administration foreign ministers of China and Mexico had multiple meetings and committed to revamping lapsed aspects of this relation such as the Mexico-China Permanent Binational Commission which also reactivated other committees that focus on China-Mexico efforts on the economy, investments and which can lead to signing of new agreements on other issues such as tourism and technology (Aróstica and Granados 2021).

Mexico's former president Enrique Nieto and current president AMLO, both prioritized investment into infrastructure development of Mexico. This has led to three high-profile infrastructure projects in Mexico that have had Chinese involvement. This includes the high-speed train from Mexico City to Querétaro, the Chicoasén II dam project, and the Tren Maya project. Of these projects, only the Tren Maya project has continued, the other projects were plagued with accusations of corruption and drawn-out delays (E. Dussel Peters 2018a; Serrano Moreno, Telias, and Urdinez 2021).¹⁵ The Tren Maya project is a priority of the current Mexican president AMLO and listed in his ten prioritized programs (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020). The Mexican group Mota-Engil Mexico Consortium won the tender for part 1 of the Maya Train and the Chinese company, China Communications Construction Company is one of the partners for this project, however, this Chinese company's involvement in the project has not been widely advertised or promoted (Hernández 2020).

While there has been a dismal record for Chinese construction companies entering Mexico, Chinese corporations are a different story. Chinese technology companies such as Huawei and Tensei have seen success in entering the Mexican market; electronics seem to be the sector that China is replacing the US as the main exporter (E. Dussel Peters 2020b). However, these technology companies are some of the current players which are also opening headquarters and buying out factories along the northern border (Micheli and Carrillo 2016; Viveros 2017; Guerrero Vázquez 2018). Huawei is a prime example of a company which has rapidly entered the Mexican market, only beginning to sell smartphones in 2013 but by 2018 becoming

¹⁵The highspeed train project was originally bid on in 2014 and won by a consortium of five firms led by the China Railway Construction Corporation with part of their bid including significant financing from the China Export Import Bank. However due to a corruption scandal of President Nieto that involved his wife, his closest adviser and one of the bidding companies, Grupo Higa, the bidding process was stopped, then re-opened and then two weeks stopped indefinitely; this caused significant tension with China (Dussel Peters 2018a, 64). The Chicoasén II dam project has been less publicized but received more local pushback and after years of delays was cancelled and caused only more tensions between China and Mexico (Serrano Moreno, et al. 2021).

Mexico's main provider of telecommunications equipment and services (Saucedo 2019; Guerrero Vázquez 2018). Tijuana has also attracted multiple smaller businesses and individual entrepreneurs. In January 2020, an international consultancy group that represents a thousand Chinese companies was in talks with the Tijuana government of the possibility of opening an industrial park ("Mil Empresas Chinas Buscan Asentarse en Tijuana" 2020).

The bilateral government relations between China and Mexico while more formalized has remained contentious and so the “going local” approach of developing China-Mexico relations has remained important. These efforts are necessary when bilateral engagement is not as politically viable as is the case of Mexico. China's multi-tiered approach to international relations have allowed it to take advantage of these existing and newly formed transpacific ties to further the interests of the Chinese state or Chinese companies. For example, in 2019 Alibaba (a Chinese e-commerce platform) and the Guanajuato Foreign Trade Promotion Coordinator signed an agreement to have Alibaba provide training to entrepreneurs on e-commerce and digital sales so that they may eventually put their businesses on the Alibaba platform (Myers 2020). In Mexico, Chinese companies, investors, and diplomats must take a much more piecemeal and local-context specific approach to forging relations.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic (2019 – present) has been a watershed moment in increased bilateral engagement between China and Mexico, especially since Mexico was the 2020 CELAC Pro Tempore President and the priorities of that year's CELAC activity was anti-pandemic efforts. Even with this increased bilateral engagement and AMLO's seeming receptiveness to cooperation with China, the importance of the multi-tiered approach to China-Mexico relations will remain to be important.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Nicholas D., and Victor D. Cha. 2017. "The Case of the Pivot to Asia: System Effects and the Origins of Strategy." *Political Science Quarterly* (Wiley-Blackwell) 132 (4): 595-617. <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12703>.
- Araujo, Ignacio, and Ernesto Bohoslavsky. 2020. "The Circuits of Anti-Communist Repression between Asia and Latin America during the Second Cold War: Paraguay and the World Anti-Communist League." *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe* 31 (1): 105-125. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=b7h&AN=144799910&site=eds-live>.
- Araujo, Gabriel, and Anthony Boadle. 2023. "Brazil's Lula proposes Mercosur trade deal with China after EU accord." *Reuters*, January 25, 2023. Accessed March 16, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-lula-eyes-trade-deal-between-mercotur-china-2023-01-25/>.
- Aróstica, Pamela, and Ulises Granados. 2021. Alcances de una Asociación Estratégica Integral: China y el Caso de México. *REDCAEM*.
- Baitenmann, Helga. 2005. "Counting on State Subjects: State Formation and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Mexico." In *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Christian; Nustad Krohn-Hansen, Knut, 292-363. London, UK: Pluto.
- Bersch, Katherine, and Riitta-Ilona Koivumaeki. 2019. "Making Inroads: Infrastructure, State Capacity, and Chinese Dominance in Latin American Development." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 54 (3): 323-345. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-019-09282-5>.
- Campos, Carlos Oliva, and Gary Prevost. 2019. "The Trump Administration In Latin America: Continuity And Change." *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 11 (1): 13-23. <https://doi.org/10.13169/intejcubastud.11.1.0013>.
- Chang, Jason Oliver. 2017. *Chino : Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880-1940*. Book. *Asian American Experience*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Collier, George, and Jane Collier. 2005. "The Zapatista Rebellion in the Context of Globalization." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 32 (3/4): 450-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150500266794>.
- Cornejo, Romer, Francisco Javier Haro Navejas, and José Luis León-Manríquez. 2013. "Trade Issues and Beyond: Mexican Perceptions on Contemporary China." *Latin American Policy* 4 (1): 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12005>.
- Creutzfeldt, Benjamin. 2018. China's Engagement with Regional Actors: The Pacific Alliance. *The Wilson Center*.

- Cushman, Gregory T. 2013. *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dag, Mossige. 2013. *Mexico's Left: The Paradox of the PRD*. Book. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- de Oliveira, Henrique Altemani. 2016. "Argentina and Brazil: Toward an Atlantic Strategy?" In *Latin America and the Asian Giants : Evolving Ties with China and India*, edited by Roett Riordan and Paz Guadalupe, 267-294. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Dehart, Monica. 2015. "Costa Rica's Chinatown: The Art of Being Global in the Age of China." *City & Society* 27 (2): 183-207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ciso.12063>.
- . 2018. "Chino Tico Routes and Repertoires: Cultivating Chineseness and Entrepreneurism for a New Era of Trans-Pacific Relations." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 23 (1): 74-93. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/jlca.12273>.
- . 2021. *Transpacific Developments : The Politics of Multiple Chinas in Central America*. Book. Ithaca [New York]: Cornell University Press.
- Delgado, Grace. 2012. *Making the Chinese Mexican : Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Book. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Devlin, Robert. 2008. "China's Economic Rise." *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United State*, edited by Riordan; Guadalupe Paz Roett, 111-147. Washington, D.C. : Brookings Institution Press.
- Dreyer, June Teufel. 2005. "From China With Love: P.R.C. Overtures in Latin America." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 12 (2): 85-98. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.brownjwa12.34&site=eds-live>.
- Duncan, Robert H. 1994. "The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74 (4): 615-647. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2517494>. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2517494>.
- Dussel Peters, Enrique. 2018a. "Chinese Infrastructure Projects in Mexico: General Context and Two Case Studies." In *Building Development for a New Era: China's Infrastructure Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Mexico: University of Pittsburg and Red Academica de America Latina y el Caribe sobre China.
- . 2020a. "China's Recent Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean: Current Conditions and Challenges." *China Currents* 19 (1). <https://www.chinacenter.net/2020/china-currents/19-1/chinas-recent-engagement-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-current-conditions-and-challenges/>.

- . 2020b. "The New Triangular Relationship between China, the United States, and Mexico: Implications for Intra-NAFTA Trade." *The International Trade Journal* 34 (1): 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853908.2019.1696256>.
- Dussel Peters, Enrique; Armony, Ariel C.; Cui, Shoujun;, ed. 2018b. *Building Development for a New Era: China's Infrastructure Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Mexico: University of Pittsburg and Red Academica de America Latina y el Caribe sobre China.
- Espiritu, Yen Le; Lowe, Lisa; Yoneyama, Lisa. 2018. "Transpacific Entanglements." *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials. New York: Fordham University.
- Foweraker, Joe. 2001. "Grassroots Movements and Political Activism in Latin America: A Critical Comparison of Chile and Brazil." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33 (4): 839-865. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.3653766&site=eds-live>.
- Gallagher, K. P., and Enrique Dussel Peters. 2013. "China's Economic Effects on the U.S.-Mexico Trade Relationship: Towards a New Triangular Relationship? ." In *China and the New Triangular Relationships in the Americas: China and the Future of U.S.-Mexico Relations*, edited by Enrique; Hearn Dussel Peters, Adrian H.; Shaiken, Harley. Mexico: Center for Latin American Studies, University of Miami; Center for Latin American Studies, University of California, Berkley; Centro de Estudios China-Mexico, Facultad de Economia, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.
- Gallagher, Kevin P. 2016. *The China Triangle : Latin America's China Boom and the Fate of the Washington Consensus*. Book. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gallagher, Kevin P. , and Margaret Myers. 2022. *China-Latin America Finance Database*. Washington: Inter-American Dialogue.
- Gallagher, Kevin P., and Amos Irwin. 2015. "China's Economic Statecraft in Latin America: Evidence from China's Policy Banks." *Pacific Affairs* 88 (1): 99-121. <https://doi.org/10.5509/201588199>.
- Galway, Matthew. 2021. "Who Are Our Friends? Maoist Cultural Diplomacy and the Origins of the People's Republic of China's Global Turn." *Made in China* 6 (2): 110-125. <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2021/12/01/who-are-our-friends-%E2%80%A8maoist-cultural-diplomacy-and-the-origins-of-the-peoples-republic-of-chinas-global-turn/>.
- Gandásegui, Marco A. 2011. "President Obama, the Crisis, and Latin America." *Latin American Perspectives* 38 (4): 109-121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X11407609>.
- Gill, Lesley. 2004. *The School of the Americas : Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*. Book. *American encounters/global interactions*: Duke University Press.

- Goldfajn, Ilan, Lorenza Martínez, and Rodrigo O. Valdés. 2021. "Washington Consensus in Latin America: From Raw Model to Straw Man." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 35 (3): 109-132. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27041217>.
- Gonzalez, Fredy. 2017. *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico*. University of California Press.
- González-Vicente, R. 2013. "Development Dynamics of Chinese Resource-Based Investment in Peru and Ecuador." *Latin American Politics and Society* 55 (1): 46-72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2013.00183.x>.
- Gonzalez-Vicente, Ruben. 2012. "Mapping Chinese mining investment in Latin America: politics or market?" *From the Great Wall to the New World: China and Latin America in the 21st century*, edited by Julia C.; Armony Strauss, Ariel C., 35-54. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- Gransow, Bettina. 2015. "Chinese Infrastructure Investment in Latin America-An Assessment of Strategies, Actors, and Risks." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20 (3): 267-287. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS901499&site=eds-live>.
- Grijalva, Aidé. 2014. "Agroindustria y algodón en el Valle de Mexicali. La Compañía Industrial Jabonera del Pacifico." *Estudios Fronterizos* 15: 11-42. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A448905923/AONE?u=msu_main&sid=AONE&xid=80eb57e8.
- Guerrero Vázquez, René Andrei. 2018. "Las Multinacionales Chinas y Sus Estrategias de Innovación en México." Masters Desarrollo Regional, Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
- Ha, Louisa, Ke Guo, and Peiqin Chen. 2022. "Mobilising Public Support for the U.S. China-Trade War: A Comparison of U.S. and Chinese News Media." *Journal of International Communication* 28 (2): 188-205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2022.2105926>.
- Hearn, Adrian H. 2016. *Diaspora and Trust: Cuba, Mexico, and the Rise of China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hernández, Pablo. 2020. "Chinese-backed Mayan Train Chugs Ahead Despite Environmental Fears." *Diálogo China*, 2020. Accessed March 17, 2023. <https://dialogochino.net/en/infrastructure/36609-mayan-train-advances-with-chinese-support-environment-fears/>.
- Hickman, Christopher. 2013. *The Kennedy Administration's Alliance for Progress and the Burdens of the Marshall Plan*. Vol. 5.
- Hogenboom, Barbara. 2012. "Depoliticized and Repoliticized Minerals in Latin America." *Journal of Developing Societies* 28 (2): 133-158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X12448755>.

- . 2014. "Latin America and China's Transnationalizing Oil Industry: A Political Economy Assessment of New Relations." *Perspectives on Global Development & Technology* 13 (5/6): 626-647. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691497-12341321>.
- Horace, A. Bartilow. 2019. *Drug War Pathologies : Embedded Corporatism and U.S. Drug Enforcement in the Americas*. Book. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hu-Dehart, Evelyn. 1989. "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers: The Chinese of Mexico and Peru (1849–1930)." *Amerasia Journal* 15 (2): 91-116. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.15.2.b2r425125446h835>.
- . 2002. "Huagong And Huashang: The Chinese as Laborers and Merchants in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Amerasia Journal* 28 (2): 64-90. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS296020&site=eds-live>.
- . 2007. "Latin America in Asia-Pacific Perspective." *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions*, edited by Rhacel; Siu Parrenas, Lok C., 29-62. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hufbauer, Gary Clyde, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Diana Orejas. 2005. *NAFTA Revisited : Achievements and Challenges*. Washington, United States: Peterson Institute for International Economics.
- Jason, M. Colby. 2011. *The Business of Empire : United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America*. Book. *The United States in the World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Jenkins, Rhys. 2018. "China's Economic Impacts on Latin America." In *How China is Reshaping the Global Economy*, 271-303. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2022. "China's Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America: What has Changed?" *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 51 (1): 13-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026211047871>.
- Jian, Gao. 2021. "Causing Troubles Elsewhere: The Shining Path and Its International Networks, 1980-1993." *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (1): 49-75. <https://doi.org/10.22945/ajlas.2021.34.1.49>.
- Kaplan, Stephen B. 2016. "Banking unconditionally: the political economy of Chinese finance in Latin America." *Review Of International Political Economy* 23 (4): 643-676. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2016.1216005>.
- Kelly, Thomas. 2001. "Neoliberal Reforms and Rural Poverty." *Latin American Perspectives* 28 (3): 84-103. <https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/stable/3185150>
- Ko, Ñusta Carranza. 2017. "Comparing the Effect of Chinese and Japanese Migration Experiences on Peruvian National Identity." *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 13 (1): 70-93. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17932548-12341344>.

- Kroshus Medina, Laurie. 1998. "The Impact of Free-Trade Initiatives on the Caribbean Basin: From Democracy to Efficiency in Belize." *Latin American Perspectives* 25 (5): 27-49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x9802500503>.
- Kurlantzick, Joshua. 2006. "China's Latin Leap Forward." *World Policy Journal* 23 (3): 33-41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40210030>.
- Lausent-Herrera, Isabelle. 2011. "The Chinatown in Peru and the Changing Peruvian Chinese Community(ies)." *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 7 (1): 69-113. <https://doi.org/10.1163/179325411X565416>.
- Lee, Ana Paulina. 2018. *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory*. Book. Stanford University Press.
- Lee, Erika. 2007. "The 'Yellow Peril' and Asian Exclusion in the Americas." *Pacific Historical Review* 76 (4): 537-562. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS396984&site=eds-live>.
- . 2010. "The Chinese Are Coming. How Can We Stop Them? Chinese Exclusion and the Origins of American Gatekeeping." *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, edited by Jean Yu-Wen; Chen Shen Wu, Thomas C., 143-167. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press.
- . 2015. *The Making of Asian America: A History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Simon & Schuster.
- Lehoczki, Bernadett. 2015. "Relations Between China and Latin America: Inter-Regionalism Beyond the Triad." *Society and Economy* 37 (3): 379-402. <https://doi.org/10.1556/204.2015.37.3.4>.
- Leogrande, William M. 2007. "A Poverty of Imagination: George W. Bush's Policy in Latin America." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39 (2): 355-385. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.4491814&site=eds-live>.
- Leon-Manriquez, Jose Luis. 2016. "Power Vacuum or Hegemonic Continuity?: The United States, Latin America, and the "Chinese Factor" after the Cold War." *World Affairs* 179 (3): 59-81. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.wrldaf179.25&site=eds-live>.
- Lim, Julian. 2010. "Chinos and Paisanos: Chinese Mexican Relations in the Borderlands." *Pacific Historical Review* 79 (1): 50-85. <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2010.79.1.50>.
- Liu, Yi, and Laixun Zhao. 2017. "Introduction." In *Sino-Mexican Trade Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*, 1-6. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

- López, Kathleen M. 2013. *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*. Book. University of North Carolina Press.
- Lopez, Marco Antonio Samaniego. 2015. "Empresas de Extranjeros Oficialmente Mexicanas en la Frontera. Significado e Implicaciones en Torno a la Cuenca Internacional Rio Colorado." *Estudios Mexicanos* 31 (1): 48-87.
www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/msem.2015.31.1.48.
- Manrique, Linnete. 2016. "Dreaming of a Cosmic Race: José Vasconcelos and the Politics of Race in Mexico, 1920s–1930s." *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 3 (1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2016.1218316>.
- Margheritis, Ana, and Anthony Pereira. 2007. "The Neoliberal Turn in Latin America: The Cycle of Ideas and the Search for an Alternative." *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (3): 25-48.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X07300587>.
- Martin, James W. 2013. *Becoming Banana Cowboys: White-Collar Masculinity, the United Fruit Company and Tropical Empire in Early Twentieth-Century Latin America*.
- Martinez, Hugo de Zela. 2013. "The Organization of American States and its Quest for Democracy in the Americas." *Yale Journal of International Affairs* 8 (2): 23-36.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.yaljoina8.30&site=eds-live>.
- Mazza, Jacqueline. 2016. "Migration in a Mobile Age: Perspectives from China, India, and the Americas." In *Latin America and the Asian Giants : Evolving Ties with China and India*, edited by Roett Riordan and Paz Guadalupe, 183-204. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Micheli, Jordy, and Jorge Carrillo. 2016. "Huawei: Trayectoria global y estrategia para México de una empresa multinacional china./The Globalization Strategy of a Chinese Multinational: Huawei in Mexico." *Frontera Norte* 28 (56): 35-58.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=117697590&site=ehost-live>.
- "Mil Empresas Chinas Buscan Asentarse en Tijuana." 2020. *Agencia Fronteriza de Noticias*, 2020. Accessed February 20, 2020.
http://www.afntijuana.info/informacion_general/102938_mil_empresas_chinas_buscan_asentarse_en_tijuana.
- Miller, Marilyn Grace. 2004. *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Miyake, Lika C. 2002. "Forsaken and Forgotten: the U.S. Internment of Japanese Peruvians during World War II." *Asian Law Journal* 9 (1): 163-193.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS469556&site=eds-live>.

- Müller, Juliane. 2018. "Andean–Pacific Commerce and Credit: Bolivian Traders, Asian Migrant Businesses, and International Manufacturers in the Regional Economy." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 23 (1): 18-36.
<https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/jlca.12328>.
- Myers, Margaret. 2018. "China's Belt and Road Initiative: What Role for Latin America?" *Journal of Latin American Geography* 17 (2): 239-243.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/44861544>.
- . Dec. 2020 2020. *Going Local: An Assessment of China's Administrative-Level Activity in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Inter-American Dialogue (Florida International University; The Dialogue).
- Myers, Margaret, and Kevin P. Gallagher. 2019. *Scaling Back: Chinese Development Finance in LAC, 2019*. Washington: The Inter-American Dialogue.
- Neier, Aryeh. 1989. "Human Rights in the Reagan Era: Acceptance in Principle." *Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Science* 506: 30-41.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716289506001004>.
- Noel, Maurer, and Yu Carlos. 2011. *The Big Ditch : How America Took, Built, Ran, and Ultimately Gave Away the Panama Canal*. Book. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Oliveira, Gustavo de L. T., and Margaret Myers. 2021. "The Tenuous Co-Production of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Brazil and Latin America." *Journal of Contemporary China* 30 (129): 481-499. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1827358>.
- Palacios, Luisa. 2008. "Latin America as China's Energy Supplier." *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United States*, edited by Riordan; Paz Roett, Guadalupe, 170-190. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Paz, Gonzalo S. . 2012. "China, the United States and hegemonic challenges in Latin America: an overview and some lessons from previous instances of hegemonic challenge in the region." *From the Great Wall to the New World: China and Latin America in the 21st century*, edited by Julia C.; Armony Strauss, Ariel C. , 18-34. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- Portada III, Robert A., Steve B. Lem, and Uttam Paudel. 2020. "The Final Frontier: China, Taiwan, and the United States in Strategic Competition for Central America." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 25 (4): 551-573. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09682-8>.
- Roett, Riordan, and Guadalupe Paz. 2008. *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere : Implications for Latin America and the United States*. Washington DC, United States: Brookings Institution Press.
- . 2016. *Latin America and the Asian Giants : Evolving Ties with China and India*. Book. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

- Ruckert, Arne, Laura Macdonald, and Kristina R. Proulx. 2017. "Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: A Conceptual Review." *Third World Quarterly* 38 (7): 1583-1602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1259558>.
- Saucedo, César 2019. "Fundador de Huawei Respalda a AMLO en su Plan de Dar Internet a la Población." *La Neta Noticias*, December 14, 2019, 2019. Accessed February 20, 2020. <https://www.lanetanoticias.com/politica/490230/fundador-de-huawei-respalda-a-amlo-en-su-plan-de-dar-internet-a-la-poblacion>.
- Scarfi, Juan Pablo. 2016. "In the Name of the Americas : The Pan-American Redefinition of the Monroe Doctrine and the Emerging Language of American International Law in the Western Hemisphere, 1898-1933." *Diplomatic History* 40 (2): 189-218. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.26376746&site=eds-live>.
- Seijas, Tatiana. 2016. "Asian migrations to Latin America in the Pacific World, 16th-19th centuries." *History Compass* 14 (12): 573-581. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12364>.
- Serrano Moreno, Juan Enrique, Diego Telias, and Francisco Urdinez. 2021. "Deconstructing the Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America." *Asian Education and Development Studies* 10 (3): 337-347. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-01-2020-0021>.
- Shah, Nayan. 2010. "Public Health and the Mapping of Chinatown." *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, edited by Jean Yu-Wen; Chen Shen Wu, Thomas C., 168-192. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press.
- Shefner, Jon, and Julie Stewart. 2011. "Neoliberalism, Grievances and Democratization: An Exploration of the Role of Material Hardships in Shaping Mexico's Democratic Transition." *Journal of World System Research* 17 (2): 353-378. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=apn&AN=ALTP884367&site=eds-live>.
- Sheppard, Randal. 2011. "Nationalism, Economic Crisis and 'Realistic Revolution' in 1980s Mexico." *Nations & Nationalism* 17 (3): 500-519. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00472.x>.
- Shixue, Liang. 2008. "The Chinese Foreign Policy Perspective." *China's expansion into the western hemisphere: implications for Latin America and the United States*, edited by Riordan; Guadalupe Paz Roett, 27-43. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Singh, Ajit. 2021. "The Myth of 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy' and Realities of Chinese Development Finance." *Third World Quarterly* 42 (2): 239-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1807318>.
- Siu, Lok. 2005. *Memories Of A Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship Of Chinese In Panama*. Book. Stanford University Press.

- Stahler-Sholk, Richard, and Harry E. Vanden. 2010. "A Second Look at Latin American Social Movements: Globalizing Resistance to the Neoliberal Paradigm." *Latin American Perspectives* 38 (1): 5-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X10384204>.
- Strauss, J.C., and A.C. Armony. 2012. *From the Great Wall to the New World: Volume 11: China and Latin America in the 21st Century*. Cambridge University Press.
- "Taiwan Recalls Ambassador as Honduras Switches Ties to China." 2023. *The Associated Press*, 2023.
- The People's Republic of China, PRC. 2008. China's Policy on Latin America and the Caribbean edited by The State Council. Beijing, China: www.gov.cn.
- . 2013. China and Mexico. edited by Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People's Republic of China.
- , July 18, 2014, 2014, "Xi Jinping Attends China-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit and Delivers Keynote Speech, Comprehensively Expounding China's Policies and Propositions Toward Latin America, Announcing Establishment of China-Latin America Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership of Equality, Mutual Benefit and Common Development, and Establishment of China-CELAC Forum," Report of Activities, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/3376_665447/3448_664958/3450_664962/201407/t20140722_594131.html.
- . 2016. Basic Information about China-CELAC Forum. edited by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China Department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs.
- Tokatlian, Juan G. 2008. "A View from Latin America." *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United States*, edited by Riordan; Guadalupe Paz Roett, 59-89. Washington, DC: Bookings Institute Press.
- Topik, Steven. 2005. "The Revolution, the State, and Economic Development in Mexico." *History Compass* 3 (1): 1-36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2005.00117.x>.
- Urdinez, Francisco, Fernando Mouron, Luis L. Schenoni, and Amancio J. de Oliveira. 2016. "Chinese Economic Statecraft and U.S. Hegemony in Latin America: An Empirical Analysis, 2003–2014." *Latin American Politics and Society* 58 (4): 3-30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/laps.12000>.
- Vadell, Javier. 2022. "China's Bilateral and Minilateral Relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean: The Case of China–CELAC Forum." *Area Development & Policy* 7 (2): 187-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2021.1974907>.
- Vanderbush, Walt. 2011. "Good Neighbor Imperialism." *New Politics* 13 (3): 40-48. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pwh&AN=62662457&site=eds-live>.

- Vidal, Gregorio. 2018. "Latin America: Limits to Alternative Economic Policies." *International Journal of Political Economy* 47 (1): 69-82.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08911916.2018.1449608>.
- Villanueva Ulfgard, R., and C. Villanueva. 2020. "The Power to Transform? Mexico's 'Fourth Transformation' under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador." *Globalizations* 17 (6): 1027-1042-1042. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1718846>.
- Viveros, Jorge Carrillo; Thirión, Jordy Micheli. 2017. "Huawei y Foxconn: Casos Pioneros de la Nueva Internacionalización China y su Impacto Regional en México." *Estudios Sociales* 27 (50). <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.24836/es.v27i50.409>.
- Winkler, Stephanie Christine, and Björn Jerdén. 2023. "Us Foreign Policy Elites and the Great Rejuvenation of the Ideological China Threat: The Role of Rhetoric and the Ideologization of Geopolitical Threats." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26 (1): 159-184. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-022-00288-6>.
- Wise, Carol. 2012. "Tratados de Libre Comercio al Estilo Chino: los TLC Chile-China y Peru-China." *Apuntes* (71): 161.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgii&AN=edsgcl.370395363&site=eds-live>.
- Wise, Carol, and Victoria Chonn Ching. 2018. "Conceptualizing China–Latin America relations in the twenty-first century: the boom, the bust, and the aftermath." *The Pacific Review* 31 (5): 553-572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1408675>.
- Wise, Carol, and Riordan Roett. 2003. *Post-stabilization politics in Latin America. [electronic resource] : competition, transition, collapse*. Book. Brookings Institution Press.
- Yang, Zhimin. 2015. "The Roles Played by Three Categories of Actors in China's Engagement in Latin America to Develop Economic Ties with the Region." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20 (3): 289-300.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS901500&site=eds-live>.

