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**Ports of Power:
Unpacking the Representations
of Chinese Influence in
Peru's Chancay Megaproject**

By Yannick Ricaud

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**Primary Thesis Advisor: Professor Maria Cecilia (Nené) Lozada
Academic Preceptor: Professor Burcu Pinar Alakoc**

Abstract

This thesis examines the differing narratives surrounding Chinese investment in Peru's Chancay Port megaproject between 2019 and 2025. Through postcolonial, media-framing, and identity theories, this study uses critical discourse analysis to trace how these overlapping narratives shape public acceptance and resistance, revealing both the promise and perils of China's deepening footprint in Peru. Chinese and Peruvian governmental narratives frame the port as a "win-win" emblem of shared prosperity and modernity, while downplaying environmental and local concerns. Mainstream media in both countries reinforce this optimism, transmitting the same perspective through their publications. In contrast, alternative media showcases what both government and traditional media have not: the ecological damage and disrupted livelihoods that the megaproject has caused. U.S. analysts warn of strategic dependency and geoeconomic rivalry, whereas neighboring Latin American states react with a mix of apprehension and opportunism. This competing combination of perspectives gives nuance in shades of gray, rather than the black-and-white of a more traditional binary analysis.

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Introduction

Latin American identity cannot be reduced to a single element within a U.S.-shaped landscape; it is a complex tapestry marked by successive external interventions. First came the Crown of Castilla, whose policies and missions redefined Indigenous societies and territories across the Americas. Later, North American influence arrived through industrial power and mass-market modernization, remaking local economies and institutions in the image of the fifty-star flag. Those who followed the Stars and Stripes introduced new cultural and economic models that communities eventually had to navigate, adapt to, and, in some cases, embrace (SERVINDI, 2024). Over time, U.S. strategic priorities moved from the Amazon to the oil-rich regions of the Middle East (Army War College, 2024). After a period of relative inattention to Latin America, China has stepped in as a major external actor, advancing its geopolitical ambitions through investments symbolized by its five-star insignia on projects like Peru's Port of Chancay (El Comercio, 2024). Today, Latin American countries face successive waves of external influence — from colonial powers to American policy and now Chinese investment — each reshaping regional alliances and power dynamics.

Currently, China is categorized as the biggest investor in strategic sectors such as rare earth minerals, and now in infrastructure like the Port of Chancay on Peru's western coast (BRI, 2019). Described as the largest port in the Pacific, this megaport reduces shipping times between Beijing and the Amazonian continent by approximately two weeks (El Comercio, 2024). Depictions of China's investment in the Chancay Port vary across contexts: Chinese state media emphasize national pride and strategic gain, while Peruvian government statements highlight economic modernization — and local community testimonies and independent outlets reveal concerns about environmental impact and social inclusion (China Daily, 2024; El Comercio;

SERVINDI, 2024). This leads us to the question: How has the Chinese presence been depicted in the Chancay's port megaproject in Peru? And how have these portrayals influenced the acceptance of Chinese investment in the country?

In order to answer these questions, the nature of Chinese investments in the world will be studied; it is the seed that will grow through this research. Chapter 1 places the case study in current literature, delving into Chinese investment layer by layer until arriving at its Peruvian nucleus. The theoretical framework and research design are described in Chapter 2. The research design outlines the methodology — Critical Discourse Analysis — which examines how language and discourse reflect and reinforce the social processes and power structures that shape hierarchies and institutions. Chapter 3 offers a thorough examination of government, media, and local narratives on the Chancay port. And finally, Chapter 4 will serve as the study's conclusion, and will give future research directions to enhance the collective knowledge of global-local investment dynamics and their strong socio-political consequences in the new increasingly intense South-to-South cooperation between Asia and South America. The analysis spans from the project's beginning in January 2019 when the majority of the shares of the infrastructure project were bought by COSCO Shipping — a Chinese SOE — to its continuing development into early April 2025.

The importance of this study is in its enrichment to the understanding of complex knowledge networks, global power relations and local level reactions to the new giant Sino-cooperation alliances through investments at America's back door. Its importance is underscored by the fact that Chancay is the only major Chinese infrastructure project in the Americas that the United States was not able to block — unlike its successful efforts to thwart similar projects in Nicaragua and Panama (Liberation News, 2024; DW, 2025). Given this

saliency, this thesis intends to provide local communities, activists, and politicians with a better knowledge of the socio-political repercussions of such investments, to enable them to negotiate for alternative development methods if needed.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The following literature review will examine how perceptions of Chinese FDI have been shaped at global, regional, and national levels. First, it explores the global dimension of Chinese investments and their evolution, marked by hostile Western narratives that degenerate into the “China Fear vs. China Fever” phenomenon. Next, beyond tracking money flows, it delves into the early stages of an expansion strategy protected by Beijing. This strategy extends beyond China’s borders via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to refashion its supply chain and reverse dependence on traditional trade routes to subjugate the West. It then analyzes the ambitious BRI project that penetrates the United States’ backyard and, over the last two decades, has made China the principal trading partner for many Latin American economies. Finally, it examines the Peruvian case, illustrating how strategic infrastructure projects — portrayed as “win-win” ventures — ultimately marginalize local community agency.

Decoding The Changing Nature Of Chinese Investment

Over the past few decades, China's FDI has transitioned from being an underestimated activity to becoming one of the main forces driving the global finances of both rich and poor countries (Vaccaro-Incisa, 2014, 96). Its growing power and influence increasingly intensify the discussion about the logic and effects of such investments. Some see these investments as critical engines of global development, while others denounce them as instruments of political influence and economic coercion (Smith & D’Arcy, 2013, 219). These contrasting academic currents provide a robust dialectic process in clarifying the objectives and challenges that China's strategy poses

with its investments. Together, they flourish when applied to vantage points far from Asia, and in concert will help this research wield both traditional and non-traditional perspectives.

A key debate in the literature concerns the roles of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) versus private investors. The principal-supervisor-agent framework contradicts simplistic perceptions of SOEs as extensions of the state (Smith & D'Arcy, 2013, 227 - 229). The Western perception of China as the spider and its companies as merely threads within its web should be discarded. When operating abroad, SOEs show a decentralization of decisions and competitive practices, widening the spectrum of behavioral possibilities (Smith & D'Arcy, 2013, 229). Vaccaro-Incisa (2014, 90 and 93) elaborates on this point by observing that China's BITs have shifted from rigid, state-directed policies to more liberalized versions based on European and North American models. This change reflects a growing willingness on China's part to engage with global investment standards rather than simply reiterating a "Beijing model," as it could be misunderstood by its Western counterpart (Smith & D'Arcy, 2013, 225). Why is it that, despite China's standout status as a country with almost no investor-State arbitration disputes against it, the West takes no notice (Vaccaro-Incisa, 2014, 113 - 115)? Can it be considered normal that every international interaction involving Chinese actors is viewed as hostile by Americanized societies, when Chinese investment growth implies a bilateral need for the participating states? Indeed, this unfolding tapestry of liberalized policies and decentralized decisions paints an unobtrusive yet resonant brushstroke on the global canvas, deftly weaving China's presence into diverse local economies.

This anomaly, regarding irregular levels of friction and a lack of disputes, raises questions about whether these stem from a well-calibrated diplomatic strategy, the structure of its investment agreements, or the apprehension of foreign investors to provoke a major economic

shift. For example, in Australia, the government's rejection of the China Aluminum Corporation's bid for the British-Australian mining group Rio Tinto was based more on national security than on economics, and is indicative of how much of the investment is mediated locally (Smith & D'Arcy, 2013, 221 - 222). This dismissal is anchored in national security over purely economic considerations, revealing how regional concerns about sovereignty overshadow foreign investment. It likewise illuminates how local politics entwined with global ambitions fuel a cautious stance toward China's expanding economic influence.