CHAPTER 3: RECONFIGURING BRAND CHINA IN MEXICO

A key form of China's current engagement with Latin American and Caribbean countries is to foment positive diplomatic relations and bilateral government arrangements. The primary vehicles for this effort are the Chinese diplomats who receive rigorous training before they deploy abroad to translate and transmit the message of China's brand in foreign countries to further the priorities of the Communist Party of China (CPC). In these efforts, the Chinese diplomats engage directly with the heads of state of different countries who may have different priorities or motives for engaging with China.

Mexico is one of the top priorities for China in Latin America that, along with Brazil, receives the most well-trained and high-ranking diplomacy officials (Creutzfeldt 2023). In 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) won the Mexican presidential election under the banner of a new political party and with populist support based on his platform of rejecting the norms of Mexican politics and prioritizing Mexico's development and alleviation of poverty. At the same time, the senior diplomat Ambassador Qiu Xiaqi had already been the Chinese Ambassador to Mexico since 2013 and had reinvigorated the public presence of the Chinese embassy and formalized more platforms for bilateral governmental cooperation between China and Mexico. While López Obrador was promising a new vision for Mexico's future, Ambassador Qiu Xiaqi and his successor Ambassador Zhu Qingqiao were promoting a new era of China-Mexico relations.

In this chapter I use thematic discourse analysis to compare the narratives on China and China-Mexico relations used in public-facing discourse by Chinese ambassadors to Mexico to those used by the Mexican president between the dates of Dec 1, 2018, to December 31, 2020. Despite sharing positive views of China-Mexico relations, their framing of these relations in their

public discourse differed to suit their own political goals in Mexico. The Chinese ambassadors predictably touted the narratives and priorities of the CPC in their public discourse and used these opportunities to push the curated brand of China with emphasis on aspects of this relationship that may be of importance for the Mexican public. Interestingly however, AMLO did not refute these branded narratives on China, rather he reframed them to suit his political agenda and promote his vision of Mexico's future. For AMLO, China was not only a valuable partner with useable resources of capital and knowledge that AMLO needed to realize his campaign promises while also functioning as a symbol for the viability of successful development and modernity outside of western norms.

Who is the Spokesperson of China in Mexico?

Diplomats are integral actors in the foreign relations efforts of China. Once Xi Jinping became the leader of China in 2012, there was a marked shift in the role of diplomats under his slogan of "Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics" (Iida 2020; Creutzfeldt 2023). Rather than sticking to a more neutral and hands-off approach, this new outward drive through diplomacy encouraged diplomats to strategically deal with external issues in their countries to promote stability and peace that would facilitate China's developmental interests abroad (Creutzfeldt 2023). These new paradigms of Xi's diplomatic focus have led to some diplomats displaying a new style of more aggressive "wolf diplomacy", which has led some Chinese diplomats to use provocative language and even insults in their public talks and social media (Dai and Luqiu 2022). However, the diplomats of Latin America do not seem to be following these approaches and instead leverage their regional and language knowledge, charismatic demeanor, business connections and new public communication strategies to interact with the leaders and public of their assigned country (Martin 2021; Creutzfeldt 2023). Benjamin

Creutzfeldt (2023) found in an analysis of all the Chinese diplomats in Latin America from 1990 to 2020 that the Chinese diplomats stationed throughout Latin America have become more regionally specialized in Latin America and received training at China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for at least two years and in the Department of Latin American affairs before deploying to the region.

China has stationed more senior diplomats in Mexico due to its importance in the region (71, Creutzfeldt 2023). The ambassador to Mexico from China was Qiu Xiaoqi from 2013-2019 and until earlier this year was Zhu Qingqiao (2019-2023). Ambassador Qiu's career followed the pattern of gaining extensive regional knowledge and leveraging this in his diplomacy efforts; he was the Chinese ambassador in Bolivia (1996-98), Andorra and Spain (2003-08), Brazil (2009-2011) and then Mexico. Once Ambassador Qiu left his post in Mexico, he was promoted to the position of Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Latin American Affairs.

While in Mexico, Ambassador Qiu fundamentally changed the dynamics of bilateral relations between the countries. Upon his departure he received Mexico's highest award given to foreign citizens the Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle. In the award speech Ambassador Qiu is credited with a slew of achievements including: personally visiting every state of Mexico, increasing the influx of tourists, opening flights between Guangzhou-Vancouver-Mexico City and Beijing-Tijuana-Mexico City, organizing art and cultural events along with opening the Cultural Center of China in Mexico, encouraging the opening of the Industry and Commerce Bank of China and the Bank of China in Mexico, and revitalizing the Permanent Binational Commission (Andrés Manuel López Obrador 2019) .

Ambassador Zhu Qingqiao spent less of his career posted in the region but had consistent training at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Department of Latin America and Caribbean

Affairs. He was the Deputy Director General of the department in 2007 until 2009 and then the Director General in 2014. He was posted in Brazil from 1996-2003 as an attaché, as the Minister Counselor (2009-2014), and was just appointed as the Ambassador to Brazil (The People's Republic of China 2023). He spent most of his time as Ambassador to Mexico collaborating with the Mexican government and Chinese companies to further anti-pandemic efforts.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador: A New Leader Requires New Solutions

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, AMLO, is a left-wing politician of Mexico who won the 2018 national presidential election for the first time in 2018 after two prior failed runs. He won with 53% of the votes and with over 30 million votes, on a leftist, populist platform and new political party, Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (MORENA) (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020). The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has effectively ruled Mexico under single party rule for 70 years until the 2000 presidential win of Vincente Fox for the conservative party of Partido Acción Nacional. AMLO has been a long-standing leader in the leftist movement, first with the Partido de la Revolución Democrática, which was founded in response to suspicions of a corrupt 1988 presidential election (Dag 2013).

With this coalition AMLO successfully won the governorship of Mexico City in 2000 during which he implemented a slew of policies that aimed to increase social programs for vulnerable populations and increased funding into development and infrastructure of the city (Macip 2018). In this position AMLO began making a name for himself on the political scene and despite a brief political scandal, left the Mayoral office with high approval ratings and became a national political figure (Macip 2018). For the 2006 election, AMLO presented himself as left-wing opponent to the well-worn right-wing politics and policies of the PRI party, an election he narrowly lost and he refused to concede defeat (Macip 2018). After a second failed

run on a more moderate platform in 2012, AMLO founded MORENA, as a civil association that incorporated his political brand messaging of championing the people over politics. In 2014 it was officially registered as a political party and became the platform for his successful presidential campaign (Bolívar Meza 2017).

This was a breaking point in the politics of Mexico; decades of corruption, continued poverty and inequality, violence and impunity and underdevelopment had eroded the public trust. AMLO's campaign in 2018 capitalized on this public sentiment and used slogans such as "MORENA is Mexico's hope" and "Together We Will Make History" which framed his intentions as breaking with the past and bringing about real change (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020). A discursive cornerstone of AMLO's campaign was a promise for a Fourth Transition that reframed the past of Mexico's political history into three prior eras transformation and envision AMLO's presidency as the next era of change.¹⁶ He promoted this fourth transition using the slogan of "primacy of politics over economics"; AMLO promised that he would root out the corruption of Mexican politics that he viewed as based in the neoliberal economic logics dominating Mexican political values (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020).¹⁷ It is with this platform and a slew of policies that promised direct benefits to the poor and increased funding of social programs and infrastructure projects that would prioritize the long-disenfranchised masses that AMLO was successful. These policies went against the neoliberal norms of past presidents and therefore AMLO's political brand was one that would bring with it a true transformation and a new era in Mexico.

¹⁶The other eras were Mexico's independence in 1810, Benito Juárez's rule and the set of Reform Laws that separated church and state (1858-1861) and finally the era that ended the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917).

¹⁷Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020 break down the inconsistency between this rhetoric on the campaign trail and real application of policies in the first years of AMLO's presidency. They conclude that, "AMLO does not seek to 're-embed' or 'rein in' market forces but rather symbolically confers more powers onto the state against the imperative of neoliberalism."

Mexico's Turn Towards China under the AMLO Administration

In the context of AMLO's decades long political career of cultivating the image of himself as a leader of the people, the Presidency of Donald Trump in the United States and his anti-Mexican campaign and presidential rhetoric only bolstered AMLO's anti-establishment image. In the 2016 US elections, Donald Trump ran his own populist campaign in the US with promises of tighter border control and limiting immigration that painted the Mexican government as subservient to US interests and Mexican people as a menace to American citizens (Ahmed 2020). In the lead up to the 2018 Mexican election, AMLO gave a campaign speech in Los Angeles in which he denounced Trump's anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant rhetoric but closed with a promise of rooting out the corruption in Mexico so not so many would have to immigrate in the first place (Andrés Manuel López Obrador 2017).

Under the Trump Presidency (2016-2020), US relations with China, while always contentious, were reaching new heights of antagonism. Specifically, Trump initiated a series of tariffs and levies on Chinese goods that escalated to a trade war between the world economic powers. This contention actually bolstered the Mexican economy and Mexico replaced China as the US's primary trade partner for the first time since 2005 (Kiernan 2019). At the same time, negotiations on the US-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement revved up tensions between the US and Mexico even more, with Mexican officials using the promise of China as leverage (Dussel Peters 2020). In this context, China has come to signify both the United States' main antagonist and a potential counterweight to the unbalanced relations between the US and Mexico.

AMLO highlighted China's key role in the economic diversification of Mexico and called for deeper trade relations at the beginning of his presidency (Graham 2019). AMLO and his cabinet have indicated in press conferences that Mexico is looking to diversify its sources of

investment and partners in trade which has included China. Despite this clear increased engagement with China, in November 2021 at the North American Leader's summit, López Obrador called for greater economic integration between the US, Mexico, and Canada to stop the "Asian giant" especially in relation to China's commercial and production power (AFP 2021). In the triangular relations between the US and China, AMLO is rhetorically shifting his alliances to suit his specific economic and political goals but without the drastic actions that his campaign portended. In fact, once elected, despite his earlier speech admonishing Trump's anti-Mexico rhetoric, AMLO has tread lightly in his discourse towards to the United States and its president so as to not worsen relations (Ahmed 2020).

Comparing Priorities for China-Mexico Relations

For this analysis I first took a textual approach in which I examined the publicly available discourse from both parties on their views of China and China-Mexico relations. For AMLO and his cabinet, I collected the transcripts of their daily press conferences and speeches.¹⁸ The Embassy of the People's Republic of China has a website that has a section dedicated to press releases and any news on the activities of the Ambassador to Mexico which I pulled every post within my given timeframe.¹⁹ The corpus I created began with the start of AMLO's presidency, December 1, 2018, and ended with December 31, 2020. Within these parameters, I got 415 unique documents. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

I open coded the documents first to identify and group the different topics mentioned in relation to China. The topics covered were varied such as China's role as a world power, specific projects or events involving China in Mexico, China's moniker as the factory of the world, and

¹⁸These daily press conferences, called La Mañanera, were started under AMLO's presidency to communicate directly to the Mexican populace on the daily and play into his image of being a President of the people. They are archived on <https://presidente.gob.mx/sala-de-prensa/>.

¹⁹ <http://mx.china-embassy.org/esp/>

comparisons of China and Mexico's ancient histories. I then grouped and compared these subthemes under the three sides of the China-Mexico relationship of government relations, economic relations, and cultural relations. I had originally grouped China-Mexico infrastructure and development and COVID-19 pandemic response as separate themes but within this discussion have grouped the first under China-Mexico economic relations and COVID-19 response under China-Mexico government relations. The other main theme was describing China as a nation state not in direct relation to Mexico in particular. For example, when AMLO would mention a list of countries participating in an event or when the Chinese diplomats talked about China's specific approach to foreign relations.

Overall, I found that both the diplomats and AMLO prioritized the economic aspect of the China-Mexico relation. This corresponds with the efforts of Ambassador Qiu to increase economic and government relations between the countries. For AMLO, economic and development reforms are a key priority in which working with China could help.

Figure 1. Thematic Code Distribution for AMLO

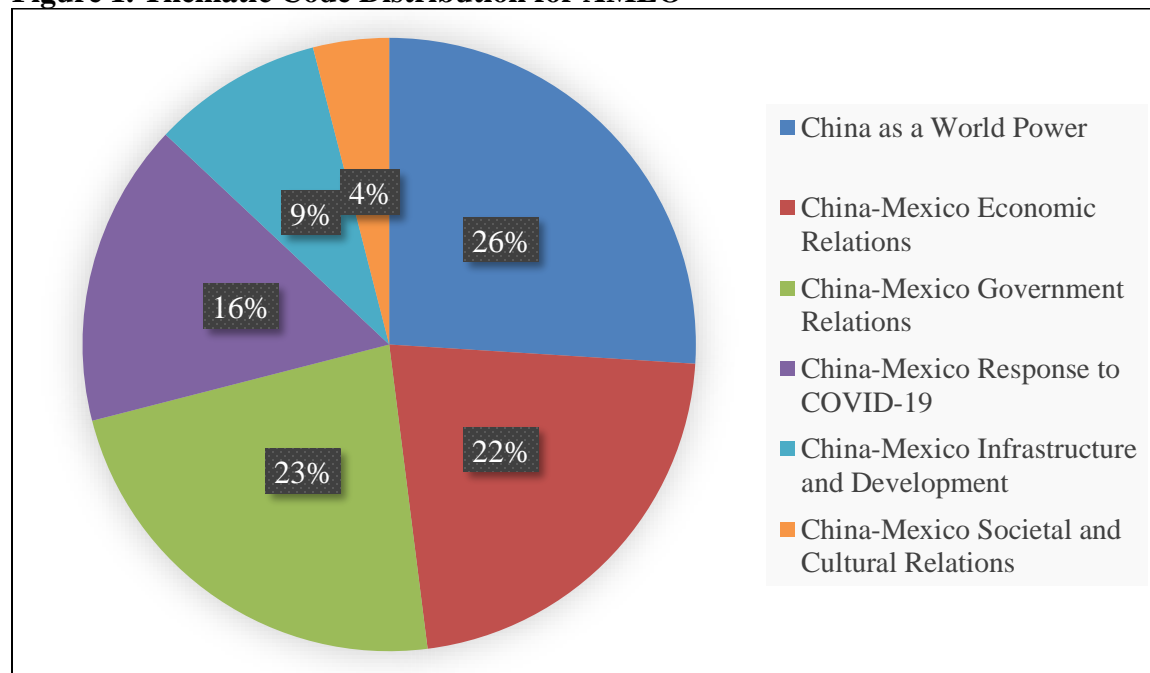
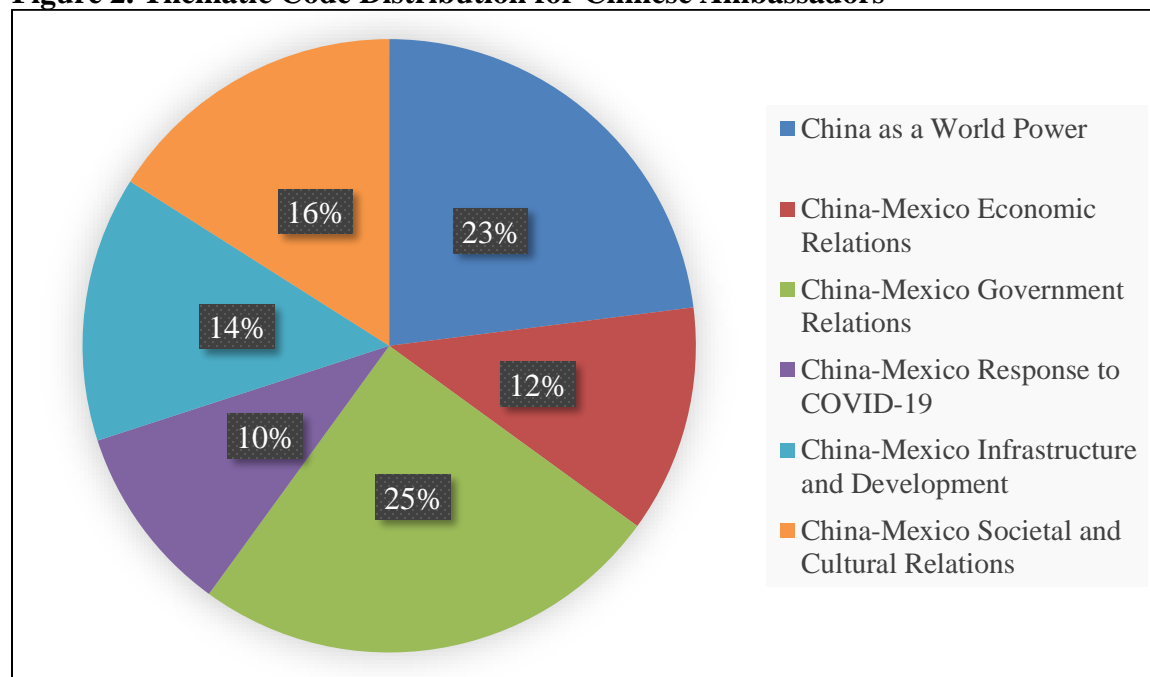


Figure 2. Thematic Code Distribution for Chinese Ambassadors



The Chinese officials, in line with China's government approaches to foreign relations emphasized the importance of government relations both on the national and subnational stage and promoted Chinese cultural events that offered educational opportunities for Mexican citizens about Chinese culture and the country. The diplomats also used these forums to highlight China's role on the global stage as a leader. Importantly, while the core narratives put forth by the Chinese diplomats aligned with China's brand, they curated them for the Mexican context and to contend with the specific negative narratives about China present in Mexican public discourse.

AMLO and his cabinet, on the other hand, prioritized his own brand in which he highlights his commitment to improving the Mexican economy and development and thus AMLO discussed and framed China in specific ways that supported and legitimized his role as a world leader and his visions for alternative modes of economic development. China-Mexico Cultural Relations was not a priority at all for AMLO, since building person to person

connections to China would not help further the development or political goals of his presidency. To AMLO, China was but one potential partner for him to further his vision.

These differences in priorities begin to tell the story of how Chinese government officials view Mexico strategically and how Mexican officials view China strategically. From this angle, it seems that the two parties of government officials align in their visions for the importance of enhanced relations between the countries, especially in relation to economic strategies. However, in closer investigation of the specifics about economic and government collaboration promoted by these two parties, a more complex picture emerged that showed that while the broad strokes priorities may align, visions of where China figures into these plans are vastly different for the two parties. Therefore, for the rest of this discussion, I discuss the three main themes of China-Mexico government relations, China-Mexico economic relations and then China as a world power theme to demonstrate the differences in the priorities and framing of China and Mexico in relation to these topics.

China-Mexico Government Relations: Building Bilateral Governmental Relations for What?

Both AMLO and the Ambassadors mentioned China-Mexico government relations but used this topic for different purposes. The Ambassadors consistently referred to the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and recorded all the state and local level government official meetings the ambassadors attended. AMLO and his cabinet never mention the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the press conferences despite it being the main venue of official bilateral collaboration between China and Mexico. Instead, they would talk about specific calls or meetings between AMLO or his cabinet members and prominent Chinese officials. However, it was not just a difference in the venues of government relations

mentioned, but a difference in why these government relations between China and Mexico were important to the speakers, to the message they were promoting, and in which ways it framed China-Mexico relations for the public.

For the Chinese Ambassadors, a central function of their government collaborations was to cultivate these official platforms for government collaboration and use these platforms to mitigate negative images of China presented to the Mexican public. They did this through promoting cultural events and government-backed initiatives that showed a face of China that was both intriguing and inviting. Cultural diplomacy and creating moments for cultural appreciation and understanding between China and Mexico was imperative for the Chinese ambassadors. Once the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe, orientalist tropes and stereotypes rapidly circulated and the Ambassadors would use their discussion of China-Mexico government relations to combat some of this rhetoric by emphasizing the aid and expertise that China has provided to Mexico.

AMLO, on the other hand, did not mention these platforms of bilateral cooperation between China and Mexico, rather he would talk about specific instances of cooperation between government officials of the two countries to address specific problems, especially the COVID-19 pandemic response. Fomenting positive cultural understanding between the countries was nowhere in his priority list and he did not mention China's unique culture or history as a reason to collaborate. Rather, the discussion of bilateral government relations was an opportunity for AMLO to highlight his effectiveness as a leader on the world stage in a time of need. In other words, AMLO was a good and effective president because he leveraged his access to other world leaders to help Mexico and Mexican concerns. Importantly, the framing of these interactions showed AMLO, or other high-ranking members of his self-appointed cabinet, as leading

international and bilateral cooperation efforts on behalf of Mexico.

Bilateral Cooperation as the Foundation of a New Era of China-Mexico Relations

For Ambassador Qiu and Ambassador Zhu, their priorities in highlighting China-Mexico government collaborations were to promote bilateral modes of government cooperation, cultivate regional and state connections with lower-level government officials and to leverage their diplomatic role to expand opportunities for Mexican citizens to know about China. These all reflect known priorities of the People's Republic of China but in examining the narratives about these issues we can see how the regional expertise of these ambassadors framed these issues for the Mexican context and highlight the priorities of China in Mexico.

First, the Chinese diplomats prioritized forging stronger bilateral government ties through official platforms of cooperation. The establishment of the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was a great achievement at the beginning of Ambassador Qiu's tenure in Mexico. In the reports, the Chinese Embassy mentioned the Partnership 39 times. From the view of the ambassadors, better China-Mexico government relations can only happen on this kind of platform, as explained by Qiu in a meeting with Julian Ventura, the Mexican Undersecretary of Foreign Relations. He states, "China attaches great importance to the development of its relations with Mexico and is willing to work with that country to enhance mutual political trust and pragmatic cooperation, so as to enrich the content of the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2019e).

Ambassador Qiu frames the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as a major component and vehicle to "enrich" the China-Mexico relationship. The top-down approach to governance is replicated in China's foreign relations which privileges bilateral cooperation platforms under the umbrella of regional policy initiatives (Yang 2015). This top-

down view of regional development and bilateral cooperation means that in the discourse of the Chinese ambassadors, government relations are privileged as the main vehicle for cooperation and the notion of state-led development is key in realizing these visions. Therefore, to engage with Mexico for any meaningful change, the federal government of Mexico must fully buy in and participate in this form of cooperation.

For the ambassadors, another aspect of forging greater ties between the countries and therefore a priority of the state was the cultivation of greater cultural understanding of China in the Mexican populace and appeals to the Mexican government to promote better understanding of Mexico to the Chinese people. The Chinese ambassadors wrote 17 reports on specific cultural promotion events and initiatives. In fact, Ambassador Qiu established Latin America's first Cultural Center of China in Mexico. Ambassador Qiu highlighted this achievement in a report on his meeting with the Mexican Secretary of Culture, Fausto Guerrero. The report states:

This country has the only Chinese Cultural Center in the Americas, as well as five Confucius Institutes, a fact that makes it an important platform for exchange and mutual cultural learning between China and Latin America. He stressed that China and Mexico, ancient civilizations and cultural powerhouses, share a broad perspective of cultural exchange. China is willing to work with Mexico to promote their ties in the field of culture to a new height. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2019d)

For the Chinese state cultivating intercultural understanding is a key priority and this is because, as covered in Chapters 1 and 2, the image of China abroad is heavily laden with orientalist other tropes. Mitigating these tropes sometimes comes in the framing of the relations such as the above example in which the Ambassador likens China's and Mexico's ancient histories as contributing to their statuses as "cultural powerhouses". In other instances, this mitigating tactic is much more blatant in campaigns such as the Exhibition of the 5th edition of the Children's Drawing and Painting Contest "China in my imagination". The Cultural Center of China in Mexico began this event with the Chinese embassy, with the aim of "planting the seed of friendship in the next

generation.” Children submitted drawings of what they imagined about China and finalist drawings were then displayed in the Postal Palace for a month as a part of Chinese New Year celebrations in Mexico (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China 2019b).

For the Chinese ambassadors, the New Era of China-Mexico relations relies on the maintenance of these bilateral forums of cooperation and can only happen with a basis of deeper cultural understanding that will assuage future misconceptions of China that do not align with the brand of China. The discourse of the Chinese ambassadors during the COVID-19 pandemic perfectly demonstrated the Chinese Embassy’s priorities of strong bilateral government communication along with the ability to combat negative images of China. First, the Chinese ambassadors actively wrote opinion editorials and wrote press releases to combat COVID-misinformation and actively pointed out the ways that some of this information was based in racist stereotypes (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China 2020a).

Second, as the pandemic dragged on, the Ambassadors began to frame the success of anti-pandemic efforts as hinging on the existing strong China-Mexico bilateral government relations. For example:

According to Zhu, China has been Mexico's second largest trading partner for consecutive years and Mexico is for China in the Latin American region. In the face of the pandemic, the two countries have supported each other, showing their deep brotherly affection. Bilateral economic and trade relations have maintained overall stability and have great tenacity and potential for development. He said that China will continue the close collaboration with Mexico in the fight against the pandemic and will further deploy their complementary advantages, in order to expand and deepen economic-trade cooperation between the two sides and achieve common development.” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China 2020b)

Ambassador Zhu explains that it is only because of China’s and Mexico’s pre-existing economic and governmental ties that Mexico has been able to benefit from China’s help. Additionally, this pandemic has only strengthened the ties between the countries that sets them up for future

success. For Ambassador Zhu, the new era of China-Mexico relations was a model that when fully implemented would lead to the realization of the idealized types of cooperation he promoted such as complementary advantages and common development.

AMLO: The Leader that Mexico Needs in Times of Crisis

AMLO only mentioned collaboration with the Chinese government for specific activities such as COVID-19 aid collaboration and high-level government official visits or communications. AMLO's brand as a politician is to focus on domestic issues first, with the premise that past politicians spent too much time concerned with international relations to the detriment of issues that matter to the everyday citizens of Mexico (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020). This attitude is perfectly displayed in an explanation as to why he is not going to visit China anytime soon in the middle of the pandemic efforts, he says: "I don't think I like to travel abroad a lot and I am in favor of the idea that the best foreign policy is at the interior" (Office of the President 2020e). He continues by saying that other countries will always respect Mexico and insinuates that Mexico should not be wasting so much time and energy on the global stage to the detriment of its own domestic development. In this response, AMLO also reinforces his priorities as the President and focusing on domestic issues while also promoting the image of himself as the everyman that maybe does not get to travel abroad. This short answer also reinforced the idea that AMLO was not going to prioritize this high-level meeting over his domestic concerns, even for as powerful a nation as China, further emphasizing his commitment to the people over power.²⁰

When it came to the global COVID-19 pandemic, AMLO needed to show strength in his response as the leader of the country. It was only once the pandemic became a global issue that

²⁰Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon did eventually have an in-person meeting with Xi Jinping after the G20 summit, but AMLO did not go.

AMLO began to mention direct cooperation with China and Chinese government officials. In the daily briefings, AMLO would recount the calls he made and recount the number of masks, medical supplies, or large medical equipment that the Chinese government had sent to various hard-hit Mexican cities and eventually the distribution of the CanSino vaccine. In these reports, AMLO was able to bolster his own image as a competent world leader who can leverage his position of power. Since these are daily press briefings, AMLO is able to talk as if it's a more personal conversation and portray his sense of urgency. For example, in one brief he states, "Good morning. Liven up. We are going to inform the people of Mexico on two topics and we are also going to make this conference brief; but good and brief, doubly good, because there is a conference call with the president of China at 8:15, so I have to be there" (Office of the President 2020b). He casually portrays his ease of access to other world leaders which bolsters his image as an effective head of state. AMLO discusses the China-Mexico relations and his role in it as a direct conduit to President Xi Jinping and demonstrate that he is working non-stop on finding a solution to this pandemic.

In the reports of the pandemic response, AMLO was also able to keep promoting his own brand of politics and demonstrate how under his leadership and his "fourth transformation" they were looking to acquire all the necessary vaccines to be able to get them to the population for free. He then assures everyone that this is possible because he and his cabinet have been working relentlessly to secure vaccines from various sources because they have signed agreements with various pharmaceutical companies in China, the United States and Russia (Office of the President 2020i). For AMLO, his non-confrontational stance in foreign relations means that it does not go against his own image to seek vaccines from these three world powers that at the time were all competing to develop vaccines the fastest. Instead, it framed him as a competent

leader of Mexico who was able to look past the petty fighting between the world powers and find the best choice for Mexico.

For AMLO, the pandemic was a time at which he could promote his brand of a new era of Mexico in which he was sticking to his domestic agendas and leveraging his position as a world leader. AMLO's cabinet members also echoed his vision for Mexico's future, such as Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon, Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Secretary Ebrard Casaubon gives a lengthy explanation of all the anti-pandemic efforts that the government was doing such as signing three memoranda of understanding with pharmaceutical companies creating vaccines in China and the US and the protocols for distributing these vaccines. He then goes on to highlight the level of efforts the government is putting in by working with 15 different companies and the Mexican government's willingness to work with whatever companies, countries, and multilateral organizations so that Mexico has timely access to the vaccines and supplies (Office of the President 2020c).

AMLO and his cabinet do not mention the efforts of China to forge better bilateral relations through platforms such as the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and therefore they do not connect increased Chinese government engagement with China to their success in combating the pandemic. For AMLO and his cabinet, China was one of many possible partners and this included the Chinese government, Chinese companies, or even Chinese aid foundations. Greater bilateral governmental ties between China and Mexico were just one of the many advantages that the AMLO presidency could strategically take advantage of in a time of crisis.

China-Mexico Economic Relations: Realizing who's Economic Vision?

Both sets of officials were concerned with the economic aspect of China-Mexico

relations. For the ambassadors, the expansion of China-Mexico economic cooperation went hand in hand with the creation of stronger bilateral government relations and sought to find ways that China and Mexico's economic goals could work together. This included the focus on complimentary markets and deals made on these platforms. The ultimate vision for China-Mexico Economic and Government relations was therefore the signing of Mexico onto the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the cornerstone platform for China's economic and development cooperation abroad. The ambassadors recognized the unique position and resources Mexico had to offer, but in the end, it was a part of China's grander regional strategy that strived to increase regional buy in to international cooperation platforms such as the BRI. For the Chinese ambassadors, development and economic cooperation were two sides of the same coin, and therefore Chinese ambassadors presented China as both an economic and development partner.

For AMLO and his cabinet, Mexico's economic development was the top priority of his presidency and China was one potential partner that he could rely on to meet his goals. However, it also posed potential threats to Mexico with concerns of environmental degradation, illicit activities and hurting specific economic sectors. AMLO used discourse on China-Mexico economic cooperation to cast himself as the right kind of leader to navigate this delicate balancing act. While the Ambassadors constantly referred to the BRI, AMLO and his government have not signed Mexico onto it, despite infrastructure development being a central promise of AMLO's campaign. He does mention projects that China or Chinese companies have worked on but instead casts himself and his vision of Mexico as the key to these development projects, and China as merely a player within this vision.

China and Mexico: Complimentary Economic Needs that could be Enhanced with the BRI

Continuing their privileging of government relations and official platforms for economic

engagement, the ambassadors relate the opportunities for economic cooperation to governmental cooperation platforms such as the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership or the BRI. The China-Mexico economic relations fall under what the ambassadors deem as “pragmatic cooperation”, in which bilateral government cooperation allows for economic relationships and activities to make a real impact. For the ambassadors, deeper government cooperation and cultural appreciate discussed above were the foundation for this kind of pragmatic cooperation which includes economic goals such as investments and trade.

For example, Ambassador Qiu gave a speech at an exposition of traditional Chinese prints for Chinese New Year held in the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico with the Mexican Senators. He said, “This year, China will work together with Mexico to strengthen political mutual trust, increase pragmatic cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, investment and culture, to deepen the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China 2019a). In proclamations such as these we see how in the vision that Chinese ambassadors have of China-Mexico relations, good bilateral government ties built on the tenets of China’s brand of international relations will lead to these more pragmatic types of cooperation.

Central to the discussions of this type of economic pragmatic cooperation was the concept of complementarity of the Chinese and Mexican economies. For the China-Mexico relations the ambassadors viewed China’s economic power and large consumer market being able to fuel Mexico’s own economic growth. In the opinion editorial, *Que se Transmita la Amistad China-Mexico* (2019) written by Qiu Xiaoqi upon his departure as the Chinese ambassador to Mexico, he provides an outline of the multiple facets of the China-Mexico economic relation that had improved over his tenure:

For many consecutive years, China has been Mexico's second largest trading partner, and Mexico has remained firmly China's second largest trading partner in Latin America. Bilateral trade totaled 58 billion dollars last year, which is 4,800 times the figure at the beginning of binational relations. Reciprocal investment grows from zero, and as of 2018, China had invested 1.1 billion dollars in Mexico on a cumulative basis. Huawei, ZTE, Xiaomi and other Chinese brands have adapted to the Mexican market, Didi and other new operating modalities have entered Mexico, branches of ICBC and Bank of China have come into operation successively, and more and more Mexicans are opting for Chinese automobiles like JAC and BAIC. In turn, Corona beer, tequila, Bimbo bread and avocado, among other products from Mexico, are gaining popularity among Chinese consumers. (Qiu 2019b)

In this quote we see how the Chinese ambassador combines these distinct aspects of economic relations between the government, companies, banks and even consumer markets as all demonstrating this complementarity and shared benefits for both countries. Ambassador Qiu's view of the many facets that make up the China-Mexico economic relationship demonstrates how the idea of complimentary markets allowed for a more nuanced discussion, at least in the political realm, of what a stronger China-Mexico relationship could be in the future despite the clear points of tension.

The idea of complementarity and pragmatic cooperation also coincides with the other approach of Chinese international relations that is "bottom-up". The Chinese version of "bottom-up" relations relies on leveraging the networks of diplomats, other Chinese officials, and their connections to both Chinese private and state-owned enterprises. (Yang 2015; Creutzfeldt 2023)

We can see this type of engagement happening in the reports of the Embassy as well with the Ambassadors publicizing their meetings with the state and local government officials. In these reports the diplomats demonstrate their specialized knowledge of Mexico and promote their message of curating China-Mexico relations to the specific developmental and economic context of Mexico. In every visit to different states, Ambassador Qiu made sure to specify what about the state would be the most impacted by better China-Mexico relations. For example, in a report on a

meeting with the Governor of Puebla, in 2019, the report states that Puebla is of particular interest due to its existing manufacturing industry and possible place for more Chinese tourists and future large-scale infrastructure projects through the BRI (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2019f). In a separate report on a meeting in the city San Luis Potosí, the ambassador commented on the importance of the automobile industry and the possibility of attracting Chinese companies to the city to invest and working with Chinese companies to provide silk for artisans in the city (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2019g).

The ambassadors not only suggested places for collaboration in different states but also went to opening events for these endeavors such as the inauguration of an FAW Trucks industrial factory in Hidalgo, Mexico. FAW Trucks is a Chinese automotive company founded in 1956 as the First Automotive Works and was one of the Chinese companies that “went out” and now has different partnerships and plants across the globe (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2019c). For Ambassador Qiu, this was a prime example of how better bilateral relations between China and Mexico “maintained a comprehensive and accelerated development, translated into the continuous promotion of economic and trade cooperation, and are now in their best moment ever” (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2019c). In this case, the Ambassador was able to reframe the success of a Chinese company in Mexico as successful China-Mexico economic engagement despite not being based in bilateral government relations.

The Ambassadors also attended events that promoted ties between Chinese companies and Mexico, such as Huawei's “Seeds for the Future 2020”. This is an international program run by Huawei to provide training and mentorship for young information and technology students. Multiple government representatives from Mexico's Department of Communication and Transportation also attended the event. In his comments, Ambassador Zhu stated that he hoped

the students would “become a new force to promote Mexico's development and Sino-Mexican cooperation as soon as possible” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China 2020c). These efforts to forge ties between Chinese companies, the Mexican government and the Mexican populace are a key economic cooperation strategy of China and indicative of how the “bottom-up” approach that still prioritizes bilateral government ties functions. For the Chinese ambassadors, top-down government platform support and locally specific contexts and opportunities worked together to shape economic and trade relations. In this framing of economic relations then, Chinese officials celebrated the instances in which China and Mexico’s economic goals and industries aligned and framed them as the natural progression of deeper governmental collaboration and China’s recognition of different countries having different development paths.

Finally, for the Chinese officials the culmination of this kind of cooperation would be Mexico signing onto the BRI. Although there are multiple projects that could fall under the banner of China-Mexico infrastructure and development cooperation, such as the Chinese construction company that won the Tren Maya contract, most of the ambassadors’ discussions of development cooperation revolved around the BRI. Since Mexico isn’t a signatory, the ambassadors instead emphasized what benefits Mexico was not receiving by not being involved. For example, in an opinion editorial, Ambassador Zhu writes, “Since seven years ago, when Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the BRI, China has signed cooperation documents with 138 nations, and has carried out more than 2,000 projects. Chinese investment in the participating countries exceeds 110 billion dollars, generating employment for tens of thousands of inhabitants” (Zhu 2020). In the framing of the natural evolution of China-Mexico economic cooperation, the Chinese ambassadors present the BRI as the logical next step in the relationship.

This framing of China-Mexico economic and development cooperation is even more clear in the discussion of the Port of Veracruz, which interestingly is an Atlantic Ocean rather than Pacific Ocean port. Ambassador Zhu tied the winning of the construction contract for the Port of Veracruz expansion project by China Harbor as a natural part of China-Mexico's transpacific trade history. In his words:

Mexico was an important stop on the Maritime Silk Road. Starting in the 16th century, China's Nao ships, carrying silk, tea, and Chinese porcelain on board, crossed the Pacific and began the commercial history between China and Mexico. Today, in the port of Veracruz, the workers of the China Harbor company are busy with their expansion project. (Qiu 2019a)

Ambassador Zhu is implicating that by virtue of just having a Chinese company working on any ports in Mexico, regardless of coast, it is a part of the BRI because it continues the legacy of historical maritime and land routes of global trade. Therefore, by highlighting the BRI and what it already is doing as a multilateral cooperation platform and then also mentioning these instances of existing development cooperation, the Ambassadors frame Mexico joining the BRI as the next logical step in this journey of economic cooperation.

AMLO: A Leader for Mexico's Developmental and Economic Future

In his discussions of China-Mexico development cooperation, AMLO framed China as a partner he was leveraging to meet his vision for the future of Mexico. China was one of the many options that Mexico could leverage to get more investment and "diversify trade relations as much as possible" (Office of the President 2019b). Reporters at the press conferences would often bring up concerns about China such as the entry of the drug fentanyl to Mexico from China, the corruption of investment deals and China as a destination for laundered money (Office of the President 2020d, 2019f). In response, AMLO and his cabinet quickly responded with assurances that they already were addressing the issues through various department and investigations. The

reporters saw China and activities associated with China as threats, but AMLO used these moments for potentially condemning these activities instead to promote his leadership and reassure the public that his government was in control of the situation.

However, AMLO and his cabinet members spent more effort to address concerns of how Chinese manufacturing was harming Mexico such as the lack of tariffs on Chinese goods entering the country or the trade imbalance between the countries. While past presidents have cast China's economic power as a threat to the Mexican economy, AMLO and his cabinet have offered alternative interpretations of this relationship. In a press conference in January 2020, AMLO turned to his Secretary of the Economy, Graciela Márquez Colín to provide an interpretation of Mexico's trade figures and its manufacturing outlook after signing the US-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement. She explains one cannot make assumptions about Mexico's economy by just looking at the shelves at stores. This is because a lot of import trade is the influx of partially finished goods to Mexico that are then brought to the national market and then sometimes exported. Mexico's manufacturing sector is only one part of the production chain for different companies. She continues by saying that there are deficits with countries like China because "Mexico is a very open economy" and that this deficit just reflects the bilateral relation rather than considering the other markets that Mexico exports goods to (Office of the President 2020g). Secretary Márquez Colín is using her analysis to paint a picture to the Mexican public of how Mexico's economy fits into the global economy and how changes in the goods in the department stores being from China is not a death blow to the Mexican economy.

Additionally, in this recognition of China's manufacturing power in relation to Mexico, AMLO and his cabinet also point out that Mexico has the benefit of location that China will never be able to compete with it. AMLO states, "Also for manufacturing in the United States

and most of the companies that manufacture are in China, but they can be changed, this situation can be changed through the investment made in the country, due to the location of Mexico” (Office of the President 2020h). AMLO frames Mexico as having different strengths than China which Mexico should be using to its advantage, and this should be a draw for Chinese and other foreign companies to invest in the manufacturing sectors of Mexico. While the Chinese ambassadors would have framed this as complimentary economies, for AMLO it means strategically taking advantage of Mexico’s strengths and focusing on domestic capacity rather than concerning themselves with outside competitors.

AMLO also had to contend with concerns of Chinese companies’ mining activities and potential environmental damage they cause. For example, one reporter asked what the AMLO administration was going to do about the exploitation of lithium since “a few concessions have been or were granted in the past, there are already foreign Chinese and Canadian companies working on the exploitation of this material, which has become very valuable for technology, they call it white oil” (Office of the President 2020f) After lamenting the excess of concessions given to foreign companies under past presidencies, AMLO assures the reporter that “in this administration we have not made any concessions” (Office of the President 2020f). AMLO’s response to concerns of environmental harm in marine preservation and pollution was similar in claiming to already have government officials addressing the issue and using the opportunity to frame the difference of AMLO’s presidency. In response to this concern AMLO said, “Of course, there was no separation before, as there is now, between economic power and political power. The government was taken, the government did not represent everyone. Now yes, now there is no created interest group, however powerful it may be, that passes over the laws and the will of the people” (Office of the President 2019g). For AMLO, these weren’t instances of

defending Chinese investors or assuaging concerns of environmental threats but rather a way of upholding the image of his administration breaking the status quo of the past. In the questions from the reporters, China and Chinese companies are all threats to Mexico and in these discussions, AMLO frames himself as the leader who can mitigate this threat while promoting the interests of Mexico instead of using it to condemn these activities.

Finally, a core campaign promise of AMLO was to invest in infrastructure and development projects that would help the most impoverished regions of the country. For him, the symbol of this promise is the Tren Maya project and the associated development projects of the isthmus. AMLO understands the importance of infrastructure as legacy as exemplified in his immediate cancellation of all contracts for a new international airport in Mexico City that was already 30% underway. This was a landmark infrastructure project of Peña Nieto, but for AMLO, “it was a symbol of the economic irregularities under Peña Nieto’s corrupt regime.” (Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva 2020, 1031) AMLO instead elevated the Tren Maya Project as a symbol of the kind of game-changing development that AMLO’s presidency would bring. He is personally committed to the trains development as he puts it:

Well, the Mayan Train is going. People want it and I don't tell lies, I'm not a liar, people are supporting this work. It is very important because it will reactivate the economy in five states of the Republic, in the southeast: Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo; and it is a public investment of more than 120 billion pesos. It is not credit, it is not debt, it is savings for not allowing corruption, for republican austerity. (Office of the President 2020a)

AMLO stakes his position as a truthful president and honest leader on his ability to realize this project and this kind of ethos persists in his discussions of Mexico’s economic and development improvement. Therefore, while China and Chinese companies play a significant role in many of these projects, AMLO does not promote this aspect of China-Mexico relations.²¹

²¹China Communications Construction Company is one of the partners for the Tren Maya Project.

The Ambassadors and AMLO both mentioned another piece of infrastructure, the port of Veracruz. While Ambassador Zhu saw it as a natural extension of the BRI, AMLO saw its historical significance as a realization of Mexico's development potential. He claims:

This is a project that has been conceived for centuries, but when it was thought about, in the 19th century, when Porfirio Díaz decided to promote it, the development of the Pacific was not the current one. China did not exist as an economic, commercial power. China relatively recently became the factory of the world. That didn't exist back then. (Office of the President 2018)

In this case, AMLO did not mention that a Chinese company was undertaking the project, in fact he states that China's presence as an economic power is a reason that this Atlantic port would not be a top priority, since the Pacific Ocean trade is more of a priority with China becoming a top trade partner. However, when discussing the reasoning of doing this project anyways, AMLO explains that it is part of his larger agenda to help people all over the country, from the north to south. This development project also includes the Tren Maya line and other infrastructure projects which would seemingly align with China's BRI vision, but AMLO frames them as distinctly national in scope.

Once again, Mexico has not become a signatory of the BRI and AMLO has addressed this directly during a press conference. He explained that while he understands that his plans for the development of the isthmus and connected projects may fall in line with the BRI goals:

We are acting with prudence, because there is an environment of commercial confrontation between the United States and China, it is in the public domain, I would not say commercial war, fortunately it is not that. But there are discrepancies and we do not want to get into that confrontation that, by the way, is being addressed because there is dialogue between them. (Office of the President 2019c)

AMLO frames these decisions to either engage or not engage with China as being part of his commitment to prioritizing Mexico and the Mexican over any other world power, despite the potential benefits they could bring.

He then continues to describe the complexities of these projects and concludes with, “Those who know the history of that strip know why we Mexicans must maintain control.” This reveals an underlying concern and hesitancy for Mexican officials in signing on officially for the BRI despite already working with multiple Chinese construction companies for infrastructure projects. AMLO recognizes that China is a world power that could potentially take advantage of Mexico, like other world powers have done in the past, and thus AMLO is a leader that puts Mexico first in his decision making in how and when to collaborate with other countries to improve Mexico. For AMLO, infrastructure of the isthmus will be his political legacy and a centerpiece of his Fourth Transition, and by downplaying the role that Chinese companies play and not joining Chinese-led platforms such as the BRI which would potentially support this vision, AMLO is centering himself as the leader of this change.

China is a World Power, but what Kind of World Power?

Despite the different visions of how China-Mexico governmental and economic relations should unfold, both groups took for granted that China was a world power. However, the importance of this world power status was different for the ambassadors and AMLO. The ambassadors stuck to the brand image of China as a different kind of world power and used examples of its role as a geopolitical leader, as a defender of multilateralism, collaboration with international organizations, and its economic expertise as proof to support this claim. For AMLO, China’s status as a world power was important for bolstering his own image. He used the symbol of China as a non-western power that realized economic and developmental progress despite not following neoliberal norms to legitimize his visions for Mexico’s future. AMLO was able to assume some of the narrative strands promoted under the China brand and interweave them into his own personal brand as a new kind of leader for Mexico.

China as a New Type of World Leader

The Chinese ambassadors' narratives about China align with the brand tenet of being a different kind of world power that can potentially offer better alternatives to countries which choose to engage. The ambassadors focused on China's role as a defender of multilateralism and its leadership role in multilateral organizations. These narratives continued to contribute to the vision of stronger China-Mexico bilateral relations stemming from good government relations. The ambassadors frame China and Mexico as equal partners working together in these multilateral organizations as exemplified in a speech given by Ambassador Zhu Qingqiao at a virtual ceremony for the National Day of China on Oct 1, 2020:

We must emphasize that both China and Mexico encourage and promote multilateralism, so that in international organizations and under multilateral frameworks such as the UN and the G20, both countries have maintained close communication to jointly promote international anti-pandemic cooperation, advocating for not politicize and stigmatize the pandemic. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2020d)

This framing of China then shows that they are a world power because they collaborate with these international organizations which gives them the responsibility of defending multilateralism. It also however puts this responsibility on the Mexican government to engage with these multilateral organizations for the common good.

Later in the same speech, Ambassador Zhu emphasizes the ways that China was different than other world powers, and from the language used, it seems he is referring directly to the United States under Donald Trump. He says:

We will firmly uphold the UN-centered international system, the international order based on international law and rules-based multilateralism, and oppose unilateral actions of bullying and intimidation, the winner-takes approach to development everything, to isolation and disengagement, as well as selfish development at the expense of others. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2020d)

China and the US were in the middle of a trade war at the time and the global anti-pandemic

response was becoming contentious. Ambassador Zhu, by stating how China would behave on the international stage, is insinuating that there are other world powers that would take part in bullying, isolation, and selfish development. So even in explanations of China's world power status, Chinese officials still differentiate China's approach to international relations from other powers and even frame the Chinese government's approach as more legitimate than other countries' approaches.

Chinese diplomats do also highlight China's economic power in discussions of their status as a world power through stories of its rapid development and economic growth, however, many of these discussions still emphasize China's responsibility as a geopolitical and economic leader due to their economic development knowledge. For example, in an Opinion Editorial Ambassador Zhu writes, "Until the end of last year, the number of rural poor population was reduced to 16.6 million, and the rural poverty rate fell to 1.7%, making China the first developing country to meet the poverty reduction targets of the UN and at the same time has greatly improved the standard of living of the Chinese " (Zhu 2019). In this case, the Chinese Ambassador is demonstrating how China's leading role in development is validated by its accordance with the United Nation's goals.

Finally, the ambassadors made sure to frame China's success and development as having reached a whole new level beyond its "economic miracle". This was apparent in the multiple reports by the ambassadors about the newest cutting-edge technology that China was using or deploying such as the following excerpt from a 2018 Opinion Editorial written by Ambassador Qiu, he writes:

It has introduced outstanding equipment such as the Shenzhou spacecraft, the Jiaolong manned submersible, and the Eye of Heaven telescope, and has achieved and even pioneered certain cutting-edge technologies. This "second revolution" gave China the giant leap to stand up, become rich and powerful, on whose 9.6 million square kilometer

land historical changes and achievements are displayed. (Qiu 2018)

For the Ambassadors, China's world power status sits in it forging its own successful path to development but also abiding by the norms of geopolitical relations, and even more faithful to these standards than other world powers. Therefore, Mexico, a country that has a close but fraught history with the other major world power, the US should be open to these alternative kinds of relations.

AMLO: China is a Symbol of New Possibilities

For AMLO, China's status as a different kind of world power was symbolically powerful in promoting his own brand of politics. AMLO referred to China as both a benchmark and a model for economic growth. One of AMLO's platform promises was to raise the minimum wage. He explains his commitment to minimum wage increases by using China as an example and says, "When the boom began in China, it was argued, that they could become the factory of the world because the salary in China was very low, they became the factory of the world and now it turns out that the salary in China is higher than salary in Mexico" (Office of the President 2019a). AMLO is referencing China's tremendous economic growth and insinuates that if Mexico wants to reach similar heights, they too should follow China's lead and as proof that a low minimum wage is not a prerequisite to being competitive in manufacturing. Additionally, AMLO cast this achievement of China as the "factory of the world" and mass producer as an admirable quality and key aspect of China's success. Importantly, AMLO leverages China's success as a real-world example of how continuing to underpay the impoverished workers would not lead to a more prosperous future, and so he validates his "leftist" approach.

AMLO also used China as an economic benchmark in which he would refer to China as a good measure of the general trends of the global economy and with phrases of "even china" in

justifying certain approaches to others. For example, in a 2019 press conference AMLO discusses the launch of a new infrastructure development plan and welcomes businesspersons to provide the private investment it needs. He explains:

This is extremely important, because the participation of the private sector in the country's economic growth is required. In all the countries of the world, private investment is the majority, in almost all of them, including China, private investment is increasing, in our country, of course, private investment represents almost 80 percent of the general investment, of the investment global; public investment is of course important, but it works basically as a seed investment to trigger growth with the participation of the private sector. (Office of the President 2019e)

This excerpt demonstrates how Mexican officials use China as justification for one economic plan over another and frame China as a setter of norms of economic development. Additionally, certain political groups and individuals on the left in Mexico have called out AMLO on the implementation of his policies for still abiding by neoliberal norms such allowing private investment and foreign companies to come and develop the isthmus (Villanueva Ulfsgard and Villanueva 2020). However, by saying that “even China” relies on private investment in its development speaks to assumptions that since China is a socialist country it relies on mostly public funds and then disproves it. Also, this qualifier makes the listener infer that China must then be an example of successful infrastructure development so if they use private investment, it is good if Mexico also relies on private investment.

Second, AMLO is keenly aware of tensions between the United States and China, but as mentioned earlier, instead of employing his usual fiery speech to condemn either power he maintains positive relations with both powers and leverages them to reach his own domestic goals. He displayed this cautious approach in discussion of an upcoming meeting with the Prime Minister of Singapore and what kind of collaboration this could bring. AMLO responds that Mexico is looking to establish a “coordination agreement” on commercial matters since

Singapore is an expert on managing ports and in fact are already helping with the management of the ports of Salina Cruz and Coatzacoalcos (Office of the President 2019d). He states that he hopes to draw up some agreements on the kind of investment that should be going into developing the isthmus (of Mexico), but that Singapore is an ideal partner to work with this on because it will bring good relations with both China and the US and as AMLO puts it:

What we do not want is to get into trouble by taking sides with one hegemonic country or another, we do not want that. So, if there is a third country that has good relations with everyone, although it is not part of one hegemony or another, it makes things easier for us, always taking into account that national investment will predominate in the Isthmus. (Office of the President 2019d)

In this instance we see how Singapore's relations with both the US and China is directly impacting Mexico's relations with them and this aspect of maintaining a balance between the US and China in Mexico's own foreign relations which AMLO uses as a public reason to support this potential new partnership. For AMLO and his cabinet, China's status as a world power was important because it served as a symbol of what an alternative type of development could look like and AMLO used it to legitimize some of his policies, such as the minimum wage increase or to assuage concerns of the left that he was still aligning with neoliberal norms. Importantly, despite the leftist image that AMLO has on the global stage, he is not turning to China as a rebuke to the United States. Instead, he looks to China and leverages Mexico's existing relations with it to justify and envision his alternative future for Mexico.