The story becomes more complicated when observing regional attitudes towards Chinese investment. Chinese FDI elicits different responses compared to the traditional ones from American and European countries, which generally have a positive association with job creation and economic development (Smith & D'Arcy, 2013, 218 - 219). Unknown operational maneuvers cast a shadow over immediate gains, triggering local unease and reputational backlash. Over the long haul, such opacity can erode trust, diminishing the bedrock of stable engagement thus putting China on the opposite side of the spectrum as an inherent threat to national security, as is the case for Australia (Wei & Lyles, 2008, 486; Smith & D'Arcy, 2013, 221). Wei and Lyles (2008, 486) describes the polarization of opinions as "China Fever vs. Fear of China." These terms are now normalized and have become a contemporary expression of past anxieties about foreign economic hegemony and fear of direct competition. Such was the case with Japan, now an ally of Western hegemony during the controversies over its foreign direct investments in the 1980s (PBS News, 2017).

BRI, The New Silk Road?

Formally introduced for the first time in 2013, the BRI has revolutionized the global infrastructure investment landscape (Arase, 2015, 35 - 37). Better known as an economic

initiative to potentially close the types of disconnections that historically existed between Asia, Europe, and Africa, the BRI has since extended to Latin America, transforming regional development trajectories there (Arase, 2015, 30 - 32). By extending its reach to Latin America — long deemed the U.S.A.'s backyard — the BRI anchors China's global ambition in new soil, refashioning regional sovereignty under its expanding canopy. The BRI is defined by massive spending on infrastructure, from roads to energy projects aimed at more securely integrating host nations into international trade (Arase, 2015, 26 - 28). The advocates of the BRI, who tend to be from the so-called "Global South," argue that Chinese investments offer a less politically conditioned alternative to Western financial models like the IMF for developing countries seeking loans (Ray et al., 2017, 6 - 7). The loans guaranteed under the BRI are seen by many as more flexible and with looser governance, thus accelerating infrastructure construction. However, this very adaptability has raised questions about debt sustainability, long-term political independence, and transparency (Ray et al., 2017, 3). Critics acknowledge that, although the BRI can spur short-term growth — often with fewer conditions than, for example, IMF loans in Ecuador, to appeal to a Global South wary of Western oversight — delayed repayments may saddle host nations with debt and erode their regulatory frameworks, as in Sri Lanka (Arase, 2015, 36; Ray et al., 2017, 9 - 11). These flexible terms may ignite infrastructure booms, but they also reignite debates over mounting liabilities and threats to local sovereignty.

According to Arase (2015, 41 & 42), China's global infrastructure development is a strategic process to reorganize global economic rules, focusing on the commercial dimension. China seeks to secure access to strategic raw materials, open new markets, and expand its geopolitical influence by financing key infrastructure projects across all continents (Myers & Wise, 2017, 191 & 195 - 198). One of the most notable developments is the connection between

China and Latin America, the latter being traditionally on the periphery of global economic circles. But what happens to local agency and participation? There is always the possibility that Chinese investments could limit the ability of local actors to shape the design and execution of their projects. In some instances — especially where planning and governance structures invite community input — BRI projects have effectively bolstered local ownership and agency, challenging negative prejudices of overriding host interests (Ray et al., 2017, 11 - 12). Yet, Jauregui (2020, 352 - 354) warns that without constant vigilance there will be no balanced negotiations and the promise of mutual gain risks of devolving into top-down imposition. This dynamic is evident in the case of the Chancay port project, whose local reflections (environmental damage and community displacement) subordinate their narratives at the national level (economic modernization). The divergence between high-level strategic objectives and localized experience engenders conflict, underscoring the importance of critical research that examines the BRI and its discursive and sociopolitical implications, not just its financial and geopolitical dimensions.

BRI: The Latin American Case

Originally focused on Asia, Africa, and Europe, the BRI has been expanding its reach into Latin America, a region that was once outside the grand Chinese connectivity plan. Latin American economies are currently experiencing Wei and Lyles' (2008, 486) “China Fever vs. Fear of China,” having to decide which stance they will take. As both an opportunity and a challenge, the BRI offers tangible economic incentives that have a complex influence on their geopolitical relations (Jauregui, 2021, 351 - 353; Montoya et al., 2019, 13 - 14). The incorporation of Latin America into the BRI has neither been immediate nor uniform and easy (Jauregui, 2020, 353 - 354; Myers & Wise, 2017, 240). In the last 20 years, China has gradually increased its profile in

the region, reaching a climax in 2017 when countries like Panama, Peru, and Chile officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China regarding BRI projects (Valderrey et al., 2019, 44 - 46). However, countries like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia have adopted a more cautious approach, weighing the possibilities of Chinese investment against long-standing geopolitical relationships, especially with the United States. This shows more apprehension about Chinese influence in the Western Hemisphere, and the risk of militarization of assets built by China (Valderrey et al., 2019, 44 - 46).

However, the forbidden and attractive fruit of the BRI's liquidity offers a financing alternative for critical infrastructure projects that have experienced a chronic lack of investment (Valderrey et al., 2019, 38 & 42). The promise of building new ports, railways, and highways is one of the key pillars of the initiative (Valderrey et al., 2019, 42). For example, the Chancay Port project in Peru is intended to strengthen its role as a bridgehead between South America and Asia, but the economic rewards carry potentially significant risks. Nevertheless, concerns about debt sustainability have also emerged in several Latin American countries (Valderrey et al., 2019, 39). The opacity and conditionality of China's lending practices have not only raised concerns about potential debt dependencies but also about the erosion of bargaining power (Valderrey et al., 2019, 55). Many Chinese infrastructure loans are also linked to direct procurement agreements that tend to benefit Chinese companies in strategic sectors such as the mining industry (Montoya et al., 2019, 16). These provide a clear contrast to the unidimensional loans from multilateral institutions like the World Bank or IMF that do not use such predatory methods in foreign countries. Now that China is offering itself as a strategic alternative to traditional Western partnerships, it is beginning to alter the shape of regional diplomatic alignments. With

inconsistent movements in the White House, Beijing's presence offers Latin American nations an alternative source of investment, technology, and political agency.

However, environmental and social challenges have complicated the implementation process of the BRI. In Peru, environmental authorities have mandated more rigorous impact assessments, forging uneasy but vital compromises between local communities and foreign investors, as seen with extractive projects near the Amazon (Ray et al., 2017, 9 - 10). Meanwhile, Ecuador has experimented with tighter community consultation mandates, though critics argue enforcement often falters when confronted with the lure of Chinese capital (Ray et al., 2017, 9 - 11). Their infrastructure projects often traverse ecologically sensitive areas, rich in stones and rare metals needed by Chinese companies (Montoya et al., 2019, 15). The most problematic places in terms of reputation and public perception are the Amazon and the Andean highlands (Myers & Wise, 2018, 241). Incursion into such areas, in general, garners negative reactions from the citizens and inhabitants of the countries that own those lands. As an example, the initiatives led by China in Bolivia and Ecuador have been subject to intense scrutiny and resistance due to inadequate environmental assessments and the displacement of Indigenous communities (Jauregui, 2020, 356). In Ecuador, Chinese-financed hydroelectric projects champion energy independence even as critics highlight ecological harm, reflecting a precarious trade-off between immediate infrastructural gains and long-term environmental resilience. Meanwhile, Mexico's measured approach underscores how balancing Western ties with Beijing's capital reaffirms a guarded stance, yet also risks postponing vital development opportunities (Myers & Wise, 2018, 158 - 160). Therefore, the BRI presents two different paths for Latin America. On one hand, it presents incomparable possibilities for beautiful and provocative

economic growth and better connectivity. But on the other, it brings risks of debt dependency, geopolitical dependency, and environmental degradation.