Conclusion

China-Mexico relations are clearly closer than ever especially through these specialized platforms such as the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both Chinese and Mexican government officials aligned in their visions of stronger bilateral relations and recognized that China's geopolitical and economic status was impacting the triangular relations

of China-Latin America-United States. However, the priorities of the Chinese Ambassadors in Mexico differed widely from those of AMLO and his cabinet. The Chinese ambassadors envisioned a new era of China-Mexico relations. In this new era, there are stronger bilateral government relations that the government officials solidify in their cooperation on platforms such as the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. It is from these platforms and foundation that the government officials can elaborate on the topical or regional priorities that suit the specific context of the country. For the ambassadors, this was a natural extension of past transpacific relations, and this bilateral relationship would only benefit further from the incorporation of Mexico into China's global project of the BRI.

For AMLO and his cabinet, China-Mexico relations were only one facet of his larger political project of a new transition in Mexico. AMLO needed to maintain friendly relations with both the United States and China so he would be able to leverage these relations to realize his vision. For him, China was an important source of investment and an economic partner in development, but the final plan was all his own and backed by his political brand and not just replicating a "China model" or project. Because China was a different kind of world power and operated differently than other world powers, especially the US, AMLO was able to use China as a symbol of what a successful alternative to western norms of development could look like but did not frame it as the answer to Mexico's problems. Instead, AMLO was an effective leader, different from the past Mexican presidents, which was able to effectively leverage China and its potential resources to reach AMLO's vision for a better Mexico. AMLO has been cultivating his own political brand for decades and once he gained office, he is using all the tools at his disposal, including both the symbol of China and the partnership with China to realize his goals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AFP. 2021. AMLO llama a ‘detener’ a China: pide más integración entre México, EU y Canadá. *El Financiero*. Accessed 2/21/2023.
- Ahmed, Azam; Crowley, Michael. 2020. Mexican Leader Vows ‘Dignity’ at Trump’s Side; Critics Fear Humiliation. *New York Times*. Accessed 2/20/2023.
- Bolívar Meza, Rosendo. 2017. "Liderazgo Político: El Caso de Andrés Manuel López Obrador en Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA)." *Estudios Políticos* 9: 99+. https://link-gale-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/apps/doc/A589125776/IFME?u=msu_main&sid=bookmark-IFME&xid=9bfa307f.
- Creutzfeldt, Benjamin. 2023. "The Boys Who Cried Wolf Warrior: China’s Diplomatic Strategy in Latin America." *Los niños que clamaban Guerrero lobo: la estrategia diplomática de China en América Latina*. (113): 61-84. <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiant113.2023.03>. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=161608760&site=eds-live>.
- Dag, Mossige. 2013. *Mexico's Left: The Paradox of the PRD*. Book. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Dai, Yaoyao, and Luwei Rose Luqiu. 2022. "Wolf Warriors and Diplomacy in the New Era : An Empirical Analysis of China’s Diplomatic Language." *China Review* 22 (2): 253-283. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.48671506&site=eds-live>.
- Dussel Peters, Enrique. 2020. "The New Triangular Relationship between China, the United States, and Mexico: Implications for Intra-NAFTA Trade." *The International Trade Journal* 34 (1): 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853908.2019.1696256>.
- Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, in Mexico, February 2, 2019, 2019a, "Embajador Asiste a Inauguración de Exposición de Estampas de Año Nuevo Chino ", http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sn/201902/t20190204_4168018.htm.
- , January 19, 2019, 2019b, "Embajador Chino Asiste a Inauguración de Exposición de Dibujo Infantil sobre China," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/201901/t20190119_4173507.htm.
- , March 29, 2019, 2019c, "Embajador Chino Asiste a Inauguración de Planta Industrial FAW Trucks en Hidalgo," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/201904/t20190402_4173622.htm.
- , January 24, 2019, 2019d, "Embajador Chino se Reúne con Secretaria de Cultura," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sn/201901/t20190125_4167966.htm.

- , January 17, 2019, 2019e, "Embajador Chino se Reúne con Subsecretario de Relaciones Exteriores de México," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/201901/t20190117_4173494.htm.
- , August 21, 2019, 2019f, "Embajador Chino Visita Puebla ", http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/201908/t20190822_4173860.htm.
- , November 13, 2019, 2019g, "Embajador Zhu Qingqiao Visita San Luis Potosí," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/201911/t20191115_4173913.htm.
- , March 23, 2020, 2020a, "Comunicado del Portavoz de la Embajada de China en Respuesta a Palabras de Sra. Carmen Salinas," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/202003/t20200324_4174030.htm.
- , October 8, 2020, 2020b, "Embajador Chino Asiste a Webinar "2020 Mexico Opportunities", " http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/202010/t20201008_4174214.htm.
- , October 23, 2020, 2020c, "Embajador Zhu Qingqiao Asiste a Inauguración Virtual de "Semillas para el Futuro 2020", " http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/202010/t20201023_4174234.htm.
- , October 1, 2020, 2020d, "Intervención del Embajador Zhu Qingqiao en la Ceremonia Virtual con Motivo del Día Nacional de China 2020," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/202010/t20201002_4174206.htm.
- Graham, Dave. 2019. "Mexico Seeks Closer China Business Ties during Testing Time on Trade." *Reuters*, June 29, 2019, 2019. Accessed February 10, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-china/mexico-seeks-closer-china-business-ties-during-testing-time-on-trade-idUSKCN1TU0N6>.
- Iida, Masafumi. 2020. "Xi Jinping's Diplomacy and the Rise of his Political Authority." *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 9 (2): 127-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2020.1843217>. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=149616645&site=eds-live>.
- Kiernan, Paul; DeBarros, Anthony. 2019. "Tariff Fight Knocks Off China as Top U.S. Trading Partner." *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 2019, 2019. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-lost-spot-as-top-u-s-trading-partner-in-first-half-11564749251>.
- López Obrador, Andrés Manuel, 2/12/2017, 2017, "Discurso de López Obrador en Los Ángeles, California," <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/2017/02/12/speech-by-amlo-in-los-angeles-california/>.
- López Obrador, Andrés Manuel 4/29/2019, 2019, "Acuerdo por el que se Otorga la Condecoración de la Orden Mexicana del Águila Azteca, en Grado de Banda, al Excelentísimo señor Qiu Xiaoqi, Ex Embajador Extraordinario y Plenipotenciario de la República Popular China en México.,"

https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5558889&fecha=29/04/2019#gsc.tab=0.

Macip, Ricardo. 2018. "AMLO: The Big Man in Mexico City." *Dialectical Anthropology* 42 (3): 315-319. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-018-9522-9>.

Martin, Peter. 2021. *China's Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy*. t. Oxford University Press.

Office of the President, Mexico, December 23, 2018, 2018, "23.12.18 Versión estenográfica de la presentación del Plan de Desarrollo del Istmo de Tehuantepec – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/version-estenografica-de-la-presentacion-del-plan-de-desarrollo-del-istmo-de-tehuantepec/>.

---, October 4, 2019, 2019a, "04.10.19 Versión Estenográfica. Diálogo con la Comunidad del Hospital Rural Zacapoaxtla, Puebla – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/04-10-19-version-estenografica-dialogo-con-la-comunidad-del-hospital-rural-zacapoaxtla-puebla/>.

---, June 5, 2019, 2019b, "05.06.19 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del Presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-77/>.

---, April 16, 2020, 2019c, "16.04.19 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-66/>.

---, November 18, 2019, 2019d, "19.11.19 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/19-11-19-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.

---, November 26, 2019, 2019e, "26.11.19 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de la prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/26-11-19-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-la-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.

---, December 27, 2019, 2019f, "27.12.19 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/27-12-19-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.

---, August 30, 2019, 2019g, "30.08.19 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/30-08-19-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.

- , June 2, 2020, 2020a, "06.02.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/06-02-20-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.
- , April, 10 2020, 2020b, "10.04.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/10-04-20-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.
- , August 11, 2020, 2020c, "11.08.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/11-08-20-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.
- , October 15, 2020, 2020d, "15.10.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/15-10-20-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.
- , April, 20 2020, 2020e, "20.04.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México ", <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/2020/04/20/version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-303/>.
- , January 22, 2020, 2020f, "22.01.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/22-01-20-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.
- , January 30, 2020, 2020g, "30.01.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México ", <https://presidente.gob.mx/30-01-20-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.
- , October 30, 2020, 2020h, "30.10.20 Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador – Presidente de México ", <https://presidente.gob.mx/30-10-20-version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador/>.
- , October 13, 2020, 2020i, "Presidente firma acuerdo con farmacéuticas para anticipar compra de vacunas contra COVID-19 – Presidente de México," <https://presidente.gob.mx/presidente-firma-acuerdo-con-farmaceuticas-para-anticipar-compra-de-vacunas-contra-covid-19/>.
- Qiu, Xiaoqi. 2018. "China Comparte con el Mundo Reformas y Oportunidades." *El Milenio*, December 17, 2018, 2018. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/china-comparte-con-el-mundo-reformas-y-oportunidades>.

- . 2019a. "Inyectemos Energía Positiva a la Cooperación China-México." *El Milenio*, January 7, 2019, 2019a. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/inyectemos-energia-positiva-a-la-cooperacion-china-mexico>.
- . 2019b. "Que se Transmita la Amistad China-México." *El Milenio*, April 22, 2019, 2019b. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/que-se-transmita-la-amistad-china-mexico>.
- The People's Republic of China, PRC, 2023, "President Xi Jinping Appoints New Ambassadors," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202301/t20230106_11002978.html#:~:text=Zhu%20Qingqiao%20was%20appointed%20Ambassador,of%20Brazil%2C%20representing%20Yang%20Wanming.
- Villanueva Ulfgard, R., and C. Villanueva. 2020. "The Power to Transform? Mexico's 'Fourth Transformation' under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador." *Globalizations* 17 (6): 1027-1042-1042. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1718846>.
- Yang, Zhimin. 2015. "The Roles Played by Three Categories of Actors in China's Engagement in Latin America to Develop Economic Ties with the Region." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20 (3): 289-300. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bas&AN=BAS901500&site=eds-live>.
- Zhu, Qingqiao. 2019. "Erradicación de la Pobreza en China." *El Universal*, July 18, 2019, 2019. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/zhu-qingqiao/nacion/erradicacion-de-la-pobreza-en-china/>.
- . 2020. "China y AL, hacia un Futuro Compartido." *El Heraldo de Mexico*, July 16, 2020, 2020. <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/opinion/2020/7/16/china-al-hacia-un-futuro-compartido-192909.html>.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSLATING THE CHINESE BRAND OF COOPERATION FOR MEXICAN AUDIENCES IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE BRI AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Chinese Ambassadors deployed abroad play an integral role to disseminate the messaging of the China brand. As discussed in Chapter 3, the past two Chinese ambassadors to Mexico, Qiu Xiaoqi and Zhu Qingqiao, increased the level of diplomatic engagement and bilateral government collaboration in Mexico. The ambassadors had direct contact with Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his cabinet to cultivate these relations and looked to local-level government and business leaders across Mexico to create more person-to-person bridges between China and Mexico. The third audience that the diplomats regularly engaged was the public of Mexico through radio and television interviews and the publication of opinion editorials (op-eds) in national newspapers. Fomenting a positive opinion of China in the publics abroad is a priority of the Chinese government with the logic that good public opinion of China will facilitate easier bilateral government engagement and potential cooperation efforts. In these op-eds, the ambassadors can respond to current events and concerns of the public in Spanish and with immediacy. Therefore, they can counteract narratives that do not align with China's brand or reframe news about China and China-Mexico relations to suit the political goals of the Chinese government in Mexico.

In this chapter, I first discuss the specifics of China's view on fomenting positive public opinion. Second, I dissect the specific wording used the most in these op-eds that coincide with the brand of China by presenting the results of word-frequency and concordance analyses I conducted on 41 opinion editorials published in national Mexican newspapers between December 1, 2018-December 31, 2020, by the Chinese ambassador to Mexico. I found that the Chinese ambassadors in Mexico consistently used the word "cooperation" to describe past,

present, and future engagement between the countries and demonstrate how the Chinese ambassadors use the op-eds to describe what *Chinese* cooperation entails and to package the brand of China for Mexican audiences.

Finally, I look to the topics of the editorials. During the first two years of AMLO's presidency the ambassadors used the term cooperation the most in two series of articles that discussed China's Second Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and then the COVID-19 pandemic. Ambassador Qiu Xiaoqi published the first three on the forum and Ambassador Zhu Qingqiao published the second set of three about the pandemic. I found that in considering these op-eds in a series, I was able to see how both ambassadors framed the forum and then the pandemic response to present specific visions of cooperation with China by intertwining reporting on these events with the keywords and phrases that are the core of China's brand. The ambassadors use op-eds to frame or reframe events in real time to promote and protect China's brand image while maximizing China's relevance to Mexico.

Promoting China's Brand Abroad

As discussed in Chapter 2, populations of different countries have varied levels of distrust of China, Chinese companies and Chinese communities that can correlate to historical prejudices, economic competition, reports of unfair deals and business practices taking advantage of the country, or as a perceived threat to the sovereignty of a country. The Chinese ambassadors and the Chinese government understand that this public distrust can hinder bilateral government collaboration. Lack of public trust and perceptions of corruption in the winning of these deals by Chinese companies has led to the complete dissolution of various projects, such as those in Mexico like the high-speed train from Mexico City to Querétaro (Niu 2018).

In Mexico in the past the ambassadors may not have been as directly engaged, and

instead China leveraged the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office to create relations with the Chinese diaspora community in Mexico as a way of fomenting economic connections (Hearn 2013). However, beyond this increased regional training, there is a new, younger generation of Chinese diplomats in their 40's who are more charismatic and reach out to the public more. For example, Lan Hu became the Ambassador of China to Colombia in 2019 and made appearances on national television and radio programs that have aided in combatting some of the anti-Asian prejudice of the country (Creutzfeldt 2023). Additionally, despite the “media offensive” that China is now taking in building up their infrastructure in news media across the globe, the diplomats are keenly aware that news from Chinese media is seen as dubious by foreign audiences and therefore not a reliable source for putting out messaging meant to soften China's image abroad (Hartig 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the past two Chinese Ambassadors to Mexico have in fact began to engage more with the public of Mexico and appeared in radio and television interviews. The Chinese ambassadors understood the importance of engaging with the media to promote a better image of China; the Embassy of China in Mexico announced that the ambassador had met with various media outlet employees to discuss China's portrayal in the media four times. However, the form of engagement with the public employed by the Chinese ambassadors with the most frequency is through opinion editorials in national newspapers. Therefore, a closer look at the op-eds may tell us more about the priorities of the Ambassadors in talking to people of the Mexican public who could feasibly run across the op-eds without actively seeking out more information about China or China-Mexico relations.

Additionally, we can see what specific phrases, words, and framings the ambassadors use in these op-eds that cast China in a specific light. For example, if the ambassadors were to cast

China as a hegemonic economic power, then that may not play out well in Mexico since they may see China as an economic competitor. Rather, the ambassadors may paint a more favorable image of China by framing it as an economic leader with complementary markets rife with opportunity for cooperation. Therefore, for this chapter I have collected all 41 editorials published by the Chinese ambassadors in national newspapers between December 1, 2018, to December 30, 2020. Ambassador Qiu wrote those published before May 2019, and Ambassador Zhu wrote the ones following. Both ambassadors have published pieces in multiple national newspapers such as *El Milenio*, *El Sol de México*, *El Financiero*, and *El Herald*. These op-eds range in topic from new policies or initiatives of the Chinese government that is relevant to the Mexican public, public relations messaging on Chinese culture, or addressing popular news related to China. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Table 1. Distribution of Op-eds in National Newspapers

Newspaper	Number of Articles
<i>El Economista</i>	5
<i>El Excelsior</i>	2
<i>El Financiero</i>	10
<i>El Herald</i>	4
<i>El Milenio</i>	13
<i>El Sol de Mexico</i>	4
<i>El Universal</i>	3

El Economista and *El Financiero* focus on financial news and the rest of the newspapers cover broader topics such as international events, economic news, lifestyle, sports, etc. The 41 opinion editorials covered a wide range of topics, but all aimed to increase general knowledge about China and reinforced the main tenets of the Chinese brand and “new major power relations discourse”. First, the majority mentioned China’s economic standing and geopolitical power and leadership at various points by providing statistics on the health of the Chinese economy, projected growth, and various international meetings that China attended or led. By providing

these statistics and recounting moments in which China was among other world leaders promotes the image of China as a transparent and thriving country and one which has a global standing as a leader. The ambassadors emphasized China's role as a geopolitical leader in 10 of the op-eds discussing China's engagement with the World Bank, United Nations, World Trade Organization, and participation in international meetings such as the G20 summit and China-led Forum on the Belt and Road International Cooperation.

Second, these opinion editorials also were venues for the ambassador to tout the domestic successes of China which support its brand image of focusing more on domestic development over international domination and adds legitimacy to China's claim to be a development expert. There were editorials specifically devoted to highlighting specific domestic development successes such as one which highlighted the economic success of the province of Qinghai, and three editorials devoted to lauding the success of the Special Economic Zone of the Greater Bay Area of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau (Zhu 2019; Qiu 2019h, 2019c). In these cases, the ambassadors have more space to educate the Mexican public about China and provide the evidence that China has already had enormous success in implementing major development efforts to revitalize entire regions.

In the same vein, another theme that these opinion editorials take the time to elaborate on is China's role as an innovative and tech-leading country. One article covered China's telecommunications infrastructure and internet infrastructure development (Qiu 2019a). Another covered the successful launch of the Chang'e 4, a robotic space mission that achieved the first successful landing on the dark side of the moon in 2019 (Qiu 2019b). Other editorials mentioned China's technological innovations as just further proof of its contributions to the world such as the Shenzhou spacecraft, Jiaolong, and a cutting-edge "Eye of the Sky" telescope (Qiu 2018).

Clearly, the Chinese ambassadors viewed the media as a key conduit for communication with the Mexican public, and so by investigating these op-eds in more detail we can begin to see how the Chinese ambassadors translate and distill China's brand for Mexican audiences.

Encoding China-Mexico Engagement as *Cooperación*

As noted in the introduction, the Chinese government takes particular care to curate the terms and phrases used in official diplomatic discourse to present a positive image of China abroad. This care also goes into picking translations of this terminology that are meant to still retain the underlying meaning of these terms and their "Chinese essence". Therefore, I wanted to know what words that the ambassadors used the most in the op-eds that contributed to the image of China specifically spun for the Mexican public and what other words were associated with it that would help curate a positive image of China. To do this I conducted a word frequency analysis on the 41 editorials and found the most frequently used words were: development (*desarrollo*), economics (*económicos*), countries (*países*), cooperation (*cooperación*) and international (*internacional*). I chose to focus on the word cooperation because it indexes more abstract notions within diplomatic jargon and international relations but also captures basic ideas of working together. Thus, for the rest of the analysis I used cooperation as the keyword that I would trace between documents. I ran a co-occurrence analysis to see which words co-occurred the most with cooperation. To the co-occurring themes and phrases used by the Chinese ambassadors with cooperation, I examined 11-word-long snippets of text that included the leading five words and the following five words of every instance of cooperation and then ran a word frequency query to see the most frequently used terms.²²

²²I focused on these smaller chunks of text because I am looking for words that are nearby rather than analyzing the grammatical relations between these co-occurring words or analyzing differences between how different languages may shift perspectives of readers.

Table 2. Words that Co-occurred the Most with Cooperation

Chinese Ambassador Opinion Editorials	
Word	Number of Occurrences
International (<i>Internacional</i>)	40
Benefit (<i>Beneficio</i>)	19
Mutual (<i>Mutuo</i>)	15
Development (<i>Desarrollo</i>)	12
Deepen (<i>Profundizar</i>)	12
Bilateral (<i>Bilateral</i>)	10
Shared (<i>Compartidos</i>)	9
Economic (<i>Económica</i>)	9
Road (<i>Ruta</i>)	8
Exchanges (<i>Intercambio</i>)	8
Countries (<i>Países</i>)	8
Ample/large (<i>Amplia</i>)	7
Signed (<i>Firmado</i>)	7
Strengthen (<i>Fortalecer</i>)	7
Belt (<i>Franja</i>)	7
Open (<i>Abierta</i>)	6
Anti-pandemic (<i>Antipandémico</i>)	6
New (<i>Nuevo</i>)	6
South (<i>Sur</i>)	6
Documents (<i>Documentos</i>)	6
Principle (<i>Principio</i>)	6

Table 2. provides a run-down of the words that co-occurred the most with *cooperación* in the op-eds which point to the type of cooperation (development, international, economic, exchanges, anti-pandemic, bilateral), qualities of this cooperation (ample, shared, new, mutual, benefit, open), and actions to be taken around this cooperation (signed, strengthened, deepened). Considering these co-occurring words together we can begin to how a specific vision of “Chinese cooperation” begins to take shape.

First, the words “international”, “bilateral”, and “countries” all point to the scope and location of this cooperation. That is that cooperation with China occurs as a bilateral relation, between countries on the international stage. For the term international, China frames many of the world’s issues as requiring “international cooperation”. For example, in the discussion of

China's contributions to the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Ambassador Zhu claims that China is already on track to meet these goals and thus China "will deepen international cooperation in the fields of agriculture, education, women and children, and climate change, and promises to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060 to build a beautiful planet" (Zhu 2020c). In this way, China is doing its part as a successful country to help reach international goals.

The terms "bilateral" and "countries" point to how Mexico can engage in cooperation with China. First, the ambassadors emphasized the need for countries to buy into these efforts rather than other types of actors (such as companies, communities, or individuals), such as in the statement, "International anti-pandemic cooperation requires the mutual help of all countries" (Zhu 2020d). By emphasizing that countries should lead this cooperation, it also allowed for the ambassadors to start differentiating and grouping countries. For the ambassadors a primary differentiation was between "north" and "south" countries, and as recounted in by Ambassador Zhu, "South-South cooperation" was integral for the future of China-LAC relations. He writes: "After six decades, both parties have become a paradigm of South-South cooperation, characterized by mutual respect, equal treatment, mutual benefit and joint development" (Zhu 2020b). Ambassador Zhu makes it clear that it is the paradigm of "south-south" cooperation that underlies the provision of the positive aspects of this cooperation such as mutual respect, equal treatment, mutual respect, and joint development.

The term, "bilateral" then refers to how Mexico can access this type of cooperation relationship and demonstrate how the ambassadors privilege government-to-government agreements and engagement when cultivating ties with Mexico. In an op-ed titled, "Let's inject positive energy into China-Mexico cooperation", Ambassador Qiu recounts the existing

successes of China-Mexico's bilateral relations and concludes that, "These stories narrate the splendor of cooperation between China and Mexico, and in them lies the engine for the development of both parties. China looks forward to working with Mexico to push for long-term and stable development in bilateral cooperation" (Qiu 2019e). Ambassador Qiu conceptualizes bilateral cooperation as the main "engine" for development for both countries, thus emphasizing the paradigm of development that China promotes abroad that prioritizes state-led development initiatives.

Additionally, by painting countries as the units of engagement for international and bilateral cooperation, it also casts China as a united front with singular goals for cooperation. This in turn allowed for the ambassadors to then present examples of how China-Mexico bilateral relations benefit the Mexican public in statements such as, "bilateral trade (between China and Mexico) increased 25% and Chinese investment in Mexico doubled" (Qiu 2019i).

Beyond the scope and scale, the ambassadors also outlined what kinds of activities were associated and included in cooperation with China, seen in the co-occurring words of "development", "exchange", "anti-pandemic" and "belt and road". For example, the word "development" would often co-occur as a separate initiative that went hand-in-hand with cooperation, such as when Ambassador Qiu is explaining the BRI as seeking both, "cooperation and common development with all the world" (Qiu 2019g). The term, exchange also co-occurred in the same manner, such as Ambassador Zhu's wish for the future of China-Mexico relations which would, "strengthen synergy of strategies, explore complementary advantages, expand and deepen exchange and cooperation in various fields" (Zhu 2020c). Deepening exchanges was only one part of a more robust China-Mexico relationship in the future.

As these examples show, the ambassadors consistently used the terms of strengthen, deepen, shared and mutual benefit as qualifiers of this kind of “Chinese cooperation” to further frame this type of engagement in a positive light. These terms also allowed for the ambassadors to pinpoint specific facets of China-Mexico relations and indicate specific sectors that the ambassador deems would benefit from more cooperation, such as in the following sentence, “partners should strengthen cooperation in public health in order to contribute more to the global anti-epidemic fight” (Zhu 2020a). Terms such as “new” were also key for the ambassadors in indicating to the public that China-Mexico relations would be different from then on, that there were not just new opportunities but also a new era of China’s international relations. For example, in an op-ed describing a promotional event for the municipality of Tianjin Ambassador Qiu concludes that Tianjin’s economic development and its role as a northern node of the BRI reflects a new era of Chinese development “with a view to writing a new chapter of cooperation, development and mutual benefits in the new era” (Qiu 2019j).

These keywords that co-occur with cooperation across the editorials serve to define and refine the image of China for Mexican audiences but also set up a framework for understanding China-LAC and China-Mexico relations. The concept of “cooperation” was clearly important for the ambassadors, so I aimed to investigate how they framed it in the six op-eds in which it was the most prevalent (Table 3.) The first three focused on the Second Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative and published by Ambassador Qiu while the latter three were all focused on anti-pandemic efforts in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and written by Ambassador Zhu. The split between main themes and ambassadors provides an interesting lens into how the Ambassadors conceptualized Chinese cooperation, packaged it, and sold it to the Mexican public depending on the state of China-Mexico relations. For the rest of this paper, I will provide an

analysis of these two sets of articles to demonstrate the building of the Chinese brand for Mexican audiences around these specific events.