The Peruvian Case

The Peruvian case involves the vicious cycle of “mega-hydro projects,” which refers to the recurrent pattern in which large-scale hydroelectric developments spark social and environmental contention, yet persistently attract state and private investment, perpetuating the very conditions that invite future expansions (Boelens et. al, 2019, 8 - 12). Standard megaproject analyses have typically shone a spotlight on technical performance and cost–benefit ratios, but critical scholars have already drawn attention to the “megaprojects paradox” that stress how enormous projects continue to be built even when repeated costs, time overruns, and social controversies emerge (Flyvbjerg, 2014, 11 - 12). This paradox is especially pronounced in Latin America, and specifically in Peru, where on the one hand, grand-scale projects have a palpating appearance support, while on the other, their funding is marred by opaqueness and their institutions are inefficient (Bebbington et al., 2010, 264 - 267) and conflict-ridden.

The environmental lens gives a different understanding that projects such as the Chancay Port do not merely transfer capital and technologies, but also demonstrate how infrastructure alters power relations (Guo, 2023, 116). In cases where Chinese mining projects in Peru have been pitched under the rubric of “win–win” cooperation, local grievances regarding poor working conditions and environmental degradation have remained, suggesting that these projects may be performing more as tools of symbolic representation and social control than as vehicles for actual development (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2012, 52).

Decolonial scholars offer yet another critical perspective which claims that dominant narratives of development create a monolithic and hegemonic vision that marginalizes local

knowledge (Mignolo, 2011, 19 - 20). These universalist models exclude Indigenous and local practices of land use and resource management, creating epistemic injustices. Andean modes of knowledge frequently conflict with externally imposed paradigms (Escobar, 2011, 13). Although, in places like Chancay, the pushback from the local communities is less visible, from small businesses to municipal leaders and fishing communities, are locked out of decisions. This marginalization reinforces the asymmetries of power and limits the space for reforms that can genuinely address local needs (Guo, 2023, 124 - 125; Tigabu et al., 2015, 322 - 325).

This narrative is further complicated by the evolution of Chinese investment in Peru. In the last fifteen years, Peru has become an important destination for Chinese investment. Initial waves of investment mostly went into the mining industry, spurred on by state businesses selling off minerals including copper, but not without inciting cases of environmental destruction and labor conflict, along with lack of transparency, as seen in controversies surrounding the Shougang Hierro Peru mine (Irwin & Gallagher, 2013, 217 - 219). After rebalancing their foreign investments, Chinese actors began to focus on large-scale infrastructure works that are in close accordance with the strategic goals of the BRI.

The Chancay port project represents this new chapter of Chinese engagement. This effort was originally envisioned as a national drive. But since 2019, it has radically shifted toward what some Peruvian nationals call the first “direct” and “real” connection to global marketplaces (El Comercio, 2024). For the Peruvian government the port is not merely an emblem of modernity, it is a threshold for a more profound engagement with global trade. The Peruvian case shows how socio-environmental conflicts and epistemic injustices are woven into the fabric of megaprojects and investment by Chinese state corporations. Given how these developments are drastically altering national terrain and its dynamics, there is a need for more critical

interrogation of whether they serve collective interest in terms of sustainable and inclusive progress. The power asymmetries between China and Peru may simply re-entrench existing inequities instead of functioning as the passport to global trade expansion of the Peruvian nation. Balancing these twin possibilities — modernization versus marginalization — will be decisive in determining whether such partnerships truly foster sustainable, inclusive growth.

Despite extensive analysis of Chinese FDI's global evolution and its strategic deployment through the BRI, existing studies rarely probe how these macro- and meso-level dynamics resonate on the ground. Scholarship has mapped Beijing's investment playbook alongside Western "China Fear vs. China Fever" debates, and has evaluated Peru's "win-win" infrastructure framing, yet it often overlooks the nuanced ways local actors — Indigenous communities, fishermen, small businesses — interpret, contest, or accommodate these narratives. Moreover, while postcolonial and discourse theories abound, they seldom converge in a single case study to trace how power, identity, and media framing interact in shaping grassroots acceptance of Chinese megaprojects. This gap calls for a critical, multiscalar inquiry into local perceptions of China's presence at Chancay.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Rooted in the author's previous research, multiple concepts that encompass critical perspectives at the global and local levels are explored in this theoretical framework. Progressively narrowing the investigative lens to the local, native scale, the analysis begins with theories of power dynamics such as Wallerstein's world-systems theory, which argues that power and wealth concentrate in the core while only meager remnants drain to the periphery. From these state-level power dynamics, attention shifts to the framing of the "fourth power", examining the media through concepts related to both the reinforcement and fragmentation of hegemonic discourses.

The focus subsequently narrows further to address identity formation, considering both its internal construction among members of a single community and its external implications in relation to other communities.

Macro-level

To begin, David Harvey's (2004, 66) concept of "accumulation by dispossession" provides an understanding on how capitalism survives by cycles of dispossession, particularly in economically weaker areas, as Peru would be in comparison to China. Harvey (2004, 63 & 66) contends that when dealing with an overaccumulation crisis, capitalist systems sometimes look for answers by extending geographical limits to access fresh resources and safe investments in overseas infrastructure. At the moment of extending their influence outside their borders, this "spatio-temporal fix" extracts extra external effort and money (Harvey, 2004, 64 - 66). Regarding the Chancay port, Chinese investment can be seen as a kind of spatio-temporal fix allowing China to reinvest surplus money and gain a foothold in the geopolitically important area of South America, while extracting the benefits of cheaper foreign labor. Here, China's political and economic objectives center Peru's riches and strategic location, hence forming narratives that may present this investment as either a positive cooperation or as economic exploitation and displacement.

Chirot et al.'s (1982, 81) interpretation of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory can situate Chinese participation within the larger framework of world power dynamics. Wallerstein labels countries as core, periphery, or semi-periphery, where core countries control periphery states by means of resource and labor extraction (Chirot et al., 1982, 85 - 86). Western countries have traditionally occupied key roles in investment and development, but China's recent market participation in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America suggests a possible

change in these conventional arrangements. As an infrastructure project connecting trade lines, the Chancay port represents China's aim to avoid Western-dominated commercial channels, presenting itself as an alternative or rival economic force inside the global system. Wallerstein's theory clarifies how local and global representations of Chinese investment are either used as a required alternative to Western economic dominance or as a neo-imperialistic tactic from a non-Western state (Chirot et al., 1982, 84 - 85 & 97).

Harvey's emphasis on dispossession helps to explain how China is portrayed as using Peru's resources while Wallerstein's world-systems approach places this amid more general changes in global power dynamics of China's strategic goals. This unique mix of theoretical lenses allows a sophisticated study of how narratives in media, politics, and local communities mirror world economic and political dynamics.

Meso-level

Robert Entman's (2007, 164) research on media framing emphasizes how, by focusing only on particular facets of a subject, media significantly shapes public opinion. His definition of framing includes describing issues, assigning causality, rendering moral judgments and suggesting answers, showing the value-laden nature of media framing (Entman, 2007, 164 - 166). The way stories around the Chancay Port project are written depends on this procedure. Media has the power to either sow seeds of enthusiasm or doubt in public perception (Entman, 2007, 169 - 170). Such framing is not impartial, as it usually corresponds with particular interests from different groups who want to control the turbulent ocean of opinions. Media stories help to disperse or amplify political power by shaping public opinion, presenting images of Chinese participation as either a threat to autonomy or a chance for development (Entman, 2007, 168).

Building on this, Loïc Wacquant's (2013, 277 - 278) interpretation of Bourdieu's idea of symbolic power provides understanding of how elites utilize symbols and language to maintain social divisions and influence general opinion. Journalists, politicians and intellectuals who construct categories that place groups in relation to one another exercise symbolic power (Wacquant, 2013, 276 - 280). In the context of the Chancay Port, Bourdieu's paradigm helps explain how elites build the image of Chinese involvement as either a beneficial partnership or a sort of neo-colonial domination (Wacquant, 2013, 279 - 281). By means of these symbolic divisions, elites shape public perceptions and group identities by presenting Chinese investors as either reliable development partners or outsiders enforcing their agenda (Wacquant, 2013, 276 - 278).

Complementing the concepts from above, Manuel Castells's (2007, 253) theory of networked communication highlights how the public sphere has been changed by the merging of traditional and digital media, generating a venue where both traditional powers and alternative counter-powers challenge each other. Castells (2007, 249) contends that this hybrid media environment enables the existence of alternative stories, which emphasize the digital channels that foster grassroots movements. At the Chancay Port, local community organizations, environmental activists, and nationalist movements may use social media to express resistance or assimilation (Castells, 2007, 249). The possibility of circulating counter-narratives across digital networks highlights the opportunity for a new fertile soil where local voices can participate in the national debate (Castells, 2007, 249 - 250).

Entman's framing theory clarifies the media's influence in forming agendas. Deepening this concept, Wacquant's interpretation of Bourdieu's symbolic power shows how elites create and manipulate the perceptions of the citizenry. Castells's observations on networked

communication highlights how digital media might support counter-narratives that fight back against the Wacquant's elite narrative manipulation. These theories show the different and complementary processes that shape public perceptions in multiple scenarios like the Chinese participation in the Chancay Port megaproject.

Micro-level

Bruner's method of approaching meaning-making offers a first prism through which local people view Chinese engagement at the Chancay port (Mattingly et al., 2008, 2). According to Mattingly's (2008, 12) interpretation, Bruner's "search for meaning" is profoundly ingrained in cultural narratives, symbols and language spoken within a community. For Peruvian citizens, opinions of Chinese engagement could rely on past tales, memories, or firsthand knowledge of foreign impact and progress. This frames the megaport project with historical settings by implying that locals understand and assign significance to this new presence using cultural "tool kits" assembled through responding to prior events (Mattingly et al., 2008, 7 & 11 - 12). With cultural narratives directing the community's view of the project's impact on their life and sense of identity, representation of Chinese participation at the micro-level becomes a negotiation between past experiences with foreign forces and present reality (Mattingly et al., 2008, 11 - 14).

Developed by Tajfel and Turner and interpreted through the lenses of Huddy (2001, 137 - 139), social identity theory complements Bruner by looking at how different groups of people classify others and themselves, and how in turn these influence social and political opinions. This theory holds that people create identities in connection to perceived ingroups and outgroups, therefore promoting a sense of belonging or division depending on these differences (Huddy, 2001, 134 - 135). For instance, in the Chancay Port, locals could see Chinese workers and investors as an outgroup distinguished by their cultural and national distinctions (Huddy, 2001,

138 - 139). For local citizens who might see themselves as protectors of their community's interests against an outside influence, this difference strengthens their feeling of ingroup identification (Huddy, 2001, 148 - 149). This is especially true if the initiative is perceived as a threat to their cultural or financial well-being; this would result in communal attitudes of mistrust or opposition toward it (Huddy, 2001, 130).

Charles Hale's (1997, 571 - 573) study on the cultural politics of identity in Latin America helps to further extend this dimension by illuminating how underprivileged groups establish their identities in reaction to corporate interests and outside pressure. Using identity as both a political and cultural instrument, Hale (1997, 581 - 583) argues that identity politics in Latin America sometimes allows communities to reject perceived economic and cultural subordination. In Lima, community members could perceive Chinese participation as an opportunity to unite around their common identity, in order to advance their economic echelon or as a challenge to local authority (Hale, 1997, 574). This framing helps individuals to locate themselves in a larger fight where the project becomes the center of expression for more profound worries regarding their status in the national and global economy.

Huddy's theory reveals the dynamics of ingroup and outgroup perceptions, complementing Bruner's insights on cultural narratives that explain how local meanings are constructed. In addition, Hale's emphasis on identity politics shows how communities might use these representations as a kind of protest. This combined approach emphasizes how actively the community presents Chinese participation, molded by complicated interactions of political, social and cultural elements at both personal and group levels rather than a passive reflection.

Research Design, Data and Methods

Design and Case Selection

This research is rooted in critical theory and guided by a post-structuralist perspective — which contends that meanings and truths are constructed through language, discourse, and cultural practices rather than being fixed — and employs a qualitative methodology (Devetak, 2009, 189 - 190). By comparing media, government, community, and external depictions of Chinese investment, this study shows how identity, culture, and power shape public opinion on foreign-backed megaprojects.

The Chancay Port megaproject was chosen due to its global significance in the world's geopolitical supply as the only Chinese-led infrastructure project in the Pacific Ocean that has not been stopped by the American government. The port has slashed transit times between Asia and South America by nearly 14 days, dramatically accelerating intercontinental trade and reducing transportation costs. The temporal scope of January 2019 – March 2025 captures key phases of the port project, starting in the year when the project was bought by COSCO Shipping, a Chinese SOE, to then the planning, development, and recent impacts on local communities, national policy and economic growth. Studying this period allows for an analysis of changing representations within a framework of evolving social, cultural and economic ties between Peru and China.

Methods

Post-structuralism

Richard Devetak's (2009, 189 - 190) post-structuralist viewpoint provides an understanding of how knowledge, power and discourse interact to construct representations. Devetak (2009, 190) observes that post-structuralism underlines the situational, historically positioned, politically charged aspect of knowledge production, rather than the idea of absolute truth. He stresses the malleability of language, how it actively shapes and arranges reality rather than merely reflecting

the world (Devetak, 2009, 189 - 190). It is by normalizing some representations while marginalizing others that power acts through discourses (Devetak, 2009, 196 - 197). This includes the manner in which ideological assumptions are presented as universally accepted beliefs (Fairclough, 1989, 32 - 33).

Based on this perception of reality, representations of Chinese involvement in the Chancay port are loaded with ideological agency reflecting and repeating global power dynamics and local identity politics, therefore negating any assumptions about their impartial nature. Stories depicting Chinese investment as "developmental aid" or "economic internationalization," for example, are produced using discursive strategies that promote specific interests to control the global narratives using only one lens (Ray et al., 2017, 11 - 12). In this regard, post-structuralism's crucial edge is its ability to question binary oppositions that control accepted wisdom and underlying presumptions (Devetak, 2009, 192). Devetak (2009, 195 - 196) underlines how deconstruction in post-structuralism reveals the processes by which these oppositions preserve power structures. The present study depends on this deconstructive approach since it helps to examine the ideological constructs underpinning representations of Chinese involvement, and to critique the layers therein. Moreover, the emphasis of post-structuralism on the interaction of history and language helps render apparent how Peru's colonial past and international economic integration influence modern depictions of Chinese investment.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is interested in the ways that language forms are applied in different power operations and expressions (Wodak, 2002, 9). By means of language, CDA helps to examine social inequality in terms of its expression, indication, formation and validation (Van

Dijk, 1995, 258 – 260). Unlike other approaches, CDA develops theoretical models that consider the social processes and power structures underlying and sustaining discourse (Van Dijk, 1995, 248 – 249). It recognizes the significant part language and discourse play in forming social structures and hierarchies, economic exploitation, and power relations as well as in influencing social systems (Van Dijk, 1993, 263 – 265). CDA can expose and challenge the institutional practices supporting either overt or covert power relations. While post-structuralism provides the philosophical foundation to challenge their power-laden character, CDA provides the scientific techniques to rigorously study the language, context and ideological variables creating these representations.