Table 3. Opinion Editorials

Title	Date of Publication	Newspaper	Ambassador	Occurrences of Cooperación
Nueva expedición para la diplomacia China	3/10/2019	<i>El Heraldo de Mexico</i>	Qiu Xiaoqi	11
Promover la construcción de la Franja y la Ruta	4/7/2019	<i>El Heraldo de Mexico</i>	Qiu Xiaoqi	9
Cooperación de la Franja y la Ruta	04/21/2019	<i>El Economista</i>	Qiu Xiaoqi	14
La solidaridad es el arma más poderosa para vencer la pandemia	6/1/2020	<i>El Milenio</i>	Zhu Qingqiao	9
China y ALC construyen la comunidad de futuro compartido	08/07/2020	<i>El Universal</i>	Zhu Qingqiao	11
Comunidad, Confianza, Cooperación, Contribución	10/1/2020	<i>El Milenio</i>	Zhu Qingqiao	9

China's Belt and Road Initiative: Cooperating for the Future

The first set of editorials written by Ambassador Qiu Xiaoqi were all published within a month and a half of each other and discussed the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. At this point in time, AMLO was in his first year in office and Ambassador Qiu Xiaoqi was ending his tenure in which he had spent six years revitalizing the diplomatic engagement of China in Mexico. China's engagement with LAC had also been following the same trajectory under the leadership of Xi Jinping and in more recent years the BRI began to include LAC. However, Mexico is not a signatory of the BRI and as discussed in Chapter 2, despite the increased engagement with China at the economic and governmental level, infrastructure projects have been a particular point of contention between China and Mexico. While the Chinese government and its spokespersons push for countries to sign memoranda of understanding on the BRI, these documents are more of a symbolic victory for the Chinese

government that signal the willingness of the signing country to participate in their vision of international relations (Serrano Moreno, Telias, and Urdinez 2021). So, despite the tensions between the countries around infrastructure development, which is usually the primary focus of selling the BRI to other countries, Ambassador Qiu instead frames the BRI as the ultimate platform for overall economic and governmental cooperation that will allow for truly beneficial cooperation in the future.

The first article, “New expedition for Chinese diplomacy”, was published in March 2019, the second piece, “Promote the construction of the Belt and Road” was published a month and a half later and “Belt and Road Cooperation” a week after that, right before the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was held in Beijing from April 25-27, 2019. The first article defines and frames Chinese diplomacy, the second one discusses the BRI, and the third more directly addresses the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

The beginning of the first article in the series, sets forth the basic premise from which the rest of the op-eds expand. Ambassador Qiu quotes the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, as saying, “Disengaging from China means disengaging from opportunities and the future, and in a sense, from the world” (Qiu 2019f). This quote sets the underlying premise for how Ambassador Qiu would continue to frame cooperation with China throughout these op-eds as tied to the future, the world, and opportunities with the ultimate venue to access this being the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

The second article continues this framing of China as the future in its more robust explanation of the BRI and providing reasons for Mexico to sign on. Ambassador Qiu casts the BRI as the primary mode of cooperation with China and purports that this platform will only become more important for international engagement in the future. To emphasize this case,

Ambassador Qiu lists off the number of countries (124) and organizations (29) that have signed on and then the statement that, “Corresponding ideas have been included in the final documents of important international mechanisms such as the UN, the G20, APEC and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (Qiu 2019g).²³ These claims serve to add authority to China’s promise of what the BRI can offer and demonstrates the broad buy in from across the globe that gives it legitimacy.

The third article provides more specifics of the BRI and the forum that highlights its importance for the future such as a new focus on specific business sectors between executive directors so that they could “share cooperation opportunities” (Qiu 2019d). Ambassador Qiu highlights the flexibility of what “cooperation” entails and the changing boundaries of the BRI platform to fulfill future needs. For ambassador Qiu, the BRI is the platform of the future, for not just cooperation with China but for worldwide cooperation, as he states: “Since its launch in 2013, the Belt and Road initiative has been well received in the international community, becoming a platform for global cooperation with broad participation and a popular public product.” This one sentence sums up China’s brand of cooperation and how China conceptualizes the BRI within this model. The BRI is not just another meeting or agreement that indicates cooperation with China but is *the* platform for global cooperation with China and after six years of development it has become a “popular public product” that will shape the future of international cooperation. In this way the brand of China cooperation entails not just accessing the opportunities of working with China but also entails buying into this vision of global human development, with China taking the lead.

Going back to the opening quote of the first article, Wang Yi’s quote paints an optimistic

²³G20 stands for “Group of Twenty” and a multilateral international cooperation forum and APEC is Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation is an inter-governmental forum.

view of China but also frames the future of Chinese cooperation and China's ascendancy on the global stage as inevitable. Ambassador Qiu continued to reinforce the difference of Chinese cooperation and the new kinds of opportunities this would provide. In the first article, Ambassador Qiu in his explanation of Chinese diplomacy also explains how it is different than other countries' with statements such as, "China always believes that the cornerstone of the current international order is multilateralism, which stands on the right side of history" (Qiu 2019f). This type of statement is typical in these pieces in that it frames China as being on one side of an unnamed dichotomy with the insinuation that other world powers are not abiding by this same principle, and therefore Chinese diplomacy is not only unique but also better. The next sentence further solidifies this framing through an explicit call out to the United States saying, "China and the US should promote bilateral ties based on coordination, cooperation and stability, an important consensus reached by both presidents. Throwing away the zero-sum game mentality and focusing on expanding cooperation is the responsibility of the two countries to the world" (Qiu 2019f). The first half sets up China and the United States as equal world powers on the global stage with a shared consensus on the importance of "coordination, cooperation and stability". However, the second half differentiates China from the United States explicitly by insinuating that the US, by engaging in "zero-sum game mentality", is doing the opposite of what Chinese diplomacy is based on.

Ambassador Qiu also plays up the unique "Chinese" identity of Chinese cooperation and the promoted platforms of the BRI. He ascribes this unique "Chineseness" to the BRI and Chinese cooperation in two ways. The first is attributable to China's persistence in "the path of peaceful development, fomenting cooperation in search of shared gain" despite the "innumerable obstacles and difficulties" of its own history of development (Qiu 2019f). Ambassador Qiu

contends that it is only through this adherence to the unique Chinese path that China has become revitalized and is now able to contribute to the protection of world peace and human progress.

The second is based in its historical and unique cultural context which ties China's current success to its ancient past. This is clear in statements such as "The initiative proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 aims to develop the spirit of the ancient Silk Road and seek cooperation and common development with the whole world" (Qiu 2019g). He frames the BRI as a uniquely *Chinese* endeavor because it is based on the "spirit" of the Silk Road of China's ancient past and therefore is a unique Chinese way of approaching cooperation. Ambassador Qiu then frames this unique Chinese approach to cooperation then as the solution for the "titanic changes" in the world in the past century that have brought with them issues of, "the governance deficit, the trust deficit, the peace deficit and the development deficit" (Qiu 2019g). These are issues that one would see discussed in large multilateral forums such as the United Nations, yet Ambassador Qiu casts China's unique approach that is based in both its position as a world power and its specific cultural context as the solution.

Ultimately, this framing of cooperation looking to the future was based in the promotion of the Second Forum. All three op-eds mention this forum. The first article, after multiple paragraphs explaining the virtues of Chinese diplomacy and how it differs from other countries and its current success, the final paragraph reveals the purpose of the article to introduce the forum to the Mexican public and provide an open invitation to Mexico to attend with the enticement of "12 thematic cooperation forums and for the first time a major business conference," and the legitimacy of "more than 100 countries" that will be in attendance (Qiu 2019f). The direct invitation to Mexico is as follows:

China looks forward to the participation of Mexico and other nations of the world in the forum, and has high expectations of exchanging views and engaging in cooperation with

all participants, with the aim that the peoples and countries of the world have an impetuous driving force to build a community with a shared future for humanity. (Qiu 2019f)

In this case, the Ambassador frames cooperation as the way to engage with China and all the other countries already committed to attending the forum. This cooperation is by extension connected to a broader and noble goal of “building a community with a shared future for humanity.” China is therefore not just a leader of a multinational forum but a leader to devise a plan for a better future for all of humanity.

The second article after describing the success of the BRI and how it would be continued into the future was more concise and just stated, “Let’s look forward to the new cooperation meeting in Beijing!”, that serves as an invitation to Mexico to attend the Second Forum on the Belt and Road International Cooperation (Qiu 2019g). The third article was published merely four days before the opening day of the Second Forum. Rather than spend more time talking about the past success of the first forum, this article is laser focused on the agenda for the upcoming meeting, future visions for the BRI and outlines the ways in which Mexico could participate in and benefit from this project (Qiu 2019d). While Mexico’s federal government and its representatives were not attending, the president of the political party, MORENA, Yeidckol Polevnsky was heading a delegation. MORENA is the political party of AMLO and does not represent all of Mexico or even the federal government, but Qiu uses this as an opportunity to connect with the Mexican audience and states that sending of this delegation “shows the support of Mexican society for the initiative and its desire and enthusiasm to carry out cooperation with my country” (Qiu 2019d).

This is the most personalized portion of these articles, with Qiu stating “my country” instead of China and reminding the audience that he is the conduit for the relations between the

two countries. This article ends with the following, “China welcomes the positive participation of Mexico and other Latin American countries in international cooperation around the Belt and Road, to jointly perform the "Ode to Joy", and create a bright future of mutually beneficial cooperation and prosperous development” (Qiu 2019d). This final dramatic sentence lays out how Ambassador Qiu views future endeavors with Mexico, one in which Mexico participates even more meaningfully in the BRI as the main vehicle for international cooperation. The second portion of this sentence paints the ideal picture of what cooperation with China could bring to Mexico, one that happens in harmony and that will bring the benefits of mutual benefit and prosperous development.

This series of articles may not have convinced Mexico’s federal government to send over direct representatives, but it did allow Ambassador Qiu to promote a specific vision of future cooperation with China that was only possible through the BRI platform. These articles serve as both a justification for the opening statement of, “disengaging from China means disengaging from opportunities and the future, and in a sense, from the world,” and as a recommendation of a way not to disengage from China through joining the BRI.

China-Mexico Relations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ambassador Zhu Qingqiao, who became the new Chinese ambassador to Mexico in May 2019, wrote the second series of opinion editorials. He started his tenure by continuing to reach out to the Mexican media and held meetings with news outlets to introduce himself and establish relationships such as TV Azteca. He conducted interviews and wrote op-eds about China’s participation in multilateral meetings such as the United Nations General Assembly, China’s annual Communist Party of China plenary meetings and the BRI. However, by January 2020 the COVID-19 virus had been identified in an outbreak in Wuhan, China. By February 17th, 2020,

Zhu was addressing the Mexican public directly about China's anti-pandemic efforts on an interview with Televisa (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic became the top priority in international collaborations and since it originated in China, China's messaging around the virus was the primary focus of the ambassador. The Second Forum was an event of high concern for the Chinese government but would not have been a primary concern for the Mexican public. The COVID-19 pandemic on the other hand was a global health crisis and public opinions about the pandemic were much more prevalent and the Chinese ambassador needed to combat these narratives head in the op-eds. In this series of op-eds, Ambassador Zhu casts cooperation with China as a successful approach to anti-pandemic efforts with immediate benefits rather than promises for future ones.

Ambassador Zhu disseminated this messaging in op-eds and more news appearances. However, similarly to the articles on the forum, Ambassador Zhu wove the brand of China and a specific image of Chinese cooperation into these articles, with the term cooperation appearing the most in these articles addressing the pandemic. Unlike the quick succession of articles published about the Second Forum on the Belt and Road for International Cooperation that had a fixed date, the articles in this series came out two months apart from each other and centered around anniversaries of significant meetings or dates of diplomatic recognition.

The first article, "Solidarity is the most powerful weapon to defeat the pandemic" was published on June 1, 2020 as a follow up to the 73rd World Health Assembly which took place two weeks earlier and covered the initial goals set at this meeting and where China was leading in anti-pandemic efforts (Zhu 2020d). The second article, "China and LAC build the community of shared future" was published two months later on August, 8th 2020 two weeks after a videoconference meeting of Foreign Relations Ministers was hosted by CELAC (Community of

Latin American and Caribbean States) to celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations between LAC and China and also the COVID-19 pandemic responses (Zhu 2020b). This article was more focused on China-LAC relations and reaction to the pandemic since it addresses the main themes from this regional-specific meeting. The third article, “Community, Trust, Cooperation, Contribution” was published on October 1, 2020 in *El Milenio*, another two months after the previous one and coincided with the commemoration of 71st anniversary of the founding of the PRC and addresses China’s relationship with Mexico, China’s development as the PRC and the affect that the pandemic has had on the world thus far (Zhu 2020c).

One of the primary tasks of Ambassador Zhu in these op-eds was to combat misinformation and negative press about China in relation to COVID-19. The first article in this series spends the most time on this topic and Ambassador Zhu states, “International anti-pandemic cooperation requires resistance to the political virus” (Zhu 2020d). Ambassador Zhu (2020d) defines this “political virus” by elaborating that, “certain politicians and media outlets in some countries shirk responsibility and concoct lies to smear China at every opportunity. These behaviors that politicize and stigmatize the pandemic harm international unity and trust and undermine the basis of global anti-pandemic cooperation.” To legitimize this assertion, Ambassador Zhu cites publications in *The Lancet* and *Nature*, both well-respected peer-reviewed medical and science journal, that condemn conspiracy theories on the origins of COVID-19 and the harm of labeling the pandemic as a “Chinese virus” and the spike of anti-Asian hate crimes (Calisher et al. 2020; Board 2020). Ambassador Zhu continues by stating, “The truth will always prevail, most countries in the world recognize and appreciate China's open, transparent and responsible attitude” (Zhu 2020d). This framing reinforces the position of China as being on the side of truth and therefore those perpetuating these narratives operating against the common

good of the world.

Beyond addressing the negative press, Ambassador Zhu reframed the concept of Chinese cooperation to fit the situation of a global pandemic. While the first series of articles by Ambassador Qiu focused on China's natural position as a leader of the world for economic and development cooperation, this series of articles framed China as a leader of the anti-pandemic efforts. Cooperation with China was the antidote to the pandemic and the accompanying worldwide issues it caused.

The first article begins by addressing the gravity of the pandemic as “the most serious global public health emergency since the end of World War II” (Zhu 2020d). Ambassador Zhu continues by stating, “The lesson we get from it is that we live in the same global village and make up a community with a shared future for humanity. The virus knows no borders or races, so only the union of the international community can defeat it” (Zhu 2020d). These sentences present the China-backed vision of anti-pandemic cooperation and uses the same keywords seen in the second forum op-eds to describe China's ultimate goals of a “shared future for humanity”. In this case however, cooperation with China can help protect this shared future as the COVID-19 pandemic threatens it.

Ambassador Zhu then also repeats the same framings used in the Second Forum op-eds of China's responsibility to be a world leader due to its superior development. In this case however, the ambassador is referring to its superior health system. As Ambassador Zhu puts it, “countries with an advanced health system must help relatively fragile countries on this issue, and the first countries that manage to contain the domestic spread must help those that are still facing it.” (Zhu 2020d).

Additionally, much like China uses its own experience with extreme poverty and then its

rapid economic development as proof of its ability to be a leader in economic development, the Ambassador frames the outbreak of the pandemic first happening in China as a benefit as well. China has had time to contain and combat the virus already and with this success and expertise China will be able to impart this knowledge to the world. Zhu affirms that this is the approach that China is taking already in the following sentence in which he states, “China, the first nation to report and manage to control the contagion, has always promoted international cooperation and within its capabilities has provided substantial assistance, as well as help to countries in need” (Zhu 2020d). Through this introduction, Zhu is already framing the pandemic as the world crisis that only cooperation with China can solve.

The third article then sums up this viewpoint through breaking down China’s engagement with the world using four “C’s”: community, confidence, cooperation, and contribution. In the paragraph explanations of each of these terms, Ambassador Zhu outlines China’s vision of the world order and China’s role in it as it pertains to not just the pandemic but also how it should respond to all kinds of crises. The first “C”, community, repeats the concept of the world being a “global village” with a “shared future for mankind” that must combat the pandemic together. The second “C”, “confianza” can be translated to both confidence and trust in English, but Ambassador Zhu frames it as a renewed confidence in the worldwide economic and political processes that were stalled or halted during the pandemic. Ambassador Zhu contends that it is China’s unique path to economic development that has allowed for China’s steady economic growth that provides renewed confidence because it is a lynchpin of the global economy. In this context, China is a natural leader for anti-pandemic efforts because it is already an economic leader. The third “C” is cooperation which Ambassador Zhu claims is the only kind of engagement that will grant access to the mutually beneficial aid, investment, and projects that

China already provides around the globe, including anti-pandemic relief. The final “C” is contribution and reflects on the physical aid and acts of cooperation that China has provided in response to the pandemic. Importantly though, these contributions highlighted by Ambassador Zhu also reflect aspects of China’s image that China would want to promote such as its biomedical expertise in developing vaccines (Zhu 2020c).

Taken together, these articles presented an image of Chinese cooperation that was able to respond to global crises with robust efficiency. While Ambassador Qiu used the discussion of the Second Forum to frame cooperation with China as a model for the future, Ambassador Zhu was able to frame pandemic response efforts as a logical outcome of this model of cooperation and use it as proof of its success. This was demonstrated to the readers through elaborations of the type of aid that Mexico received based on this more robust cooperation such as Ambassador Zhu’s promise that anti-pandemic efforts will also provide access to, “advances in medical treatments, in economic reactivation, in guaranteeing a better quality of life for the people, in improving the regional and global public health governance system” (Zhu 2020d).

Additionally, Ambassador Zhu was able to reflect on this time of crisis and China-Mexico collaboration during this crisis as proof of the deepening relations between the two countries that was based in friendships built on solidarity. He writes, “despite the physical distance, China and LAC show brotherly affection amid the pandemic. The solidarity, support and even the donation of items that the countries of the region gave to China at its most difficult time have moved the Chinese people” (Zhu 2020b). There is a vague reference to donations and support given to China from these countries but no renumeration of what this included, instead it was just a lead into Zhu outlining China’s provision of “more than 27 million units of health supplies and more than 1,100 respirators...more than 30 videoconferences to exchange their

experiences without reservation...the acquisition of anti-epidemic materials from China by way of ‘air drops’” (Zhu 2020b). This list of aid, supplies and support is all presented as what Mexico received in exchange for merely showing “solidarity” with China in its time of need.

In this narration of the cooperation between China and Latin American and Caribbean countries, cooperation entails both material exchanges and information sharing that is never one sided, but mutually beneficial. However, Ambassador Zhu frames the impetus for these exchanges as stemming from a sense of kinship and empathy indexed in the phrases of “brotherly affection” and “China feels it firsthand”. Therefore, mutually beneficial cooperation, as described by Ambassador Zhu, is not driven by contractual obligations but rather these emotional and interpersonal connections that make these interactions moral rather than pragmatic. However, these sentimental connections do still result in concrete and pragmatic outcomes.

Finally, while these articles used the pandemic as proof of what the specific brand of cooperation with China could bring, there was still the future-looking view. Much like the definition of what cooperation through the BRI expanded, so too did the definition of what was included in anti-pandemic efforts. Ambassador Zhu demonstrates this expansion by quoting Chinese Prime Minister Wang Yi once again from his speech to the CELAC-China meeting:

...deepen anti-epidemic solidarity cooperation, always prioritizing the well-being of the people; guarantee the economic growth and well-being of the people in accordance with the principle of mutual aid and shared gain; promote the joint construction of the Belt and Road looking for opportunities in the midst of the crisis; enhance the driving force of global cooperation guided by demand; and strengthen coordination in global governance following the principles of fairness and justice. (Zhu 2020b)

In this quote, participating in anti-pandemic cooperation effort was more than an antidote to a global pandemic but encapsulated the safeguard of the global economy and protections of China’s brand ideals such as mutual aid and shared gain. Ambassador Zhu framed the pandemic

as an event in which the world could evaluate the tenacity and integrity of China's model of cooperation and in doing so, they would be able to improve the entire world. From the ambassador's view, anti-pandemic efforts are a natural extension of China's approach to cooperation that already aligns with its cooperation efforts in platforms such as the BRI. As he concludes in the article, "We are convinced that the ties between China and LAC will be even more consolidated after the COVID-19 test, and the future of the China LAC community with a shared future will be more beautiful" (Zhu 2020b). The third article repeats this sentiment but for the specific Mexico context when Ambassador Zhu states, "China and Mexico are good friends and partners, and have supported each other amid the pandemic. The COVID-19 did not stop the steps forward in bilateral relations, instead it gave them a greater boost" (Zhu 2020c).

In this view then, the increased pandemic bilateral cooperation has only strengthened China and Mexico's relationship. This is based on their friendship and their commitment to support through the pandemic. The ambassador commends Mexico for acting in these ways, unlike the other world powers he had condemned earlier in these same articles. This promotes the forward-looking and positive view of China-Mexico relations and frames better China-Mexico as part of China's overall trajectory in the region. Importantly, the pandemic merely "boosted" an already thriving relationship, or potentially thriving relationship.

Ambassador Zhu then explains that this continued bilateral cooperation would be based in both countries' governments jointly deciding future directions through consensus and align strategies that are mutually beneficial across multiple sectors all through the already established (and presumed successful) China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. It is only through this type of relation that the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership would reach "a higher level that will benefit both countries and peoples" (Zhu 2020c).

This final appeal to the Mexican readers presents a concise message of what Mexico-China relations could look like if they continue to support politicians that would engage in this partnership. In this way, cooperating with China does not just provide the immediate benefits of medical supplies for issues like the pandemic, but also is an investment into future relations that could be even more beneficial especially in the face of new crises yet to arise.

The Evolution of Chinese Cooperation in Mexico

Considering the transformation of the discourse on China's role and engagement with China throughout these six documents, we see that these articles are not just repetitions of the same words and messages over time, but rather the Ambassadors reframe and recontextualize China's approach to international relations and cooperation to deepen what it means to cooperate with China. For example, the ambassadors consistently tied the concept of getting "mutually beneficial" opportunities to China-specific cooperation. In discussions of the BRI, cooperation entailed participating in this platform and the mutual benefit aspect was the economic and development benefits that Mexico could reap if they cooperated in this Chinese branded platform. In discussions of the pandemic on the other hand, mutual benefits still stemmed from cooperation with China, but these benefits were medical supplies, China's knowledge on fighting the pandemic and access to China's already revived economy. This concurrent adherence to specific phrases and terms along with the flexibility of interpretation and framing allow for the Chinese ambassadors to continuously cultivate the brand image while also molding it to fit both local contexts and global changes simultaneously while painting a positive picture of China to the Mexican public.

Another theme that was consistent across these op-eds was the peaceful and non-aggressive nature of cooperation with China. In relation to the BRI forums, the ambassadors

present the BRI as a cooperative platform that is a “public good” and thus not a threat to other countries or their sovereignty. Additionally, the ambassadors framed both the BRI forum and the pandemic response as contributing to China’s vision of “a shared future for humanity” that presented the premise that China’s own development and economic success would benefit the world and it was also able to implement its expertise in these areas to help the world, not just China. Therefore, China was a non-threatening and natural leader for both international development initiatives and for crises such as a global pandemic.

Through the narration of China’s pandemic response, Ambassador Zhu was also able to provide concrete examples of how China’s friendly approach to cooperation would result in real benefits such as medical supplies or expertise knowledge exchange. Specifically, Ambassador Zhu’s framing of the COVID-19 virus appearing in China first as a positive outcome for the world rather than a negative outcome for China reflects this framing of China’s relations to the rest of the world. According to the ambassador, the Chinese government was able to use its unique domestic approach to contain and address the pandemic and then disseminate this knowledge to the rest of the world. This reinforces the brand image of China putting domestic issues first and this approach being better for not just China but the rest of the world.

These discussions of the Second Forum on the BRI and the pandemic both talked about China’s global strategies and responses while the ambassadors were also refining the messaging for Mexican readers. The BRI series of articles began by just introducing the BRI’s origins and ultimate goals while ending with a passive invitation to Mexican officials to join in on what was sure to be an exciting opportunity. By the second article the message to the Mexican audience was more explicit in the benefits the BRI offered and insinuated that Mexico would be missing out if the government representatives did not attend. By the third article, Ambassador Qiu

provides a report of the only Mexican representatives that had committed to attend and even though it wasn't the level of participation that the ambassador had been campaigning for in previous articles he frames it as a sign that there is a political and popular will in Mexico to participate in the BRI. Thus, Mexico and China are moving towards higher levels of cooperation, or rather China's preferred avenue of cooperation via the BRI.

The series of articles about pandemic responses also followed a similar trajectory in which at first the Ambassador updates the Mexican audience about China's overall global response to the pandemic and indicates that Mexico is benefiting from these responses through shared knowledge and aid. By the second article Zhu explained how Latin America and the Caribbean benefited from anti-pandemic cooperation with China and laid the groundwork for how this cooperation would extend to the future. In the third article, Zhu frames the pandemic as a stress test on China's unique approach to international cooperation and proof of its success. The appeal to Mexican readers and what this means for future China-Mexico relations is much more explicit by this article and since Zhu is already framing China-Mexico anti-pandemic response as a success, it portends well for the future of these relations if they follow the Chinese approach to cooperation.

Overall, this investigation of Chinese diplomatic discourse aimed at the Mexican public demonstrates the precision with which the Chinese spokespeople curate every instance of public-facing text and builds upon past messaging on China's role on the world stage and becomes more refined in its appeal to Mexican audiences. The expansiveness of China's vision of cooperation combined with the ambassadors' consistency in terminology to define Chinese cooperation despite different circumstances allowed for a consistently positive image of China to persist. In these two series of op-eds, cooperation with China is the solution to an array of immediate issues

and a long-term alternative path to shared prosperity with China. Additionally, by identifying cooperation as a specific keyword in Chinese diplomatic discourse and tracing it across these public-facing documents I was able to provide a picture of how Chinese cooperation differed from other types of cooperation. By considering how the Chinese ambassadors build up the brand of China across these documents, we must consider how Chinese diplomatic discourse is powerful not just because of its ubiquity and legibility but also due to its malleability across space and time. So, Chinese cooperation then does not refer to just one thing or a collection of actions, but rather refers to a way of interacting with China, based on an idealized set of characteristics and within a presumed world order. In this world order, China is different than other world powers and provides unique means of cooperation which provide mutual benefits for countries which choose to participate, including Mexico.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Board, Nature Editorial. 2020. "Stop the Coronavirus Stigma Now." *Nature* 580: 165.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-01009-0>.
- Calisher, Charles, Dennis Carroll, Rita Colwell, Ronald B. Corley, Peter Daszak, Christian Drosten, Luis Enjuanes, Jeremy Farrar, Hume Field, Josie Golding, Alexander Gorbalenya, Bart Haagmans, James M. Hughes, William B. Karesh, Gerald T. Keusch, Sai Kit Lam, Juan Lubroth, John S. Mackenzie, Larry Madoff, Jonna Mazet, Peter Palese, Stanley Perlman, Leo Poon, Bernard Roizman, Linda Saif, Kanta Subbarao, and Mike Turner. 2020. "Statement in Support of the Scientists, Public Health Professionals, and Medical Professionals of China Combatting Covid-19." *The Lancet* 395 (10226): e42-e43. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30418-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30418-9).
- Creutzfeldt, Benjamin. 2023. "The Boys Who Cried Wolf Warrior: China's Diplomatic Strategy in Latin America." *Los niños que clamaban Guerrero lobo: la estrategia diplomática de China en América Latina*. (113): 61-84. <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiant113.2023.03>.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=161608760&site=eds-live>.
- Embassy of the People's Republic of China, in Mexico, February 17, 2020, 2020, "Embajador Zhu Qingqiao Habla de Esfuerzos Chinos en Lucha contra COVID-19 ", http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/202002/t20200218_4173999.htm.
- Hartig, Falk. 2016. "How China Understands Public Diplomacy: The Importance of National Image for National Interests." *International Studies Review* 18 (4): 655-680.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw007>. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw007>.
- Hearn, A. H. 2013. "China's Social Engagement Programs in Latin America." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 19 (2): 239-250.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2013.853355>.
<https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84891873655&doi=10.1080%2f13260219.2013.853355&partnerID=40&md5=b83989e6ec8214d90321b36e9d34dba4>.
- Niu, Haibin. 2018. "A Strategic Analysis of Chinese Infrastructure Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean." In *Building Development for a New Era: China's Infrastructure Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Enrique; Armony Dussel Peters, Ariel C.; Cui, Shoujun;, 180-194. Mexico: University of Pittsburgh and Red América Latina y el Caribe sobre China.
- Qiu, Xiaoqi. 2018. "China Comparte con el Mundo Reformas y Oportunidades." *El Milenio*, December 17, 2018, 2018. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/china-comparte-con-el-mundo-reformas-y-oportunidades>.
- . 2019a. "Alcanzando Consensos para Afrontar Conjuntamente los Desafíos." *El Financiero*, April 1, 2019, 2019a. <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi1/alcanzando-consensos-para-afrontar-conjuntamente-los-desafios/>.

- . 2019b. "China Abre una Nueva Era de Exploración Espacial." *El Heraldo de Mexico*, January 9, 2019, 2019b. <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/opinion/2019/1/9/china-abre-una-nueva-era-de-exploracion-espacial-72318.html>.
- . 2019c. "China: Shanxi, Escaparate de Transformación y Apertura." *El Milenio*, February 26, 2019, 2019c. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/china-shanxi-escaparatode-transformacion-y-apertura>.
- . 2019d. "Cooperación de la Franja y la Ruta." *El Economista*, April 21, 2019, 2019d. <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/opinion/Cooperacion-de-la-Franja-y-la-Ruta-20190421-0063.html>.
- . 2019e. "Inyectemos Energía Positiva a la Cooperación China-México." *El Milenio*, January 7, 2019, 2019e. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/inyectemos-energia-positiva-a-la-cooperacion-china-mexico>.
- . 2019f. "Nueva Expedición para la Diplomacia China." *El Heraldo de Mexico*, March 10, 2019, 2019f. http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/ojos/201903/t20190310_10313379.htm.
- . 2019g. "Promover la Construcción de la Franja y la Ruta." *El Heraldo de Mexico*, April 7, 2019, 2019g. http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/ojos/201904/t20190409_10313392.htm.
- . 2019h. "Promoviendo Juntos un Nuevo Desarrollo." *El Financiero*, February 21, 2019, 2019h. <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/promoviendo-juntos-un-nuevo-desarrollo/>.
- . 2019i. "Que se Transmita la Amistad China-México." *El Milenio*, April 22, 2019, 2019i. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/que-se-transmita-la-amistad-china-mexico>.
- . 2019j. "Tianjin Enfrenta una Nueva Oportunidad de Desarrollo." *El Milenio*, April 18, 2019, 2019j. http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/ojos/201904/t20190419_10313397.htm.
- Serrano Moreno, Juan Enrique, Diego Telias, and Francisco Urdinez. 2021. "Deconstructing the Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America." *Asian Education and Development Studies* 10 (3): 337-347. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-01-2020-0021>.
- Zhu, Qingqiao. 2019. "Qinghai, el “Origen de los Tres Ríos” para el Mundo." *El Milenio*, December 13, 2019, 2019. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/zhu-qingqiao/columna-zhu-qingqiao/qinghai-el-origen-de-los-tres-rios-para-el-mundo>.
- . 2020a. "China y AL, hacia un Futuro Compartido." *El Heraldo de Mexico*, July 16, 2020, 2020a. <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/opinion/2020/7/16/china-al-hacia-un-futuro-compartido-192909.html>.

- . 2020b. "China y ALC Construyen la Comunidad de Futuro Compartido." *El Universal*, August 7, 2020, 2020b. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/opinion/zhu-qingqiao/china-y-alc-construyen-la-comunidad-de-futuro-compartido/>.
- . 2020c. "Comunidad, Confianza, Cooperación, Contribución " *El Milenio*, October 1, 2020, 2020c. Accessed January 25, 2021. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/zhu-qingqiao/columna-zhu-qingqiao/comunidad-confianza-cooperacion-contribucion>.
- . 2020d. "La Solidaridad es el Arma Más Poderosa para Vencer la Pandemia." *El Milenio*, June 6, 2020, 2020d. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/zhu-qingqiao/columna-zhu-qingqiao/la-solidaridad-es-el-arma-mas-poderosa-para-vencer-la-pandemia>.

CHAPTER 5: BRAND CHINA RECONFIGURING VISIONS OF MEXICO'S FUTURE

The President of Mexico and the Chinese Ambassadors have multiple platforms and opportunities to promote their visions of China and China-Mexico futures. However, the Mexican public receives messaging about China from a plethora of sources including news media, popular culture, other political pundits, corporations, and individual experiences. The narratives about China from these sources creates a heterogeneous brand image of China in Mexico that is multilayered and at times contradictory. This complex brand image impacts public opinions of China in Mexico which ultimately affects the political viability of collaborating with China at an economic or diplomatic level. Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss findings from a 2022 city-wide survey I disseminated in Tijuana, Mexico that aims to gauge the level of agreement that respondents had with various narratives on China already promoted by the Chinese ambassadors and AMLO to the public. I conducted this research in Tijuana, Mexico because it is a city that has been a major gateway for the entry of Chinese immigrants, Chinese capital, and Chinese corporations to Mexico and which also is a manufacturing hub that Chinese goods have outcompeted for the past three decades.

I discovered that the Tijuana residents had a positive view of China and the future of China-Mexico relations and that they generally agreed with the core premises of China's brand as a new kind of world power that could provide opportunities for Mexico. However, in the open-ended responses and in conversations I had while conducting the surveys in-person, the complex thought processes behind these opinions emerged. Individuals were taking up the narrative threads of China's promoted brand and interweaving them into the existing geopolitical and economic paradigms with which they already made sense of Mexico's past, present and future. Additionally, individuals' frameworks for understanding the world were already

articulated around locally specific knowledge such as borderland politics and the complexities of the manufacturing sector which further influenced their incorporation of China's brand narratives into their world views. Many of the respondents were very pragmatic in their views on China and China-Mexico relations, and they viewed China as another world power that Mexico needed to smartly engage with to avoid mistakes of the past and forge a better future, a future that China could take a part in if it actually benefited Mexico. Therefore, while the respondents may not completely embrace the official narratives about China promoted by Chinese diplomats, the alternative narrative threads that this discourse provided were influencing their worldviews and created discursive space for respondents to imagine alternative futures in which China could strategically play a role.

From these findings, I conclude that China's discursive influence in Mexico is less about its ability to make people buy into the "China story". Instead, by elevating the image and disseminating more information about China to the Mexican public, the Chinese ambassadors and AMLO introduce new narrative threads that allow the Mexican public to put words to and identify ways that global system changes are impacting their lives and potentially the trajectory of Mexico. Therefore, I ultimately suggest that in gauging public opinions on such broad topics such as "China's influence" we must then consider how the narratives promoted by various actors align or do not align with prevailing paradigms of understanding global systems and the unique ways that individuals incorporate these narratives into their own worldviews in ways that ultimately affect overall public opinion on these topics.

Public Opinion Polling on China in Latin America

As a response to the increased political and economic activity between China and Latin America, region-wide surveys done by AmericasBarometer Latin American Public Opinion

Project in work with Shanghai Jiao Tong University backed National Image Project, have added questions pertaining to public opinion on China's influence in the region to their surveys beginning in 2010 (Kang 2015; Carreras 2017). Some of these questions included: "how much influence do you think that China has in your country?" and "The government of China. In your opinions is it very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy?". More recently, the Pew Research Center has also created a world-wide survey looking to gauge the perceptions of China's influence and governance across the globe and comparing countries in high- and middle-income countries. This survey used questions such as, "please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of China?" and "In making international policy decisions, to what extent do you think China takes into account the interests of countries like (survey country)?" (Silver, Huang, and Clancy 2023).

Analyses of the 2012 and 2014 survey responses done by Carreras (2017) and Kang (2015) revealed that the Latin American public recognized China's growing impact in the region and that the majority saw this increased influence as a positive. Carreras (2017) posited that China's economic dealings and investment activity influenced the positive public opinions to a greater degree than traditional indicators of successful soft power campaigns such as popularity of Chinese culture and media. Kang (2015) found that at the time positive views of China's influence in the region were slightly higher than those of the US and posited this was due to China's success at modernizing its once undeveloped country that LAC countries saw as valuable experience. These studies were able to demonstrate overall trends of public opinions in LAC about China and interrogate regional or country-to-country differences, however many conclusions drawn about the reasons for the differences in opinions were conjectures based on

the knowledge of the political economic context of those countries. For example, Kang (2015) hypothesizes that responses from “Bolivian Alliance for the Americas” countries, led by Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro and opposed to United States’ hegemony, would indicate a stronger preference for the China’s economic model of development over the “Brazil-Mexico pro-US free market liberal model”. However, while more of the respondents from these countries indicated a greater trust for China (51.9%) over the United States (40%), only in Venezuela did more respondents indicated a preference for China’s model of development over the US (Kang 2015).

The 2023 Pew Research Report, “China’s Approach to Foreign Policy Gets Largely Negative Reviews” can provide more comparisons both longitudinally and across regions. The questions in this survey focus on measuring China’s favorability, the trustworthiness of Xi Jinping to “do the right thing” in world politics and the extent to which China takes other countries’ interests into account in its decision making (Silver, Huang, and Clancy 2023). The only Latin American countries surveyed were Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. They found that respondents in Africa and Latin America viewed China more favorably than respondents in North America, Europe, and Asia and notably, Mexico gave China a majority positive rating (Silver, et al. 2023, 5&13).

The researchers note that this favorability in Mexico could be related to the trend of Chinese companies engaging in “nearshoring” or opening foreign-owned factories and manufacturers closer to major consumer populations (Silver, et al. 2023, 15). However, a 2022 market study conducted by the National Bank of Mexico on nearshoring in Mexico indicates that Chinese companies, while increased in number than previous years, still only accounted for a small portion of the companies engaging in this kind of activity (Mazini 2022). Additionally, most of this activity is happening in Monterrey and Saltillo and may not be relevant to many

respondents who could have taken this survey. This is a prime example of the lack of explanatory power that these surveys offer. They may be a good barometer of public sentiments that allow researchers to make broad claims that the public perceives an increase in China's influence in the region, but do not provide enough detail nor consider the local particularities required to claim what influences these public opinions, who holds which opinions and how these opinions could change overtime. More insight and details could reveal what specific activities done by China or Chinese businesses are being reacted to the most, what social and cultural aspects are influencing these perceptions and how do opinions differ on these changes across the population.

Additionally, individuals' relations and experiences with people, places, things, or ideas that they associate with China are also highly variable even within one country, where a large Chinese infrastructure project may cause public outrage in one community and Chinese-run factory that provides new jobs may have a different effect. Therefore, I designed and disseminated a survey for the public of Tijuana that aimed to gauge reactions to specific narratives about China already promoted by the Chinese ambassadors and the Mexican President to further investigate what aspects of China's brand were the most salient to them.

Tijuana: A Microcosm of China-Mexico Relations and Changes

The public opinions on China in Latin America and the Caribbean are varied and highly dependent on the experiences of the populace with the Chinese state, Chinese companies, and Chinese immigrants along with the media and government discourse on China. In Mexico, as argued in Chapter 2, China-Mexico relations have developed in a more piecemeal fashion, since national level engagement was not politically viable for much of the 2000s due to economic competition in the US export market and domestic manufacturing (Hearn 2016). The level and

diversity of activities that could be associated with China in Mexico has only grown in the past decade. In a speech given by Ambassador Qiu Xiaoqi on the commemoration day of the founding of the People's Republic of China, he enumerates the multiple facets of China-Mexico relations from the 58 billion dollars in trade and investments over \$1.1 billion to the entry of Chinese brands and banks or even Chinese car manufacturers like JAC Motors and BAIC Group (Embassy of the People's Republic of China 2020). In other parts of the country, large infrastructure projects such as the scrapped Chicoasén II dam project in Chiapas or the China Harbor Company work on the Port of Veracruz may also loom large as symbols of China's growing influence.

During pre-dissertation research in Tijuana, Mexico in 2018, I witnessed how these vastly different activities that could be associated with China informed people's opinions about China and China-Mexico relations. In some conversations people would refer to the superiority of Chinese food in Tijuana or gesture towards their Huawei phone as indicators of this influence. For others, it would become conversations about the Chinese immigrants moving to the city or that they in fact worked for a Chinese company. This only reinforced my interest in conducting research in Tijuana, a city on the borderlands between the US and Mexico and which also has seen a great influx of Chinese immigrants, goods, capital, and corporations. Tijuana is an interesting place to investigate public perceptions about China because of the diverse types of Chinese influence in the city that residents could have knowledge of or experience with and its complex relationship with the United States on the borderlands.

First, there is a significant Chinese community in Tijuana, and potentially the largest in Mexico. As covered in more detail in Chapter 2, the initial development of northern Mexico was dependent on Chinese immigration and despite anti-Chinese campaigns of the early 1900s,

Tijuana did not expel its Chinese community. This has led to the city maintaining a Chinese population that have become part of the city's cultural landscape and contribute to the claims of many people that Tijuana has the best Chinese food. This diasporic community has played a key role in establishing China-Baja California economic connections well before other regions in the country; the Chinese Overseas Chinese Affairs Office leveraged the Chinese diaspora communities in Tijuana and Mexicali to create the Chamber of Chinese Enterprises of the Northeast in 2008 (Hearn 2016). These relations also led to the first direct flight from mainland China to Mexico, and at the time, all Latin America, in 2008 and with this a new wave of Chinese immigration.²⁴ Official figures estimate that between 2000 and 2015 the Chinese population of Mexico quintupled to 8,860 people, and of these immigrants Baja California is home to over 30% of them, the highest concentration in the country (Tapia 2018). This number is surely higher now, and Tijuana is recognized in the national media as a center for Chinese immigration with reports that the "Chinese achieve their Mexican dream in Tijuana" and others stating that the Chinese community is a key to the development of Baja California (AP 2019).

Second, Tijuana is a major city in the state of Baja California on the border with the US and a key location in the development of the NAFTA-era infrastructure of borderlands factories to produce goods to be sent to the United States. Tijuana's economic development is tied to the maquila industry and is directly impacted by trade deal negotiations and changing trade partners (Hufbauer, Schott, and Orejas 2005). A report in December 2022, estimated that there are over 270,000 people working in the maquilas in Tijuana (Solis 2022). Therefore, China's emergence as a manufacturing power negatively impacted outcomes of Mexico's manufacturing sector which is especially salient in a manufacturing center such as Tijuana. It would not be surprising

²⁴Direct flights from mainland China to Tijuana with a 2-year stoppage due to the COVID-19 pandemic

to have Chinese manufacturing power then be a bigger impact on opinions of the public of Tijuana, who may have witnessed firsthand this shift to the detriment of Mexican manufacturers and workers. However, more recently, large Chinese corporations, such as Huawei and Hisense, have come to Tijuana and the surrounding area providing jobs and in some cases revitalizing abandoned factories (Qiu 2019). As of 2019 the Chinese embassy reported that there were over 40 Chinese companies in Tijuana (Viveros 2017; Guerrero Vázquez 2018).

Third, the Chinese government recognizes the importance of engaging with Tijuana to further China-Mexico relations. The only Chinese consulate outside of Mexico City is in Tijuana and therefore the Ambassadors frequently visit the city and hold Chinese cultural promotion events. The local government officials in Tijuana also support increased engagement with China. A representative of the Tijuana Mayor's office attending and speaking at a Chinese consulate event celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China stated, "the twinning between China and Tijuana, validates the ties between them and serves as a platform for new forms cultural, social and commercial cooperation, with the purpose of achieving specific and innovative projects" (Hernandez 2019). Tijuana's closer ties to China in comparison to other parts of Mexico made it an interesting place to conduct fieldwork on perceptions of China since the residents may have had a wider range of experiences with Chinese companies, people of Chinese ethnicity, Chinese food, or even the Chinese government.

Surveying the Public

With this context of Tijuana in mind, I went to the city with the intention of investigating how the public viewed China and what factors contributed to individuals' opinions. To contend with a shortened timeline and limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, I developed a survey instrument that aimed to gauge overall knowledge of China-Mexico relations and measure the

degree of agreement or disagreement with premises of the China brand promoted by the Chinese government spokespersons in Mexico. I first gathered demographic information and asked about respondents' exposure to media coverage of China. I then structured the following four sections to gauge respondents' level of agreement to the narratives contributing the brand of China. As explained in the introduction, while the brand of China comes down to China being a different kind of world power that can provide alternative opportunities for partner countries, there are many different facets to these narratives that contribute to this image and outside parties also contribute to the narratives about China that influence its image.

In the context of Mexico, the past two Chinese ambassadors to Mexico have made sure to present the brand image of China to the Mexican president and the Mexican public. As covered in Chapters 3 and 4, the ambassadors and AMLO focused on a variety of topics in their public communication such as China's technological expertise, China's unique development model, and China-Mexico trade relations. Using this background knowledge, I presented 17 statements that promoted these narratives on China taken directly from the public speeches, press conferences and publications of the Chinese Ambassadors and AMLO and asked respondents to rank their level of agreement on a scale with the options of totally disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and totally agree.²⁵ I separated these statements into three sections that pertained to: China-Mexico government relations, China-Mexico economic relations and China's role on the world stage. I then had a follow up question which asked respondents to select three issues which should be the priority for the future of China-Mexico relations. By parsing out the various narratives that contribute to the brand of China and collecting information about how the public reacts to each one, I can pinpoint the specific narratives that reinforce the brand and that are the most salient to

²⁵Some of the statements were slightly edited for brevity but I retained the exact word choices such as adjectives or verbs to describe these dynamics.

the Tijuana public. The follow-up ranking exercise then allowed respondents to indicate what aspects of the China-Mexico relations were the most important to them. Finally, I provided the opportunity to write on their own perspectives of China's influence on their lives in Tijuana and future of China-Mexico cooperation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

I formatted and disseminated this survey using Qualtrics and received 353 survey responses between February 1, 2022-March 30, 2022. I advertised the survey online on social media and disseminated it through emails and WhatsApp groups. I also went to public squares with research assistants recruited from the Autonomous University of Baja California on fourteen separate occasions. The plazas were in the delegations of Playas de Tijuana, Mesa de Otay and Centro. I used the filtering questions of being over 18 years old and living in Tijuana, Mexico as criteria to take the rest of the survey. Four respondents did not live in Tijuana, so they did not complete the survey. Of the 349 remaining responses, an additional 26 individuals did not reach the end of the survey however 18 of these responses included responses to the demographic data and at least the first section on background knowledge about China and China-Mexico relations. Therefore, for this chapter I am including all 341 responses that included at least some responses to opinions on China and China-Mexico.

Due to this convenience sampling method of collecting responses, the survey respondents are not a true random sample of the population of Tijuana which limits these findings from generalization to the entire population using statistical analyses. However, while recruiting survey respondents in the field I was able to gather supplemental ethnographic data from these interactions. I took notes on distinctive characteristics of the respondents, large reactions to certain questions, reasoning behind responses and extended responses individuals gave. These surveys sparked longer conversations about these topics that the survey wouldn't have captured

on its own. Additionally, I was able to reach multiple respondents who would never have been given the option or interested in taking this survey. I got responses from elderly individuals, people with no internet access and those who were at first wary to take the survey because they didn't feel they knew enough about the topic to contribute. From the combination of these methods, I was able to see how respondents reacted to specific talking points about China and China-Mexico relations but also go deeper into how they discussed these topics in conversations and what aspects of this relation they valued the most.

Who Took the Survey?

Of the responses, I got 184 from people self-identifying as male (54%), 157 from individuals self-identifying as female (46%), one choosing other and another preferring not to respond. Of these respondents, 204 (59.8%) were between the ages of 18-35, but I was able to get responses from people of up to 84 years old (Figure 3). Tijuana's population does have more men than women and most of the population is under the age of 40. As of 2020, 26.6% of the total population of Tijuana were between the ages of 15-29 (G.d. Mexico 2020). So, while the places we recruited, especially those near the university may have had more young people than other public spaces, it was not far from the actual population of Tijuana as a whole.

I also got responses from eight of the nine delegations in Tijuana despite only doing in-person recruitment in three of them. Delegations are administrative and political units used to divide large cities in Mexico. I found that people did not always know the delegation of their residence, they instead just knew their neighborhood, so for some that indicated "prefer not to respond" it was because they did not know, and others chose not to answer the question at all.

Additionally, I conducted in-person recruitment in the cafes and in the parks of Playas de Tijuana, in Parque Teniente Guerrero, Zona Rio Shopping Center and Avenida Revolución (the

Baja California in Mesa de Otay Centenario. I chose these recruiting locations for safety reasons and these locations could account for large amount of people from these areas represented in the respondents.

Figure 3. Age of Respondents

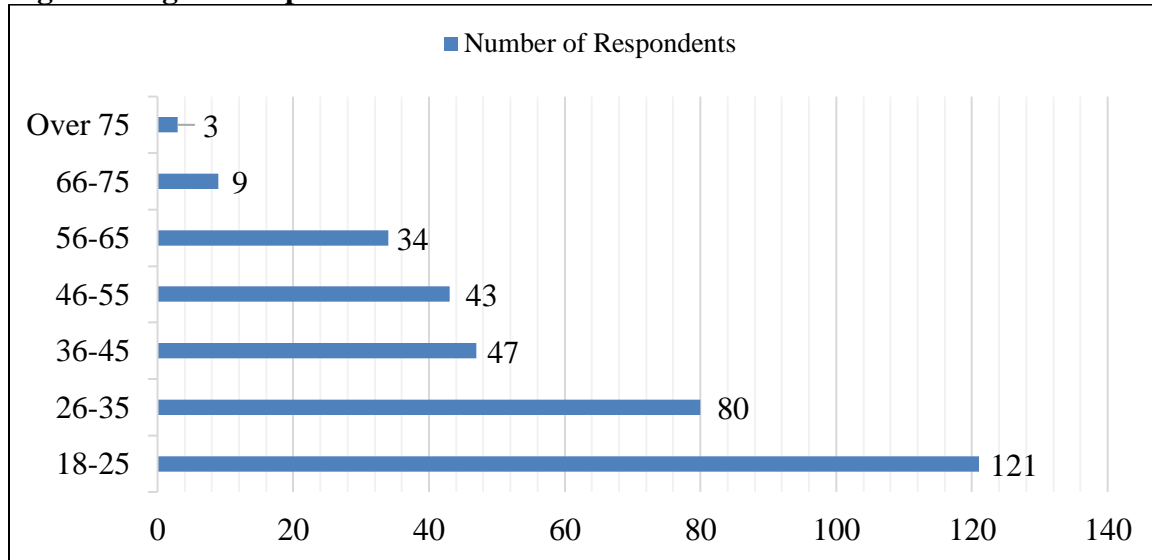
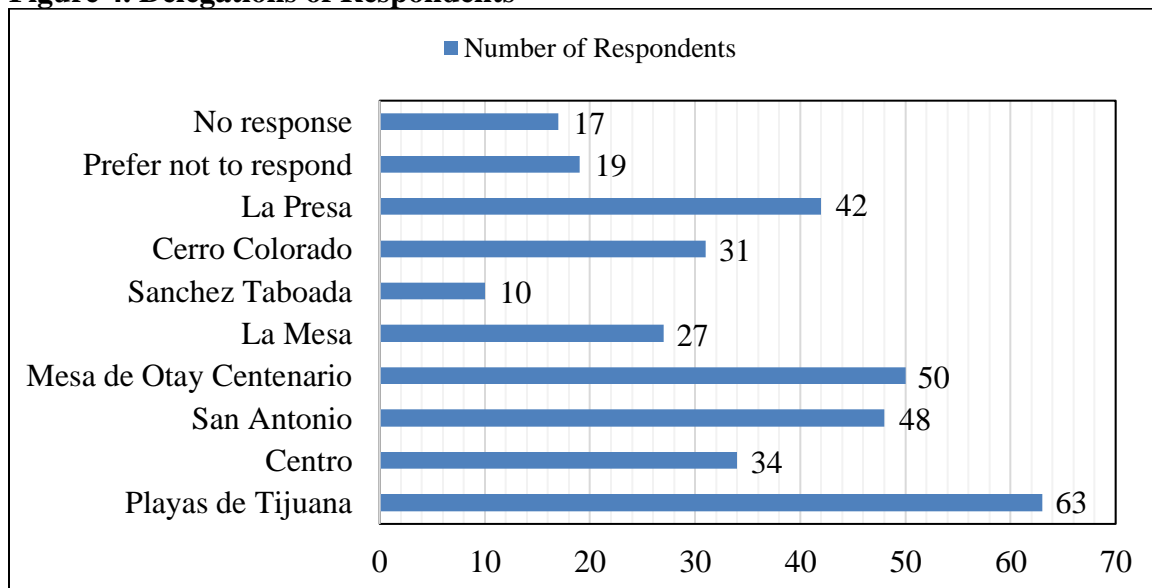


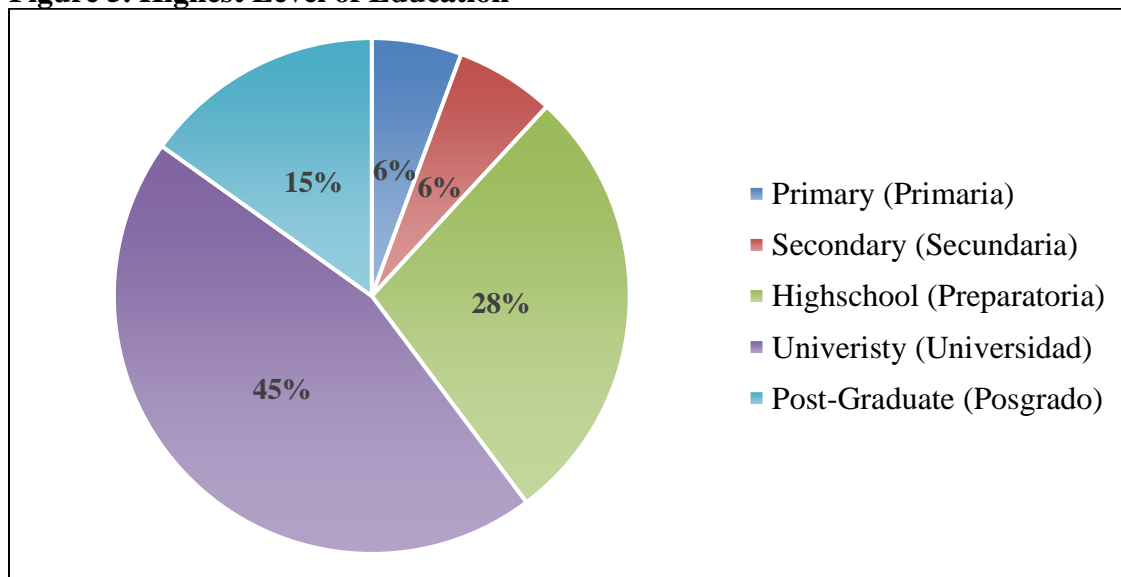
Figure 4. Delegations of Respondents



Finally, most of my respondents had a university education or higher. This skew towards individuals with higher levels of education is due to my own personal network consisting of

these individuals and that I disseminated this survey primarily through academic networks and sites. However, in the in-person surveys I recruited respondents of the entire range of education levels who would have never come across this survey otherwise. Of the 341, I collected 136 surveys through online recruitment, and I collected the remaining 215 in person. Many of the elderly respondents and those that were working as vendors or day laborers at these locations let me know that due to their family circumstances, they didn't complete primary or stopped after secondary school. I am sure that the in-person survey recruitment added valuable participants to this study who would otherwise never have a chance to share their opinions. Many people exclaimed that they didn't know anything about China-Mexico politics but then would have strong opinions on at least some of these questions and statements.