Data Collection

To analyze the construction of these representations, the study will use media and government reports, mainly from Peru and China, but also other indirect actors such as the U.S.A. and other Latin American countries. Media sources define how stories regarding the Chancay port are built, packaged and shared to impact public opinion. They reflect dominant and alternative discourses, capturing the interaction of power, ideology and societal values by forming images of Chinese participation. Government reports similarly offer a window through which institutional narratives supporting or normalizing foreign investment may be seen, therefore illuminating the official framing of the project. Post-structuralism emphasizes the need to dissect these reports to expose how knowledge generation supports power systems. By trying to reveal how local and global dynamics create narratives, it renders them indispensable for comprehending the ideological and sociopolitical underpinnings of representations inside the Chancay port megaproject discourse.

The following table, inspired by Titscher et al.'s book *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (2000, 152 - 159), presents the process of purpose, data, analytical steps and implications:

Table 1: Textual Method of Analysis

Purpose	Data List	Analytical Steps	Implications
To understand how official or influential documents (e.g., policies, media publications) frame local identities and investment narratives.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chinese government (3 Ministries and the official BRI communique) 2. Peruvian government (4 Ministries) 3. Mainstream Media (China Daily, People's News Daily, El Comercio, La República) 4. Alternative Media (AndinaPe, SERVINDI, Peru Pesquero) 5. International Voices (American Army War College, El Observador, El Economista, Universidad de Navarra, and others) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Document Selection: Relevant documentation from 2019 – April 2025 that is related directly or indirectly to the Chancay port project and/or its local communities. 2. Initial Review: Search for themes, language patterns, and stakeholder positions. 3. Systematic Coding: Creation of a coding scheme to categorize key concepts such as progress, alliance and identity. 4. Interpretation: Discover how the layers in these documents construct, reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics and perceptions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reveals how formal narratives set the tone for public discourse and sentiment therefore helping to identify dominant themes and any shifts in rhetoric over time. 2. Shows how certain ideas become dominant, marginalized, or reshaped which focuses on the flow of the power relations embedded in FDI acceptance and non-native presence.

These sources were chosen for their relevance and credibility to both the Chinese and Peruvian governments. Official publications from each country's ministries reveal the narratives and intentions those administrations aim to project at home and abroad. In tandem, the high levels of corruption and low transparency in both nations also affect traditional media's discourse, though to a lesser extent. Alternative media outlets and international commentators provide a wider range of perspectives on the Chancay port project. Altogether, this selection paints a nuanced spectrum of views, emphasizing the many shades of gray inherent in such megaprojects rather than a strict black-and-white narrative.

Chapter 3: Analysis

This section examines both Peruvian and Chinese agendas by first unpacking their overly optimistic official governmental narratives. It then analyzes how traditional media more cautiously follows the optimistic narratives from both governments, while alternative media challenges that optimism with more realistic perspectives. Finally, it considers how the spectrum of international voices shapes a more balanced dialogue through its discursive frictions. By tracing these shifting viewpoints, the analysis reveals the ongoing tension between the push for development and the need to respect local communities outside the dominant global narrative for a more equitable future for upcoming generations.

Government

China: The Story of the Giver

The Chinese government methodically built up the narratives of the megaproject of the Port of Chancay as a key pillar in the evolution of Sino-Peruvian strategic relations from January 2019 until the present. As Beijing consistently presented Chinese FDI as beneficial and transformative for Peru, this period demonstrates a well-chosen narrative characterized by optimism, mutual benefit, modernity, and maximum empathy. However, when viewed through the lens of Harvey (2004, 64 - 66), the project can also be interpreted as a "spatio-temporal fix" that China uses to absorb surplus capital while expanding its geopolitical and economic base in Latin America, with the Peruvian government at the strategy's epicenter.

The entire saga began with COSCO Shipping Ports' purchase of 60% of the shares of the Port of Chancay in January 2019, which was not only presented to Peruvian society as a superficial commercial transaction but also as the premeditated beginning of deep-sea bilateral relations (China Daily). The official Chinese narrative emphasized Peru's geographical

advantage, highlighting how the port could become an important logistics hub connecting South America with Asia, reducing travel time down to 23 days (BRI, 2019). This implies a maximization of economic benefits for both countries. China's perspective portrays its FDI as a source of solutions for Peru's development, job creation, and economic progress (BRI, 2024). However, when placed under Wallerstein's framework, China's participation can also indicate a shift in the balance between core and semi-peripheral zones (Chirot et al., 1982, 100). This interjection wrestles with American and Euro-centric power dynamics, transforming the West's allies into neutral or even enemy states.

By early 2022, the port (then still in progress) had become the largest terminal in the Pacific, representing modernity and growth of economic complexity for the Chinese and Peruvian citizens (People's News). These symbolized promises of economic growth: a thicker vein that would graft Peru into the bloodstream of global trade through the scarlet banner of China (BRI, 2024). President Xi Jinping's BRI aspirations are displayed with unilateral Chinese "goodism" that conveys intentions of a helping hand. Within this framework, Harvey's accumulation by dispossession (2004, 128 - 129) suggests that these movements align with a broader strategy to maximize power and new shades of global hegemony. Perhaps as part of a long-term geopolitical maneuver by China, this method reduces dependence on trade routes dominated by the West and strengthens China's global influence in a region of strategic interest to the United States.

By November 2024, China's discursive approach had deepened even further. Xi's diplomatic narrative positioned the Port of Chancay not only as an economic benefit but also as a renaissance of ancient cultural and historical ties between China and Peru (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). For the port opening, Xi and President Boluarte held the ceremony virtually,

giving a mix of pragmatism with outlines of insecurity and distrust that were camouflaged with APEC and other cultural symbols (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). There, Xi repeated the same official Chinese narrative, stressing that it is the "first smart and green port in South America" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). His comments lend the megaport a unique character while acknowledging the critical role China played in its creation, merging the legends of the Maritime Silk Road with the Andean imagery of the Inca Trail. The symbolic power of the Chinese elites is denoted by deploying evocative symbols to maintain authority and shape collective understandings to discourage potential new waves of alternative discourse.

Shortly thereafter, the Chinese government (2024) emphasized the arrival of the first Chancay ship in Shanghai in December 2024. Serving as evidence of China's commitment to facilitating Peru's access to the market and its global integration, this emphasis projected the fundamental role that China and Peru will have in global trade (BRI, 2024). By January 2025, these topics were reinforced in diplomatic conversations between the legislative leaders of both nations (BRI, 2025). This carefully crafted narrative promotes mutual collaboration, discreetly encouraging alignment with China's broader economic vision (BRI, 2025). What stands out most is that the narrative never addresses negative or hostile views of Chinese investors, which in turn masks any potential threat to local livelihoods or cultural integrity (Huddy, 2001, 138 - 139).

From 2019 to 2025, these intertwined discursive strategies created a unified wave of official portrayals designed to establish the Port of Chancay as a central symbol of Sino-Peruvian partnership. By embedding China's geopolitical ambitions within grand narratives of shared prosperity, cultural fusion, and advanced modernization, these representations serve Beijing's strategic objectives. Moreover, discussions about potential environmental damage, Indigenous rights, or sovereignty disputes were not mentioned at all, creating an idealized representation of

Sino-Peruvian harmony. Even so, the official narrative — which repeatedly emphasizes mutual gain, prosperity, and cultural unity — effectively naturalized China's rise as compatible with Peru's own aspirations, eclipsing local criticisms and alternative narratives.

Peru: The Feelings of the Receiver

Just as in the Chinese case, the Peruvian government has meticulously crafted an optimistic story designed to hide deeper geopolitical, socioeconomic, and local complexities. By adopting the same tone of optimism and brotherhood, Peru has supported the Chinese portrayal of investment as positively transformative for the country's economic sovereignty and leadership in the region (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2024).

The announcement of the agreement in 2019 between COSCO Shipping Ports of China and VOLCAN Mining Company of Peru in Davos came during the term of Martín Vizcarra. It proclaimed a milestone of bilateral cooperation with the greatest economic rival of Western hegemony (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2019). These actions can be interpreted by the Peruvian companies as a forewarning of war and a message of departure from the colonial development model. By integrating with China's infrastructure network, Peru effectively positioned itself within a global economic system marked by changing core-periphery dynamics (Chirot et al., 1982, 100). The very act of praising Chinese finance and infrastructure reveals Peru's partial acceptance of China's growing central role, which has traditionally been occupied by Western powers (Mattingly et al., 2008, 11 - 12).

By December 2020, the government had shifted its focus to highlight the sustainability aspect of the Port of Chancay. Minister González cast the project's environmental compliance as a tactical reaffirmation of sustainability and care for the citizens (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2020). His claim demonstrated the officials' curated vocabulary by selectively

showcasing the port's "green" credentials while minimizing any mention of the excessive dependence on external funding (Entman, 2007, 168). This discourse shows the government's desire to project an image of responsibility to both international investors and national audiences. However, beneath the narratives of balance and progress, Peru silently endures its fundamental dependence on foreign capital (Harvey, 2004, 66).

By September 2022, Minister Alvarado described Chancay as a logistics hub for South America, intending to lead the region, a position inconsistent with Peru's subservient devotion to China (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2022). Wallerstein enables an understanding of China's discourse as part of a broader strategy to secure its dominance in global markets (Chirot et al., 1982, 100). Peru's discourse, while celebrating national pride, simultaneously places the country within China's sphere of influence (Ministerio de Transportes y Comunicaciones, 2024). By praising China's "cutting-edge" capabilities, Peruvian authorities implicitly present local resources and knowledge as subordinate, shaping the public's perceptions of who truly exercises leadership in development and its direction (Wacquant, 2013, 277).

Just like Minister Alvarado, Minister of Economy Contreras described the Port of Chancay a year later as the backbone of Peru's aspiration to become "the logistics and maritime hub of Latin America" (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2023). With the same principle of the Minoan thalassocracy which once sought to weave its dominance across the Mediterranean, the modern push for influence in Peru aspires to achieve a similar vast connectivity, but this time through the expansive reach of the Pacific. A familiar script emerges, yet is played out by different actors with different lives. The unification of the Peruvian discourse on national identity and economic development presents a vision of the rose of hope with imperceptible thorns, bestowing vulnerability unto the continuity of Chinese investment.

All these narratives suggest that Peru has turned its back on the United States and, implicitly, that its deep friendship with China is fostering an anti-American sentiment: one in which the voice and path to development lie not in the White House, but with the CCP — even more now due to Trump’s worldwide tariff attack. Moreover, the coinciding timing of APEC, the inauguration of the megaport, and the political turbulence sparked by a massive nationwide protest by transporters — provoked by Peruvian drivers making “protection payments” to mafias and Venezuelan groups linked to the terrorist organization Tren de Aragua — provided the government with a window of hope and opportunity (Ministerio del Interior, 2024). Nevertheless, before the massive protest started, the government and activist leaders made a deal to postpone it until after the APEC summit took place (Ministerio del Interior, 2024). In light of this positive temporary resolution, the Peruvian government’s use of extreme positivism in promoting the megaport adds a new layer to the discursive misdirection (Entman, 2007, 164 - 166). Rather than suggesting the unwavering loyalty of a neo-feudalist allegiance to lordly Beijing, this approach appears designed to dilute public scrutiny and deflect criticism of governmental errors that, according to some citizens declaring at the Peruvian Ombudsman (2024), have created a level of insecurity reminiscent of the Fujimorist dictatorship and its struggle against Sendero Luminoso. Is this use of rhetoric a technique akin to authoritarian propaganda, now amplified by the internet’s exponential reach that obscures the true essence of the issues (Castells, 2007, 249 - 250)? This language functions as a smokescreen that ensnares the dispossessed — those desperate for hope to find the strength to rise each day (El Peruano, 2024).

In addition to internal protests, a noteworthy aspect is the extensive Chinese control of Peru’s energy sector. Unlike countries such as France or the United States, where strategic

sectors are safeguarded from foreign private investment, Peru has not imposed similar restrictions. According to the Bolsa de Valores de Lima (BVL), China Southern Power Grid International, a state-owned enterprise, acquired 82.3% of the shares of Edelnor, one of the nation's largest electricity providers, in mid-2023 (Pacific Credit Rating, 2023). Moreover, China also holds ownership of Luz del Sur, another key player in the energy market (Infobae, 2023). Such developments suggest that China may already effectively control the country's electricity supply currently, and could potentially exercise unilateral leverage should the Peruvian government deviate from the ambitions of President Xi Jinping (Chirot et al., 1982, 88 - 92). Currently, China not only dominates the electricity market but also controls the flow of power to the nation's largest Pacific port, a facility similarly under Chinese influence. Should other essential utilities, such as water, gas, and internet services, also fall under Chinese ownership, this could mark the first instance of comprehensive Chinese autonomy on the South American continent (Chirot et al., 1982, 95).

The energy company that provided electricity to Lima and other regions, Edel Peru, was dissolved and rebranded as Pluz Energia Peru on August 19, 2024, three months prior to the APEC summit where the Chancay Port was to be inaugurated (Pluz, 2025). The Peruvian government's apparent reluctance to address these pressing issues may be attributed, in part, to the challenges posed by an under-educated populace and a myriad of concurrent crises (Huddy, 2001, 134 - 135). Consequently, official discourse from the government tends to emphasize the port as a singular positive development, selectively disseminating information (Ministerio de Transportes y Comunicaciones, 2024; Mattingly et al., 2008, 12). The normalization of terror, violence, and disappointment within Peruvian society appears to trigger a collective memory mechanism whereby adverse events are overshadowed by the sparse positive occurrences.

This could be interpreted as fortune for the Peruvian government, as the people's hunger for hope makes it easier to bury the relentless barrage of bad news that has become daily fare for the average citizen (Huddy, 2001, 135 - 136). The resulting indifference — fueled by decades of continuous political abuses against human rights and the mysterious disappearances — has served to downplay these enduring problems (Mattingly et al., 2008, 9 - 10). Now, even as the nation faces a new low point regarding public security, the citizenry clings to any semblance of positivity and readily accepts the dis-informative promises of the government's information campaign. This sense of demarcation between the internal and external group blurs, reducing the possibility of resistance from the communities by artificially merging their identity with that of the Chinese investors without them perceiving it as an attack on their sovereignty (Huddy, 2001, 138 - 139).

In summary, the official narrative surrounding the Port of Chancay from 2019 to 2025 on the Peruvian side includes strategic optimism, selective disclosures similar to those of an authoritarian government, and carefully woven rhetoric almost reaching dogmatic levels. This discourse presents a hopeful image of economic independence, regional leadership, and national prestige. And even though it is not mentioned directly, each compliment to China increasingly entangles Peru in structural dependencies on Chinese geopolitical and economic strategies. In addition to analyzing the implications of the carefully constructed discourses of both governments, studying media representations is a vital dimension to have a more complete picture of local perceptions. If journalists support these harmonious narratives or defend marginalized voices, they will determine whether Peru's public sphere remains under a seamless hegemonic alignment, or sees the emergence of more critical and antagonistic perspectives towards the Peruvian and Chinese governments.

Media

Official Media Outlets: A Continuation of the Same Narrative?