Figure 5. Highest Level of Education

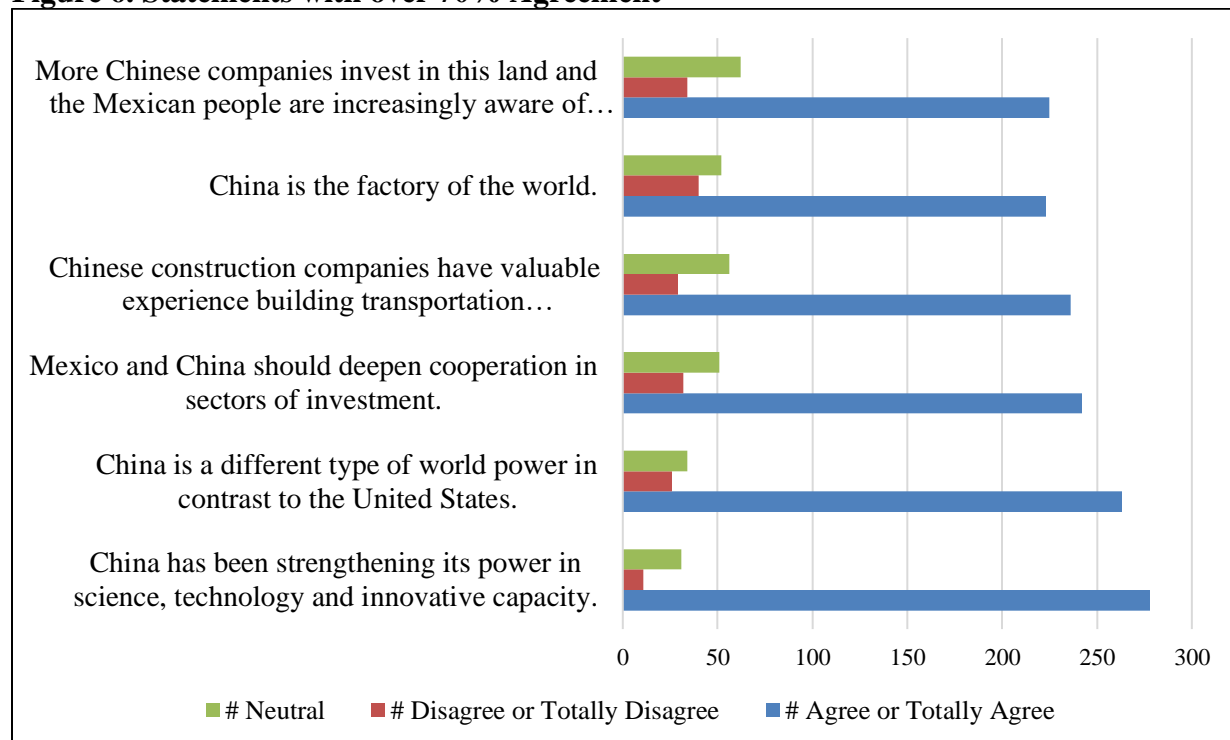


Views on China in Tijuana

Overall, the public of Tijuana has a favorable view of China and China-Mexico relations and for the 17 statements, none received a majority of respondents in disagreement, indicating that they generally agreed with the narratives on China and Mexico promoted by the Chinese ambassadors and AMLO. There were six statements that garnered over 70% agreement and total

agreement combined. Notably, the question to have the most “disagree” and “totally disagree” statements was “China's large manufacturing sector is a threat to Mexican companies” with 30.7% of the respondents. However, this question also had nearly a third agree and the other third select “neutral”. So, one of the only questions that explicitly painted a negative picture of China, as a threat, had the most disagreement and a high number of people not selecting a side.

Figure 6. Statements with over 70% Agreement



The popularity of these statements begins to paint a picture of what aspects of China-Mexico relations were the most salient to the public. These statements indicate that the respondents valued China’s technological and infrastructure expertise, investment capacity and manufacturing power. I grouped the 17 survey statements under three sections, China-Mexico economic relations, China-Mexico government relations and views on China. None of these statements are from the China-Mexico government relations group which included statements such as: “China-Mexico relations are characterized by shared benefits”, “China and Mexico

share many common aspects and a great convergence of interests” and “bilateral relations between China and Mexico will become a paradigm for developing countries that work together and move forward together.” This also corresponds with the themes in the open responses which privileged the economic relations over government engagement.

This bias in the responses indicate that respondents’ views on China potentially mirrored the priorities of AMLO more so than that of the Chinese ambassadors. As discussed in Chapter 3, the ambassadors and AMLO aligned in their general view that China and Mexico should strengthen their relations. However, their views on how to enact this new era of cooperation differed in activities and priority areas. Chinese ambassadors prioritized enriching bilateral government relations and forging better cultural understanding as the foundation on which to expand other types of engagement such as infrastructure or investment. The ambassadors framed cooperation as based in the logic of China and Mexico having converging interests and sharing a history of friendship that would foster closer relations. AMLO on the other hand emphasized the economic power and expertise of China that could help further his own priorities of economic development. The respondents agreed that China-Mexico relations were important; 63.3% indicated that China was becoming more important for the Mexican government. They also embraced the statements pertaining to economic opportunities, however, their agreement to statements on complementarity and converging interests were not as strong.

A factor that could be contributing to the government relations between China and Mexico being less salient to the respondents is the lack of familiarity or knowledge about government initiatives. For example, only 15.5% of the respondents had heard of the China-Mexico Comprehensive Strategic Association, a key forum for bilateral engagement that has been around for nearly a decade. This could be associated with where individuals got their news

since only 37.2% had noticed more news coverage on China or China-Mexico relations and the most popular sources of news about China and China-Mexico relations for the respondents was Facebook and Television, and as a write-in answer YouTube was the most popular. The Chinese ambassadors did spend time conducting interviews on television but to see content from the embassy on social media platforms you would have to follow to the embassy's account.

Conversely, the overwhelming agreement with aspects of China's technological, infrastructure, and investment power could also be attributed to getting news about China in these sources and potentially more experience with these aspects of China's activity in Tijuana. Five people wrote about the importance of increasing technological knowledge with China to improve development, as one person stated, "I think it affects that China is not involved a lot in the infrastructure, we need more support in technology, construction of buildings, highways, hospitals and highways, just as they have it, they are very efficient." In this statement, we can see how respondents identified key areas that China could help Mexico that would be tangible for the public were Chinese technological knowledge and infrastructure expertise. The respondents repeated this opinion in the ranking exercise of what respondents believed should be the top priorities for future Mexico-China engagement in which 77.5% of the respondents chose "exchange of technological knowledge and experience". The Chinese ambassadors push the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the prime example of China's infrastructure expertise and in the Mexico context, the ambassadors tout the Tren Maya project as a national example of how a Chinese company can help realize Mexican infrastructure projects. However, for these respondents, only 63 individuals had even heard of the BRI, and only one person mentioned the Tren Maya project in conversation. For the people in Tijuana, Chinese infrastructure pertained more to technology, urban infrastructure, and manufacturing infrastructure. The respondents

were buying into the narrative of Chinese expertise in these arenas, but not in relation to the large infrastructure projects led by China, instead thinking about infrastructure that impacts their daily lives such as highways. In the 2023 Pew Research survey, 61% of Mexican respondents also agreed that China's investment into Mexico has benefited the economy a fair amount or a great deal (Silver, et al. 27).

The other aspect of China's influence that was the most salient was its productive power, as shown in the prominent level of agreement with the statements, "China is the factory of the world" and "more Chinese companies invest in this land and the Mexican people are increasingly aware of Chinese brands". The Chinese ambassadors did not emphasize China's overall manufacturing power nor used the "factory of the world" moniker as the Communist Party of China views it as a vestige of its past stage of development which it used on its path to become a modern developed nation and was associated with cheap labor and cheap products, an image the ambassadors wished to get rid of. To counteract this narrative, the ambassadors have promoted the Chinese goods and products entering the market that are higher quality and that do not compete with the consumer goods market of Mexico, such as Huawei phones and Chinese car brands.

For the respondents, China's productive power was multifaceted. The ubiquity of Chinese goods of all different calibers from Huawei phones or cheaply made tourist goods "made in China" were all reminders of this power, even when the respondents viewed some favorably, and others not so favorably. One respondent wrote in his assessment of Chinese goods as such, "At the time, Chinese products were said to be of bad quality, something that is no longer seen today, and as China grows economically, we see more frequently products, services, and even systems from that country." He did select "agree" to the statement that China was the

factory of the world and the statement about more Chinese brands being known by the Mexican public. These statements did not contradict each other for this respondent, he saw this as just another evolution of China's manufacturing power. This positive view of Chinese goods could also be due to the positive views of Chinese technology demonstrated in the Pew Research Center survey in which 57% of Mexican respondents viewed Chinese technological goods as well-made and 56% considered it to be inexpensive (Silver, et al. 31).

Finally, 81.4% of respondents agreed or totally agreed that China was a different kind of power than the United States. However, looking in the responses it was much more difficult to discern what specifically about the two made them different or the same. The respondents who strongly agreed with this statement were also overwhelmingly also agreeing with the following statements: "China's large manufacturing sector offers good opportunities to increase trade with Mexico" and "The Mexican government should provide incentives for Chinese companies to operate in Mexico." These correlations hint that respondents saw this difference from the United States as an opportunity for alternative types of economic engagement.

Notably, the respondents that strongly disagreed with the statement of China's difference from the United States, were also more likely to agree that "China's large manufacturing sector is a threat to Mexican companies" and more likely to disagree with the statement "In recent years, the friendship between Mexico and China has been consolidated". Seeing China as not being different than the United States, was therefore also correlated for many of the respondents with negative opinions on China and by extension negative opinions on the US. For example, a young man who followed this pattern, stated, "The interests of China in Mexico are only the exploitation of natural resources and to maintain an established position of espionage for the 'gringos.'" His response demonstrates the negative opinions on China associated with perceiving

it as a similar kind of world power to the US. However, for the majority of those that agreed that China was different than the US, the open responses were highly varied and the reason for the differentiation between the countries was unclear.

Thinking about China to Imagine Mexico

In grappling with the wording of the phrases I gave them, respondents were also grappling with the impact of China on Mexico and how this figured into their own perceptions of Mexico on the global stage and its potential futures. From these discussions it became clear that for the public of Tijuana, Mexico needed new possibilities for its future development that included better infrastructure, investment into the economy, and jobs. Respondents agreed that China could be a part of this solution as technology and infrastructure experts and new source of investment, as seen in the previous discussion.

However, while respondents agreed that China was different than the US, they were still concerned by the possibility of disadvantageous deals made with China. They justified this wariness by telling stories of past unfair treatment by world powers which disregarded Mexico's sovereignty and sabotaged the development of Mexico. Therefore, the respondents provided practical solutions for engaging with China to better Mexico in ways that privileged Mexican sovereignty and found avenues for engagement with China that fit the existing local context of Mexico. In this conceptualization of future China-Mexico relations, the narrative threads about China being a different kind of world power and China offering alternative development resources and models are present, but the conclusions of these narratives promoted by the Chinese ambassadors that China is therefore a benevolent development partner are not. Instead, the respondents are agreeing with the primary premise and interweaving them into their own world views of China and Mexico.

China is Different than the United States: A Threat or Friend?

A key narrative of China's brand is its differentiation from the west on multiple axis, as the oriental other, the communist other and then finally as a new kind of world power. The Chinese ambassadors frame China's alterity to other world powers to make multiple claims about China's position in the world and how this will influence its international relations. The diplomats promote China as a different kind of world power that is naturally aligned with the global south because it too suffered the indignities of colonialization and imperialism and therefore conducts international relations based in the tenets of solidarity-based mutual cooperation over fear-based domination. As noted above, 81.4% of the respondents did agree that China was a different kind of world power compared to the United States. However, they did not agree that this automatically meant China was a benevolent leader.

The first point of contention with the official narrative is the premise that China's world power status is of equal status to other world powers, namely the US. Regardless of how much China continues to engage with Mexico, the US will always be a primary relationship for Mexico as its northern neighbor and economic partner. In response to my survey, multiple people stated that they didn't realize that China was that important for Mexico or as one of the open responses stated, "The Mexico-United States relations should be more important than the Mexico-China relations." While many people recognized China as an important country to engage with, the looming presence of the US especially in the Mexico-US borderlands was inescapable in the material, social and economic reality of respondents' daily lives. Thus, to discuss China's world power status, individuals also referenced the US.

In these layered conversations that compared China and the US as world powers, I saw how respondents thought of Mexico's own geopolitical positioning and its history with other

world powers. For the statement: “Mexico is caught in the middle of tensions between the United States and China”, 38.2% agreed and 22.7% totally agreed. Some respondents laughed in agreement with exclamations of, “of course!” while others explained to me that Mexico is not “trapped” between any countries, because it is its own independent country and can do whatever it wants. For respondents such as this, Mexico’s autonomy was their top priority, regardless of which world power the country needed to engage with. For the majority that agreed with the statement, they saw Mexico’s geopolitical position as dependent on delicately asserting its autonomy and sovereignty on the globe stage to maintain positive and ultimately beneficial relations with both the US and its potential rivals such as China. As one middle-aged woman summarized, “I have the impression that the Mexican government fears that closer ties to China will cause problems with the United States who sees the Asian country as a threat.” A young man took this speculation one step further in his written response stating, “in the aspect that the US could generate conflict of interests in the development of an economy together with China.” These two respondents viewed improved relations with China as correlated to poorer relations with the United States, positioning Mexico at the center of this balancing act that if the Mexican government did not navigate well could spell disaster for the country. So, for them, China and Mexico were both greater powers than Mexico and that is what mattered, rather than their relative power to one another.

This leads to the second point of divergence between the official narratives on China deployed by the diplomats and the narratives used by the public of Tijuana. Chinese diplomats frame China’s difference from western world powers as proof that China is therefore aligned with the global south and therefore treats countries as partners rather than subjects. Respondents did not interpret China’s difference from the US as an automatic alignment with Mexico, rather it

was also fundamentally different than Mexico. The markers of differentiation noted by respondents was its geographic location as an Asian country and its ideological background as a communist country. The respondents did not view China's Asian culture as a negative and a few mentioned their interests in Chinese culture. China's communist government however was of much greater concern. A young man I interviewed declared that he did not like the type of government China has and was afraid of China interfering with the Mexican government and making demands, and so while the United States was no better, China was more of a threat. To him, both countries were alike because they were major countries seeking geopolitical or economic advantages, but China's difference in government and therefore ideology made it more of a threat than the US. While the brand of China being different than the United States was salient for the respondents, this did not assuage concerns over Mexico sovereignty.

This negative view of China being a communist state indicates a third point of contention between the Chinese diplomats' narrative and the views of those in Tijuana, that China's difference to the west also indicated that it would not act like western world powers in its international relations. One middle aged woman in Zona Rio seemed to agree with this perspective as she explained to me that China is more pacifist than other countries and more interested in investment over anything else. For her, the intentions of China were solely monetary rather than geopolitical and thus its relations with Mexico were different than the US's interest in the country.

Another young man had a more cautionary take on how this relationship could play out by writing, "They should move forward but with precautions, China has demonstrated attempts at aggressive foreign policy with trading partners that have pointed out deficiencies in Human Rights in the Asian country. If friendship and genuine interest in joint progress are demonstrated,

great goals could be achieved.” He recognized that China could be a “friendly” partner and that could lead to benefits for Mexico but does not buy into the pacifist image of the country. He instead is knowledgeable about the power China has over dictating the conditions of bilateral relations and this includes silencing valid criticisms of the country in important arenas such as human rights. However, for this respondent, this concern was not enough to deter the possibility of working with the country.

In discussions of the potential relations with China, people also began to reflect on Mexico’s past and the pervasive influence that the US wielded over Mexico’s domestic and international affairs. A notable example of this kind of reflection was the mention of the 1923 Bucareli Treaty which Mexico signed after the Mexican Revolution ostensibly to address the concerns of United States citizens affected by the war, but which ultimately protected the land and oil interests of US citizens and companies. According to the respondent, “the Bucareli treaties have prevented Mexico from being a world power”. This treaty is covered by the Mexican government with similar disdain with the website for Mexico’s National Commission of Human Rights describing how the precedents set by the treaties have allowed for the United States to continue violating Mexico in its borderlands by letting “transnational companies to install electricity generation and regasification plants to supply the energy requirements of the United States in California,” and “allowing US police officers to operate our airports, officially turning them into branches of the CIA and FBI” (C. Mexico 2023).²⁶ This treaty seemingly has nation-wide significance as a symbol of the US taking advantage of Mexico and ignoring its sovereignty. In the open responses, invoking the Bucareli Treaty by name is a kind of warning of what could happen once again if Mexico is not cautious in its interactions with China.

²⁶CIA stands for the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency and the FBI is the United States’ Federal Bureau of Investigation.

For respondents with more favorable views of China, working with China was a clear opportunity for greater independence, using one world power as leverage against the other. One young woman stated that, “Mexico should stick closer to China, in order to make itself a counterweight to the capitalist model of the United States.” She clearly saw China and the US as different due to their alternative economic and governance models and did wish for an alternative outside of western norms and now working with China was a way to achieve this. The respondents with more cautious views of China also suggested ways to engage China in specific ways that would take advantage of its entry into the region while also checking this potential threat. Such as one person suggesting that Mexico should, “maintain the relation without mutual interference between the countries, except when it has to do with resolving some problem related to public health or some natural catastrophe.” Others provided more specific suggestions on how to engage with China saying, “[T]he Mexican government should incentivize Chinese investment and receive Chinese military advisory and equipment but also it should be stricter with the rules for Chinese investment with the objective of not doing harm to the Mexican natural environment.” The respondents bought into the idea that China was different from other world powers, and it did offer alternative possibilities, but they did not see it as the benevolent alternative that the Chinese diplomats proposed. One woman’s response summed up this perspective quite well, she wrote, “it is a good opportunity that if the [Mexican] government knows how to take advantage, it will go well for us.”

The last part is the key to protecting the sovereignty of Mexico, Mexico needs to “know how” to take advantage, and who knows who it will benefit if it doesn’t take advantage effectively. These responses indicate the pragmatic view that many respondents had of China and their in-depth knowledge of how global dynamics between China, the United States and Mexico

was a delicate balancing act. This viewpoint left room for the possibility of working with China for a different kind of future, one not so dependent on the west and potentially one which could be forged by Mexico, for Mexico. That is, if Mexico did not concede too much power over to China. The respondents were incorporating part of the Chinese diplomat backed message on China's role as a new kind of world power but were not buying into the secondary part of this message of China automatically being a better partner or acting different than other world powers, at least, not in the way that mattered to the respondents.

China is a Leader for Development: Complimentary or in Competition?

In the quotes above from respondents providing suggestions on how to mitigate China potentially taking advantage of Mexico, there was still hope for working with China to improve the Mexican economy and help with development. There was a tradeoff between the need to protect Mexican interests and respondents understanding that Mexico was chronically underdeveloped and therefore not meeting its maximum potential as a modern country.

In the open responses and conversations, while respondents saw China as a potential threat to sovereignty, they also saw China as a fount for alternative opportunities, development knowledge and capital to further the interests of Mexico. Some respondents had a purely pragmatic view of China's ability to help with Mexican developing, as a pair of women in Zona Rio said in response to discussing increased Chinese investment and more Chinese companies coming to Mexico, "work is work, jobs are jobs." Others however had more nuanced views on Mexico could potentially collaborate with China in the existing global economic systems to advance the development goals of the Mexican public. The common refrain I got was that Mexico has the resources, it has the manpower, and the people have the will to work, but none of the current systems were working to bring meaningful change for everyday people. At the same

time, the respondents viewed China as being technologically advanced, flush with cash, having multiple companies looking to go overseas, and having a different kind of culture and therefore new perspectives that Mexico could take advantage of for this development.

Seemingly, these views aligned with the ones pushed by the Chinese ambassadors but the approach to these kinds of relations was different for the respondents than the ambassadors' vision of economic and development cooperation. As discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, the Chinese ambassadors frame economic cooperation with China as being based in the tenets of mutual benefit and finding ways to leverage complimentary markets. As part of this increased cooperation China can also offer its expertise in other areas of development, as it has already seen this success in its own country and therefore can provide an alternative model for other countries. From the earlier discussion, the respondents clearly agreed that China was an expert in areas such as technology and infrastructure and offered new economic possibilities for Mexico to benefit from which aligns with the diplomat-backed narratives. However, the first point of divergence is the idea of China-Mexico economic relations being mutually beneficial or complimentary. There are two intertwining arenas that this lack of complementarity was apparent to the respondents: trade and manufacturing.

The people of Tijuana, who live in one of the major manufacturing hubs of Mexico were very cognizant of the significant impact that Chinese manufacturing had on Mexican manufacturing and the imbalance in trade relations between the countries. As one person complained while taking the survey, "what is Mexico even giving to China besides avocados?!" Twelve other respondents mentioned the negative impact that Chinese goods coming to the Mexican market and competing in foreign markets had on Mexican manufacturing and even specific sectors such as the shoe industry. There was not just an encroachment on specific sectors

either, but even in the manufacturing of Mexican cultural goods as one person wrote, “Chinese businessmen also counterfeit traditional Mexican products such as handicrafts or molcajetes, thereby negatively impacting the economy of Mexican artisans.”

The respondents clearly saw China-made goods as disruptive to Mexico’s manufacturing-reliant economy and not part of “complimentary” interests. Despite this clear negative imagery of Chinese goods and manufacturing power, many of these same respondents still selected that China was not a threat to Mexican manufacturing and agreed with other statements that called for closer economic engagement with China. Further discussions on the topic did not result in the complete rejection of hopes for economic collaboration with China but rather a critical view of Mexico’s own development trajectory, reliance on manufacturing and potential future solutions that still considered working with China.

The first aspect of this was the recognition that the cheap goods coming from China were also potentially beneficial to the Mexican populace. One woman explained to me during an interview in front of the discount store Waldo’s that she was a single mom with 14 dogs and a mother with disabilities and that she did not have much time to concern herself with politics or China-Mexico relations. However, she did buy mostly Chinese goods for the low cost which she valued. While disseminating surveys on Avenida Revolución, which is the main tourist road in Tijuana, I had one man explain to me that the boutique shops we see on the side of the road were all selling “made in China” goods to the tourists to Mexico. Chinese production of cheap goods was not just outcompeting Mexican goods but was blurring the lines between Chinese and Mexican products. Additionally, while this influx of goods was certainly harming entire Mexican industries, it was also providing opportunities for those in need of cheaper goods to live or those leveraging these new sources of goods to generate income. An older man in his open response

wrote, “I don't sell anything, but if I did, what I would sell the most would be Chinese things.” For these respondents, the cheap Chinese goods were filling a market demand which Mexican goods could not successfully fill and so it made sense that these goods were doing well.

A few respondents further refined this pragmatic view of the Mexican economy in relation to China in discussions of the increased Chinese companies coming to Mexico and employing Mexican workers. There were seven survey takers that stated they worked for Chinese companies, including Hisense and TCL Technology which are multinational electronic manufacturers with factories in Tijuana. Two other responses mentioned that more and more people in Tijuana are working for Chinese factories and companies and multiple stated that the companies were taking advantage of the cheap cost of labor in Mexico. While many of the people who mentioned they worked for a Chinese company had generally positive views of these companies, other respondents still voiced concern over the presumed poor working conditions of these companies. As one young man put it, “Several companies of Chinese origin established themselves in the city of Tijuana providing low-quality working conditions to Mexican citizens.” Some respondents indicated that this was a reason for the Mexican government to not incentivize Chinese companies to come to Mexico because there were already enough Mexican companies of better quality that should be getting the incentives and support instead. This topic was more split in the open responses as well, with 47% of respondents either agreeing or totally agreeing that the Mexican government should offer incentives for Chinese companies to operate in Mexico, 25.2% selecting neutral, and 27.7% disagreeing or totally disagreeing.

Other responses went into more specifics of what the poor working conditions entailed such as low pay, unhealthy food in the cafeterias, and dehumanizing and restrictive work environments that didn't respect human or worker rights. A young woman emphasized that at

these Chinese companies' exploitation happened to everyone hired, "from the manufacturing people who are those that earn the least to the people who are in charge of the company, that is, those who operate with degrees." After this warning however she explains the nuance in her point of view by explaining that a woman operator she knows was "intelligently" looking for a job with a medical product company because it was well known that they paid a lot better for operators and "obviously more to the administrators and other workers." These responses revealed how many people in Tijuana are much more in tune with the differences within the manufacturing sector and how tradeoffs made by welcoming Chinese companies to operate there were not evenly distributed across the population or different sectors.