As China and Peru jointly defend the Port of Chancay's supposed perfection, the unilaterality of the positivity expressed by the official media in both countries evokes questions about deeper power dynamics and genuine national autonomy. The almost identical optimism adopted by Chinese state media and major Peruvian sources essentially reinforce the same narrative as their governments. In the official Chinese media, the news indiscriminately promotes the Port of Chancay as a blessing for Peru, a chance that the Chinese government has given to the country by showcasing Chinese investment as a benevolent solution for infrastructural gaps and monetary inequalities (Castells, 2007, 253; China Daily, 2024; People's Daily, 2024). These representations, backed by references to the Maritime Silk Road and President Xi's symbolic "Inca Road of the New Era," position China as Peru's "genuine" friend (Huddy, 2001, 137 - 138). However, this friendship must be seen for what it is: a pursuit of security and influence by both parties and the expansion of Beijing's economic presence (Jauregui, 2020, 353 - 355). Chinese official media platforms focus on consolidating their image in Latin America using the same words as their government, embellishing the power of trade routes and the new dominance of Western commerce rather than mutual progress (Valderrey et al., 2019, 38 & 42). Because the message targets a domestic Chinese audience, it understandably foregrounds a Maoist theme of national strength, framing the project as a victory for China — even if that victory comes at Peru's expense (Harvey, 2004, 64 - 66). Meanwhile, the Peruvian media, with a more servile tone, full of words of admiration, distorts those narratives (El Comercio, 2024). Like Paracelsus through the miracles of literary alchemy, mainstream media transmutes any dissent into a story of national aspiration to become the new regional power (Entman, 2007, 164 - 166; El Comercio,

2024). Again, this global hierarchy of core and periphery is seen, where becoming a member of the core means that Peru must accept Chinese investments in infrastructure (Chirot et al., 1982, 93 - 96).

Nevertheless, the question remains whether this realignment in the global system truly liberates Peru, or merely exchanges one external influence for another. Headlines and stories highlighting immediate job creation, increased trade volumes, and optimistic economic forecasts serve as focal points, often excluding environmental or sociopolitical ramifications like crime (China Daily, 2024; El Comercio, 2024). This curated media environment, bolstered by the governmental support of both nations, creates empowering official discourses to attack and label any criticism as regressive or unpatriotic (People's Daily, 2024; La República, 2024; MTC, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This creates an Orwellian Truth about the indisputable benefits of Chinese participation, steeping the populace within its message. Moreover, the fact that conventional media continues to dominate public opinion due to their ease of *massification* simplifies the official discourse and minimizes dissent. The result is a subtle but powerful "discursive authoritarianism" in which the absence of diverse perspectives perpetuates a sense of unanimity around the supposed inevitability of the port (Entman, 2007, 169). In that sense, both governments are combining techniques from Wallerstein and Rousseau to convey that a regime with the absolute majority suppresses the interests of the minority as a necessary means for peace and order within its internal hierarchies; one strategy is by excluding them from national reports (El Comercio, 2024; La República, 2025).

That is why the residents of the Chancay area are persistently defined as the main beneficiaries of this port, as the first to receive the blessing of the saint or the cure for the plague, while the rest are left with the crumbs of such a feast (Entman, 2007, 168 - 169; La República,

2025). In this way, it can be interpreted that a division of the national reality is created whereby denying the benefits of such investment and infrastructure would generate resentment from the rest of the population, who only see and know what the media and the government show them (Hale, 1997, 574; La República, 2025). How can one refuse entry to paradise in a Christian country? The celebratory tone of the media here clashes with the localized distrust rooted in concerns about land dispossession and resource exploitation. Per the reasoning displayed by the official authorities, China and Peru are friends, and the logic follows: friends do not harm one another (Huddy, 2001, 130; La República, 2025). By overlooking these underlying tensions, conventional media takes for granted the deeper entanglement of Peru with China, as well as stifling alternative voices and local demands for accountability (Castells, 2007, 249 - 250; La República, 2019; El Comercio, 2024). Ultimately, the coordinated approach of the official media of China and Peru underscores how narratives become instruments of power to construct the reality most convenient for the interests of the states. Facing this reality requires a continuous examination of both conventional and alternative media narratives, as they shape the destiny of Peru's public sphere. By extension, they work to define the truth and perception about sovereignty, democracy, and the future of the country within a rapidly transforming global order.

Alternative Media Outlets: Not Blue, But Gray Sky?

The narratives of Peruvian alternative media offer a more complex portrait of the Chancay Port project, "completing" the puzzle offered by the official media with a different shape (Castells, 2007, 250 - 251). These alternative media reveal unrecognized ecological costs, socioeconomic tensions, and grassroots dissent that counter the narratives of success and progress disseminated by their counterparts (SERVINDI, 2024). Unlike the pure and impeccable narratives promoted by Chinese and Peruvian government sources, these independent media sources highlight the

decline behind all the sanguinity, unveiling local struggles and structural imbalances hidden by promises of modernization (Mattingly et al., 2008, 2; SERVINDI, 2024). Through these “antagonists” the concept of "accumulation by dispossession" is observed, with the false image of progress from Chinese investments masking patterns of resource extraction and social displacement beyond their traditional borders (Harvey, 2004, 64). More than a purely benevolent partnership, Chinese investments give the “officialism” a firm and stable position to extend their influence in Peru, by connecting their predatory interests in natural resources with the formation of development and obedience (Harvey, 2004, 66).

Fortunately, alternative media such as Peru Pesquero (2020), an association platforming small-scale fishermen, highlights the paradox that arises when official rhetoric promises broad economic opportunities, but local fishing communities experience greater insecurity (Castells, 2007, 249 - 250). This contrasts with the Peruvian government's publication discussing the investment made to improve the situation of those same artisanal fishermen (Peru Pesquero, 2020). Although the official interpretation of the Chinese rise in Latin America portrays them as the supernova of the century, China's imitation of Western hegemony control methods endangers local communities through large-scale displacement and the erosion of their livelihoods (Arase, 2015, 26 - 28; Chirot et al., 1982, 104). On the ground in Chancay, reports from AndinaPe (2023 & 2025) detail accidents caused by the construction of parts adjacent to the project, showing how the pursuit of a strategic advantage can overshadow everyday realities — even though in that case the state acknowledged its failure, largely downplaying it to further the narrative of unstoppable progress (Castells, 2007, 248 - 249; Montoya et al., 2019, 15; El Comercio, 2024). Antagonizing the mainstream, alternative media networks reframe the debate by highlighting those neglected aspects such as unfulfilled compensation promises, damage to homes, and

persistent dangers to artisanal fishing and marine wildlife (Peru Pesquero, 2020; AndinaPe, 2023).

Governments and major media brands frequently categorize criticism as an obstacle to national development (Wacquant, 2013, 277 - 278). However, the revelations by Dar (2024) and SERVINDI (2024) have already been published and read by internet users in Peru and around the world. Small factions of the Peruvian citizenry are already aware of the damage to roads and homes, puncturing the bubble of optimism the state would rather see remain inflated. By highlighting these contrasting local experiences, independent media resist the established hierarchies of knowledge, challenging the notion that large-scale initiatives should proceed without questioning in the name of the common good (Huddy, 2001, 146 - 148). This networked communication highlights that, despite the dominance of conventional media, digital and community platforms provide opportunities for counter-narratives to emerge (Castells, 2007, 250 - 252).

Thus, the same hybrid media environment that supports top-down messages also provides avenues for alternative voices. Reports from SERVINDI (2024), a news agency that focuses on Indigenous and rural perspectives, sheds light on the infrastructural neglect, environmental hazards, and insufficient government response, showing a certain level of permitted freedoms and transparency while demanding greater transparency (Entman, 2007, 164 - 166). But if in theory one life does not weigh more than another, why is there not greater attention being paid to the agitations of the inhabitants of Chancay? This sense of "us versus them" is not only inter-dimensional, as Chinese investment imposes conditions upon *chancainos*, but also intra-dimensional, as impact is disproportionately distributed among Peruvians within the country. This pattern intensifies once the negative impacts such as disruptions in fishing and

forced displacements become tangible (Hale, 1997, 574). Naturally, the persistent disparities in the distribution of power and resources fuel historical and current resentments. This case exemplifies how Latin American marginalized groups mobilize their identity to challenge invasions of their autonomy, except in this case, it is a multi-dimensional friction between China, Peru, and the rest of the world (Hale, 1997, 574).