From another angle, it was not just the Chinese companies coming to Tijuana and hiring Mexican workers, but also the fact that some of the Mexican owned factories were still tied to China. A middle-aged woman in Playas de Tijuana wrote in her open response that, "it affects Mexican maquilas, but unfortunately the machinery is Chinese." As her response reveals, the public of Tijuana understood the intertwined nature of Chinese and Mexican economic endeavors and the futility of separating the two. Another young man I interviewed in Plaza Rio also questioned the validity of asking about "Chinese" and "Mexican" manufacturing, because as he explained everyone was working for Chinese factories now, so it was difficult to classify what "Chinese manufacturing" was, did it still count as Chinese if it was happening in Tijuana? And if it did, it was at least bringing jobs, so that was good for the Mexican economy.

This suggestion reflects the strategic lens through which the respondents viewed potential China-Mexico economic cooperation. While people acknowledged that China was outcompeting certain Mexican industries and this was having a negative effect, they saw this as the reality of the global economy that Mexico was not adapting to quickly enough. A snack vendor in Plaza

Universitaria encapsulated this taken for granted view of China's economic power in his explanation that Chinese factories were a threat to the Mexican economy due to globalization. He went on to explain that Chinese goods outcompeted Mexican goods and that while China and Mexico may be different countries, they do the same thing. From his viewpoint, China outmaneuvered Mexico in manufacturing due to the pressures of globalization and how China was able to develop its manufacturing sectors to suit this global economic paradigm and Mexico has not.

Therefore, the solutions that respondents gave in relation to further China-Mexico relations also reflected this pragmatic stance. The same woman who discussed the use of Chinese parts in the factories ultimately suggested that because of this close relation between China and Mexico in the maquila sector, the two should foster a good relationship so that "the two grow to their greatest potential in Tijuana". From her point of view, Chinese and Mexican companies should cooperate more so that they both can prosper rather than trying to compete with one another.

The responses to the ranking exercise also reflected an agreement with these kinds of solutions. The statement, "greater business opportunities between complementary sectors of each country" (52.4%) was the third most popular choice for priorities for future China-Mexico relations. A middle-aged man presented a vision of how this could work. He wrote:

The productive-manufacturing capacity of China covers a large number of sectors, whether commercial or industrial in Mexico, so that the dependence on it is becoming stronger, therefore, Mexico must have a better understanding with China and have a stronger collaboration to consolidate strategic Mexican sectors (infrastructure, transport, industries, etc.), which would diversify investment in the country and no longer depend on the United States. I believe that productive diversification is good for Mexico.

In this response we can see the multiple aspects of China-Mexico economic relations that respondents were grappling with, such as the growing dependence on China in Mexico's

manufacturing sector. In this solution, the respondent does agree with the Chinese diplomat endorsement that China offers an alternative to the US and that Mexico was too reliant on the US. A young woman voiced a similar sentiment and wrote:

I think it is very evident on a day-to-day basis how the relationship between these countries has changed and grown and I think it is very beneficial because a commercial advantage for Mexico is to have many trade agreements but the economy still needs to be more diversified and not depend so much on the USA. This link between Mexico and China has me expecting new opportunities and benefits it will bring to those that already exist.

For her, the turn towards China offered these new opportunities not just for investment but new models of economic development in Mexico, and one which is explicitly not as reliant on the United States. However, this embrace of China's alterity and hope for new economic opportunities was not due to a natural complementarity between the two countries.

From these responses, we can see how respondents clearly see China as an economic power whose influence on the global economy and Mexico's economy was inevitable. Therefore, the respondents believe that Mexico must deal strategically with this reality to take advantage of new possibilities rather than sticking to old, defunct approaches that are only harming Mexican development. Secondly, the respondents were keenly aware of the complex interconnections of the Chinese and Mexican economies in the manufacturing sector and the diversity of manufacturing in the city. Therefore, the public of Tijuana, economic cooperation with China was not merely finding a new partner for collaboration or implementing a "China model" for development. Rather it opened new possible pathways for Mexican development that would not have been possible before that would require strategic planning and finding a balance of tradeoffs that would benefit Mexican development.

China-Mexico Relations: Embracing Chinese Culture or Chinese People?

The final aspect of China-Mexico relations that was particularly salient to the respondents

was the increased presence of Chinese immigrants. Neither the Chinese diplomats nor AMLO promoted this topic. Relatedly, the ambassadors did promote increased cultural understanding between the countries and in the survey, 69% of respondents agreed or totally agreed that relations between China and Mexico will benefit from deeper cultural understanding between citizens of both countries. Additionally, for top priorities for future China-Mexico relations, the statement “Better cultural understanding between the citizens of China and Mexico” was the fourth highest priority but since respondents were able to choose three responses, 46% of people chose this as a priority.

For the respondents, the increase in Chinese immigrants was a clear indicator that they witnessed of increased China-Mexico engagement and the perceptions of the Chinese population were overwhelmingly positive. However, their views on the Chinese community reflected some of the underlying nuance of views on China. China relies on connections and relations created by overseas Chinese communities when they are looking to expand economic and diplomatic relations abroad. Tijuana is of particular importance as a city of cultural promotion and outreach for the Chinese ambassadors as the location of the only other Chinese consulate outside of Mexico City. The ambassadors therefore present the narrative that China’s unique cultural heritage and specific non-western values are a key factor in its global success and therefore there are some lessons that other countries and their citizens could get from having a greater understanding of Chinese culture.

There were some respondents who did align in this viewpoint. There was one middle aged man who wrote that China had one of the most ancient civilizations and another person wrote about the good reception that Chinese cultural demonstrations received in Tijuana. Respondents also lauded the long history that the Chinese community had in Tijuana and the

attractive nature of Chinese cuisine and its potential to contribute to the “gastronomic culture” of Mexico. Others recognized that prejudices still existed in Mexico against Asian populations and so hoped that efforts to increase cultural understanding would diminish this prejudice.

However, the rest of the responses pertaining to this topic were less focused on the specific cultural aspect of China and instead valued the workers and new immigrant group they represented. Multiple responses indicated the increasing presence of Chinese immigrants, with one person stating, “A great number of citizens of China, of all social classes, have arrived at the city of Tijuana, they are hardworking people and very disciplined.” Even people who were vehemently against increased collaboration with China, mentioned their eagerness to have more Chinese immigrants entering the city, as they saw them as a valuable workforce.

They saw this group of newcomers as an indicator of larger cultural and societal shifts in Mexico as a whole, that Tijuana, as a cosmopolitan city, was witnessing firsthand. As an older man wrote:

I think that relations between Mexico and China have definitely strengthened significantly in the years that I have lived in Tijuana. I personally like this approach. I think that the number of trips between China and Mexico and the stay of some of its citizens in the two countries, respectively, have increased a lot. These trips and these exchanges and these opportunities for the exchange of opinions, tastes, knowledge, etc., help to provide mutual respect and esteem between the peoples of China and Mexico.

According to him, Tijuana is already seeing this shift in populations with the direct flights connecting it to mainland China and there are so many opportunities for exchanges not just in culture but in knowledge. A young man in Playas expanded this thinking in his response:

In my opinion, a relationship between these two countries is of the utmost importance since we live in a world where we cannot be independent in the cultural concept and knowledge, currently we must live in an interdependent coexistence where both parties are enriched with culture by implementing principles and knowledge with technological, economic advances, etc., important as a society.

In this written response the respondent indicates how increasing cultural understanding between

the two countries is an integral part of living in modern society and a gateway to further increase the exchange of technological and economic advances. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Chinese ambassadors have highlighted the longevity of the “Chinese culture” and “Mexican culture” and therefore claim that due to this rich history the two countries citizens would benefit from knowing the other better. However, for some respondents, they saw deeper cultural understanding as a key part of increasing governmental and economic collaboration. The inevitable interdependency of the modern world necessitated cultural exchange.

In a similar vein, the reflections on new Chinese immigrants also elicited concerns of people and companies exploiting the clearly vulnerable population. Multiple respondents saw this community as vulnerable due to vast differences in culture and language which made them cut off from Mexican society and could be dangerous for them. A middle-aged woman I interviewed on Avenida Revolución described how her working-class neighborhood which was once was filled with migrants from other parts of Mexico or central America was now “puro chino”, or all Chinese. She explained that it wasn’t clear how well-off they were or if the factories were taking advantage of them because it seemed to her that they just worked all day and night. Multiple other respondents expressed concern and compassion for the welfare of the influx of Chinese immigrants they saw as tied to an increase in Chinese companies in the city. As one person put it, “who knows who is working at those factories” and who knows what is going on there. Individuals were aware of the toll this kind of manufacturing model has taken on the Tijuana population, and the Chinese immigrants were especially vulnerable to this exploitation.

Almost all other mentions of the Chinese immigrants in Tijuana were positive and highlighted the food, interesting culture, and how it contributed to the diversity to the city. From these encounters and responses, we can see how people welcomed the economic and work

opportunities provided by Chinese companies coming to Mexico, the real anxiety rather stemmed from them also importing the negative aspects of what they associated with Chinese development and models that the ambassadors were promoting.

Conclusion

From these survey responses we see that the public of Tijuana had an overall positive view of future China-Mexico relations. The aspects of China that were the most intriguing for respondents was its technological expertise, the available capital it could provide, and the fact that it was an alternative source of this kind of support from the United States. A young man from Playas de Tijuana succinctly presented this hopeful view of future relations and wrote, “The relation with China could be the impulse that we need to reach our maximum economic and technological potential.” Respondents viewed potential relations with China as a series of strategic decisions to off-set the economic and geopolitical power it wields.

For the respondents, it was important to preserve Mexico’s sovereignty and follow its own development path. China, as a relatively new but powerful player, presents this opportunity, but only if the Mexican government approaches it in the right way. The various worries about China and Chinese companies were based in the history of Mexico with other world powers such as the United States and on the current activities of China in the country. As of right now, this perception of China included that it was a technological and manufacturing power that had surpassed Mexico and harming the Mexican economy. There was also the perception that the Chinese companies, if not kept in check, could bring the ugly side of Chinese development to Mexico. On the other hand, many of the respondents were very accepting of an influx of Chinese immigrants who they viewed as having an excellent work ethic and expert knowledge, bringing with them good food and an ancient culture, and contributing to the diversity of the city which

would benefit everyone.

Therefore, the respondents incorporated at least the beginning threads of China's story as promoted by the Chinese ambassadors into their worldview. However, they did not make the same conclusions about China-Mexico relations that the Chinese ambassadors promoted. The "brand of China" in Tijuana was instead informed by the complex understandings that respondents had of Mexico's economy, its role in the global economy and lessons from its past political experiences. The respondents were therefore able to envision alternative possibilities for Mexican development within this global paradigm that was less reliant on the US. However, this vision did not embrace the Chinese ambassador promoted narratives, instead respondents viewed ways that Mexico could strategically engage China by relying on past lessons learned during its history of engagement with the US and leverage the tension between the US and China to Mexico's advantage. China was a new and prominent player in the region and rather than viewing it as the answer to Mexico's problems, it added another dimension to the strategic economic and geopolitical game that Mexico needs to play to succeed in existing world paradigms.

It seems that this partial acceptance of China's brand image in Mexico was possible because it did not clash with the existing worldviews on Mexico's positionality or economy. Additionally, the sociocultural, economic, and material terrain of Tijuana clearly shaped these viewpoints as well. Without the in-depth and personal knowledge of Mexico's manufacturing sector, it is possible that the respondents would not have held such pragmatic views on China-Mexico economic relations. Additionally, the people of Tijuana see the city as a desirable entryway for immigrants from around the world and so they saw the entrance of Chinese immigrants, even with the acknowledgement that many of them were working in the factory

industry, as a contribution to the diversity of the city rather than a threat. Therefore, in considering how effective the Chinese brand is in shaping public opinions of China, we must also consider how much the brand aligns with prevailing public cosmologies on geopolitics and economics and how individuals incorporate these complex calculations into the assessment of their own country.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AP. 2019. "Ciudadanos Chinos Cumplen su Sueño Mexicano en Tijuana." *El Sol de Tijuana*, June 15, 2019, 2019. <https://www.elsoldetijuana.com.mx/local/ciudadanos-chinos-cumplen-su-sueno-mexicano-en-tijuana-3768402.html>.
- Carreras, Miguel. 2017. "Public Attitudes Toward An Emerging China In Latin America." *Issues and Studies* 53 (1): 1-28. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S10132.51117400045>.
- Embassy of the People's Republic of China, in Mexico, October 1, 2020, 2020, "Intervención del Embajador Zhu Qingqiao en la Ceremonia Virtual con Motivo del Día Nacional de China 2020," http://mx.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/sgjs/202010/t20201002_4174206.htm.
- Guerrero Vázquez, René Andrei. 2018. "Las Multinacionales Chinas y Sus Estrategias de Innovación en México." *Masters Desarrollo Regional*, Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
- Hearn, Adrian H. 2016. *Diaspora and Trust: Cuba, Mexico, and the Rise of China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hernandez, Juan Miguel. 2019. "Celebran en Tijuana el 70 Aniversario de la Fundación de la República Popular China." *La Voz de La Frontera*, 09/26/2019, 2019. <https://www.lavozdelafrontera.com.mx/local/celebran-en-tijuana-el-70-aniversario-de-la-fundacion-de-la-republica-popular-china-4234452.html>.
- Hufbauer, Gary Clyde, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Diana Orejas. 2005. *NAFTA Revisited : Achievements and Challenges*. Washington, United States: Peterson Institute for International Economics.
- Kang, Liu. 2015. "Interests, Values, and Geopolitics: The Global Public Opinion on China." *European Review* 23 (2): 242-260. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1062798714000714>.
- Mazini, Andre. December 23, 2022 2022. *Propiedades Industriales de México: El Nearshoring Cobra Fuerza, FIBRAMQ es la Más Expuesta al Tema: Incrementamos Nuestra Recomendación a Compra Fideicomisos de Infraestructura de Bienes Raíces*, Citibanamex (El Banco Nacional de Mexico).
- Mexico, CNDH. 2023. "El Tratado de Bucareli, entre México y Estados Unidos." La Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos <https://www.cndh.org.mx/noticia/el-tratado-de-bucareli-entre-mexico-y-estados-unidos>.
- Mexico, Gobierno de. 2020. "Data Mexico - Tijuana." <https://datamexico.org/en/profile/geo/tijuana>.
- Qiu, Xiaoqi. 2019. "Inyectemos Energía Positiva a la Cooperación China-México." *El Milenio*, January 7, 2019, 2019. <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/qiu-xiaoqi/columna-qiu-xiaoqi/inyectemos-energia-positiva-a-la-cooperacion-china-mexico>.

- Silver, Laura;, Christine; Huang, and Laura Clancy. July 27, 2023 2023. *China's Approach to Foreign Poicy Gets Largely Negative Reviews in 24-Country Survey*. (Pew Research Center).
- Solis, Gustavo. 2022. "Resurgent Maquiladoras are Making Tijuana a Boom Town all over Again." *K PBS*, January 5, 2022, 2022. <https://www.kpbs.org/news/border-immigration/2022/01/05/resurgent-maquiladoras-are-making-tijuana-a-boom-town-all-over-again>.
- Tapia, Luz Helena Rodríguez. 2018. "Inserción Laboral y Trayectorias de Inmigrantes Recientes de Origen Chino en Baja California, México." Maestría en Estudios de Población, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
- Viveros, Jorge Carrillo; Thirión, Jordy Micheli. 2017. "Huawei y Foxconn: Casos Pioneros de la Nueva Internacionalión China y su Impacto Regional en México." *Estudios Sociales* 27 (50). <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.24836/es.v27i50.409>.

CONCLUSION

In the discussions of China's rise as a world power, narratives of a "voracious dragon" or "playful panda" create images of a dangerous world power looking to overtake the world or as a benevolent giant looking to engage more with the world. However, either way one interprets China's emergence as a world power there is clearly a shift happening on the world stage with China's geopolitical and economic power contesting norms and potentially challenging long-time world hegemony such as the United States. This contestation is happening in the very discourse about China, world powers and their role on the global stage, and visions for the future. There are varying speakers and listeners that use, interpret, and reformulate this discourse such as political pundits of China and other countries, news media outlets, corporate actors, and ordinary people. The Chinese state recognizes that controlling this discourse and shaping it in a way that reflects positively on China is a key part of its foreign policy.

To understand how people come to hold their opinion on China, I suggest conceptualizing China's national image as a "brand" that is dialogically produced across a complex socio-ideological terrain of existing frameworks, discourses, and symbols about China. China has come to mean many different things to different people that all inflect their opinion on the country. The Chinese state understands and strategizes to deal with this multiplicity of meaning associated with the country by curating and strategically deploying a specific narrative about the country that is its "brand story" to protect and foment the best brand (for China) it can for foreign audiences. There are three central tenets I identified that make up this promoted brand image of China: that China is a new kind of world power, that it is aligned with the global south and a still developing country, and that due to its own unique development path and these positionalities, China is the ideal leader for new paradigms of global development.

Across this dissertation, I have demonstrated how actors of the Chinese state protect and project China's brand, but they only wield so much influence. Once it is released, other actors and different populations interpret and reconfigure it into their existing conceptual horizons of the world and from there make assessments about the country. In different arenas of interpretation, multiple actors negotiate brand China. In this dissertation, I traced these processes of negotiation at multiple scales, first from the worldwide and historical point of view, then from a regional point of view, and then at a country and then city level. By tracing these narratives across both time and space, I demonstrated not just their simultaneous malleability and stability but also how they are reconfigured to suit different priorities and perpetuate or push against powerful paradigms of the world.

Instead of trying to crystalize what China's national image is or a specific "brand" image that represents its identity, I instead looked at the process of how meaning is ascribed to the country that is both authoritatively constructed by the state but also that must contend with outside narratives that other actors retold and reconfigured within the bounded constraints of existing ideological frameworks. This was key to understanding how the contradictory brand of the country that asserts it is both a world power and a still developing country came to be a cohesive story that is now incorporated into initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

This approach has allowed me to interrogate not just China's discursive campaigns to change hearts and minds but also long-established paradigms and ideologies of world relations such as the juxtaposition of the "west" to the "east" and the domination of the global north over the global south. In these analyses, we see how these paradigms for understanding the world are not just static and explanatory frames for global relations but rather enforce power dynamics, obfuscate heterogeneity of these webs of relations, and limit the discursive possibilities for

describing and defining the world. Using the concept of “brand” instead allows me to expose how these frameworks are negotiated and leveraged by both political actors, the media, and everyday people to suit their own desired outcomes and values.

In Chapter 1, because I examined how the Communist Party of China curated language of China’s brand in relation to existing frameworks of the world, such as the east against west dichotomy or the communist against capitalist dichotomy, I could see how China’s brand was interwoven into these paradigms that allowed these seeming contradictions. China claims to be a different kind of world power, not just due to orientalist tropes, but because of the different historical route it took towards development. This alternative experience and its multiple identities as it went through these changes were all inscribed into its brand language and therefore China’s spokespeople can claim to be all these things, because it was true, at least one point in time. In this way, Chinese officials not only leverage these frames for their own ends but also create new logics with which to see these relations that allow for alternative readings of both China and the world order.

This focus on change and shift instead of constraint and conformity within the dialogical negotiation of China’s brand therefore also allowed me to see how different actors curate China’s brand for certain audiences and see which parts of the brand story they emphasized over others. To understand the context of why the narrative threads may need to be interwoven in a new pattern, I first needed to understand the context of where they were being deployed, in the case of this dissertation, in the dynamics of the western hemisphere. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, to understand how China-LAC or China-Mexico relations have developed, we needed to first get an understanding of the power, social, political, and economic dynamics of the entire hemisphere, particularly under the purview of the United States hegemony. Some scholars have

argued that China's entry into Latin America has been an affront to US hegemony, however, as I demonstrated in this chapter, it may be upsetting the existing paradigms of influence, but it has not completely eclipsed or replaced the influence of the United States. Instead, because of the needs of both China and countries in LAC, it has become yet another player in the hemispheric calculus that the countries of LAC use to determine their way forward. China entering the region has led to new possible ways forward, but that does not mean these countries will take those alternative routes. Since I am using the concept of a dialogic brand image, I also can incorporate the impact of factors outside of the control of the state, but which still index China, such as Chinese immigrants, international corporations, and products into my understanding of how China-LAC relations are formed. Considering these factors therefore allows me to decenter the primacy of geopolitics and nation states in my analyses of these relations and therefore offer alternative explanations as to why and how China-LAC relations have gotten to their current configuration.

This examination of China-LAC relations therefore does not reduce this to a struggle between world powers or a deluge of Chinese capital, but rather allows us to see the complex interactions of the political, discursive, economic, and material worlds that ultimately shape perceptions of China. A key contribution of my dissertation is the consideration of the discursive aspect of these webs of relations and how it is not enough for China to tell its story. Instead, it needs to tell the right kind of story that not only presents a positive image of China, but one which the target audience will receive in the desired way. Therefore, in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I sought to investigate this curation process as Chinese diplomats presented the China story to the Mexican public. The Chinese ambassadors must negotiate China's image with the existing narratives on China in Mexico and can do this through different avenues such as press

conferences and opinion editorials. However, their voice is but one of many that tells China story in Mexico, and more importantly, where China may fit into the story of Mexico.

Therefore, in chapter three, I examined how Chinese diplomats in Mexico serve as both disseminators and distillers of the brand of China and curate the brand for Mexico's unique context. I compared their discourse on China and China-Mexico relations to that of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), the current President of Mexico and found that on the surface AMLO was in alignment with the brand messaging of China. However, this alignment was only due to the brand of China aligning with AMLO's own personal political brand in the Mexican political arena. Additionally, while other populist and leftist leaders in the region have turned to China in times of economic need or as a counterweight to the US, AMLO is not taking this route. China is certainly a valid partner for economic initiatives, but not because AMLO is buying into the China model of development. Instead, he has his own brand and model he is promoting in Mexico, and he uses China's success story to legitimize his brand rather than the blueprint. To achieve his vision, he needs to balance relations with both the US and China while protecting Mexican interests.

In this chapter, since I conceptualized China's brand as something that is co-constructed rather than concrete, I revealed how China's brand was also negotiated by AMLO to support his own political brand. This angle of analysis therefore allows me to interrogate the narratives about China perpetuated by these different political actors, and instead of trying to fit it into one box or another, I instead ask how different people position it in their own world views. Therefore, we can see how not only the Chinese state takes advantage of these existing paradigms but also how other political actors can also take advantage of China and its image. Therefore, these perceptions and positionalities are produced rather than destined, regardless of how any nation

state may present it.

In the fourth chapter, I dissected the discourse of China's brand used by the Chinese ambassadors as they distilled it for the Mexican public in opinion editorials published in national newspapers. I demonstrated how the Chinese ambassadors shaped the concept of cooperation to suit the Mexican context and framed as a specific kind of geopolitical and economic relation with its own protocol of engagement. I then showed how the ambassadors framed this conceptualization of cooperation in discussions of the Second Belt and Road Initiative and then during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ambassadors were able to use the concept of "Chinese cooperation" to encode larger claims of China's superior leadership and the potential for better outcomes for Mexico if it too partakes in this specific kind of cooperation efforts. These chapters revealed how discourse on China's brand were complex and multilayered and at times contradictory because Chinese ambassadors would shift the framing of it to suit the context of the moment. However, in this flexibility they were also pushing a broader narrative on China that situates it as the superior leader in world politics and development.

In Chapter 5, I took the background knowledge on China's complex and multilayered relations with Mexico along with the insights of the multiple narratives about China already circulating in Mexico to create and disseminate a survey to the public of Tijuana. This methodology was undergirded by the concept of "brand" because it allowed me to examine how people grappled with these specially curated messages rather than take for granted that they either agreed or disagreed with these statements as providing a full picture of their opinions on China. This brings up a final key consideration of my dissertation, the need to question what surveys of the public actually tell us about public opinions and what alternative approaches may be necessary to provide needed nuance and context. Longitudinal and region-wide surveys are

helpful in demonstrating trends over time or space, but they do not provide us insight into the differences of what exactly is informing these positive, negative, or neutral opinions. In the context of Mexico, China's influence is extremely varied and impacts individuals in many ways, so I used this survey to see which narratives about China were the most salient to the Mexican public and used my interviewing techniques and follow up questions to understand why.

While conducting this survey however I found that the respondents considered China not just based on their own experiences with things they deemed as "Chinese" but also within the complex frameworks they used to conceptualize Mexico's place on the world stage and its geopolitical relations with other world powers. This demonstrates how opinion polling may reveal general trends of the public but fail to capture any of the underlying reasons for these opinions that are much more revealing of perceptions of China abroad. In my own survey, I found that people had overall positive views of China but not because they completely agreed with the Chinese ambassadors' story of China. Instead, they considered and judged China and China's favorability in relation to their knowledge and opinions on Mexico's economic, development and society. Therefore, to understand why they viewed China favorably one must understand how they understand their own conditions and world systems that may not fall into rigid ideological categories.

In this dissertation I demonstrate how "brand" is a useful alternative analytical tool to look at geopolitical relations that let us consider the intersection of discourse, capitalism, globalization, and power removed from the strict labels of south-south or imperialism and colonialism and instead asks how specific actors are navigating and negotiating these complex networks. Additionally, I demonstrated how combining critical discourse methodologies with ethnographic and survey methodologies on the ground provides a necessary alternative view into

how national images of different countries are promoted across the globe and how people come to understand these narratives. I demonstrate that the catchy slogans that seem to be a focal point of many analyses and critiques of China's foreign diplomacy were not actually that impactful in people's opinions and instead it was their lived experiences and specialized knowledge that shaped their understandings of China.

This brings up the final consideration of my dissertation to question how we think about China or other nation state's discursive power to change the story of the world and their position in it. China is not alone in its agenda to shape global narratives on the world systems in support of its own agendas or to foment positive opinions about its country in foreign publics. However, many of the scholarly discussions of these efforts and motivations rely on frameworks that reinforce well-worn paradigms of international relations such as liberal democracies opposing authoritarian or socialist states. However, China's story does not neatly fit into these paradigms and neither do people's views on China. It is this disjuncture between people's experiences and perceptions and official narratives that China is able to start shifting these paradigms for understanding the world. These differences are not just seen by the public but also by the same analysts and political pundits who have long relied on these paradigms to make sense of the world, and they too have been trying to deal with these dissonances by constantly labeling China's particular approach to the economy, governance, or international relations with various monikers indicating this difference. This brings up the question of if China is indeed somehow subverting these frameworks or if the frameworks were not as fully explanatory as they have been purported to be. Overall, China's emergence as a powerful political and economic actor on the world stage should have us consider not just how China is changing the world but also question existing frameworks for understanding global dynamics.