By positioning themselves as guardians of ecosystems and defenders of social equity, local communities not only challenge the claims of top-down narratives but also reaffirm their right to participate in the decisions that shape their future. Ultimately, alternative media exposes the flaw in the triumphant prosperity narratives promoted by both governments and mainstream outlets. Meanwhile, local communities must weather ecological risks, deaths from infrastructural failure, and ambiguous promises of compensation. By questioning official optimism, recognizing the potential for dispossession, and exploring how community-level identities alternative media shapes a different perception of foreign investment-backed megaprojects. This challenges the monolithic notion of development itself, urging a more inclusive dialogue that does not erase those whose voices go against the carefully choreographed Sino-Peruvian embrace.

International Voices

American Voices: New Gifts, New Concerns, and Maybe Real Interest

The rise of the Port of Chancay as a significant infrastructural and geopolitical milestone has sparked intense commentary among analysts and policymakers in the U.S.A., who view the project through the intertwined lenses of strategic competition and economic rivalry (Army War College, 2024; Global Americans, 2024). The American interpretation of the project indicates a clear erosion of its own influence over the brotherly southern continent (Huddy, 2001, 146 - 148). This shows a delayed reaction to the new consolidation of China's infrastructural

diplomacy in Latin America (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2024). As a result, Chancay becomes crucial for assessing the geopolitical resilience of the United States.

The American Navy underscores these tensions, describing the port as a pawn in Beijing's chess set meant to weaken Western maritime control in the Pacific (Chirot et al., 1982, 105; Army War College, 2024). It warns that eventually the port may serve for deeper naval and logistical penetration in a region historically known as the "backyard of America," contesting pre-established power structures (Army War College, 2024). In their pursuit of maximizing their security and influence, states with sufficient power tend to invest in infrastructure beyond their borders to consolidate their geopolitical reach (Harvey, 2004, 64 - 66). From the eagle's eye of the White House, the construction of Chancay's port implies a shift in hemispheric power dynamics, where China skillfully positions itself as the "new core," while the United States faces falling behind and must counter or contain such advances (Chirot et al., 1982, 97).

These perspectives gain greater dimension when placed alongside the criticisms raised by Global Americans (2024). This alternative media source labels China's efforts as an invasion of Peruvian sovereignty, as being a direct attack not only on the Chinese discourse but also on the Peruvian government that defends Beijing's interests as if they were Peru's own (Chirot et al., 1982, 84 - 85). It implies how advanced technologies, financing agreements, and long-term service contracts could entangle Peru in an economic dependency that weakens its autonomy, as China has already done with other countries like Sri Lanka (Global Americans, 2024; Hale, 1997, 571 - 573). The U.S. viewpoint thus merges classic Western security concerns, evoking old Cold War anxieties about foreign infiltration, with modern concerns about digital infrastructure and potential threats to the democratic governance of its "allies" (Army War College, 2024). This situation is important to address as it is the only strategic megaproject that the US government

hasn't been able to control or cancel, as it has done with financial giant BlackRock's acquisition of the Panama Canal, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio's deal with Panama which took the latter country out of the BRI project (CBS, 2025; DW, 2025). The same situation also occurred with the Nicaragua Canal, another infrastructure project the Chinese government wanted to create as an alternative to the traditional Western Panama Canal, but they failed to initiate it because of financial cost and US intervention (Liberation News, 2024).

From there, the criticism becomes more direct, even from lesser-known American media, portraying Chancay as part of a grand strategy to redirect trade flows from Latin America and orient them towards China (Ahead of the Herd, 2024). This has even more validity with the current state of Trump's tariff diplomacy, which weakens the White House's relations with the world. For these reasons, the United States has begun to mount a response similar to China's, using gifts exemplified by renewed infrastructure investments in Peru, from support for train systems in Lima to funding additional projects in Arequipa as well as nine donated Black Hawk helicopters (SwissInfo, 2024; Canal N, 2024). Such moves reveal Washington's recognition that a purely passive stance could accelerate its loss of regional influence, but an active one could tempt Peru back.

In addition to the resurgence of American interest, during the APEC meeting, American allies positioned themselves to counter China's presence in Peru. Peru is reshaping its alliances with its Western allies: it forges new defense accords with South Korea, relaxes visa rules with Japan, and receives U.S. investment into the Corio Port as a deliberate counterweight to China-backed Chancay (Presidency of the Government of Peru, 2024). These calculated moves tighten Lima's grip on its own destiny and blunt Beijing's leverage (Presidency of the Government of Peru, 2024). This shows that China can no longer be subdued solely by the power

of the United States, but has reached a point where it must call on other allies to serve as amplifiers of subversive retention of Chinese investment forces (Chirot et al., 1982, 108).

Regional Jealousy and Newly Found Benefits

While the U.S. perspectives tend to focus on the angle of strategic rivalry and fear of losing hegemonic power, Latin American actors project more varied and pragmatic responses to the rise of Chancay. Some see it as a disturbing threat to established trade routes; others consider it a catalyst for the expansion of exports (AthenaLab, 2022; El Observador, 2022; Universidad de Navarra, 2024). Chile stands as a prime example of the former, where analysts fear the diversion of trade from ports like Valparaíso to Chancay, potentially undermining job creation and national income to the point that one of its senators openly speaks about those implications (AthenaLab, 2022; El Observador, 2022; La República, 2025). Concerns about displacing Chile's own regional leadership emerge through the possibility of FDI and market dispersion which would lead to a future economic slowdown (La República, 2025). The narrative of Chancay repositions Peru as a logistics hub backed by China, overshadowing Chile's established maritime reputation (Universidad de Navarra, 2024).

On the contrary, Colombia adopts a more welcoming stance, viewing Chancay as an opportunity to revitalize its Pacific routes and secure new markets for its exports (El Economista, 2025). The same dynamic appears in Ecuador, where various commercial sectors anticipate shorter and more economical export routes to Asia through Chancay (El Economista, 2025). Simply basking in the immediate benefits, such as faster shipping times and broader access to Chinese markets, is dangerous because it is unknown to what extent such "advantages" would continue without invading other sectors, therefore attacking the sovereignty of those countries by turning narratives in favor of Chinese capital.

What complicates matters further is the transformation in Peru's own regional position. The reconfiguration of shipping routes effectively places Peru in a new key position, with Chancay serving as a guardian for goods moving throughout the South Pacific (AthenaLab, 2022). Moreover, China's solid financial support and logistical planning foster Peru's economic rise to a leadership position largely controlled by Beijing. In this case, China maintains the ultimate influence. The question is whether Peru can leverage its infrastructural advantage to strengthen true autonomy without being subject to Beijing's economic orchestration.

Chancay thus becomes a platform for more general changes regarding the alignment of Latin America with world powers. American experts read it as a contested area, emblematic of the fall in U.S. dominance and the growth of Chinese ambition, resonating with *realpolitik* issues reminiscent of past historical rivalries (Army War College, 2024). Regional players are far from consistent in their attitudes as well; some mourn the economic displacement while others welcome new export paths putting the dollar above the ecosystem yet again (Global Greengrants Fund, 2020). Through each story — be it American, Chilean, Colombian, Ecuadorian, or Peruvian — attempts to influence collective views of what Chancay represents, who benefits, and at whose expense, these several points highlight the degree of Wacquant's (2013, 279 - 281) symbolic power (Global Greengrants Fund, 2020). Given this diversity of views, Chancay becomes a microcosm of modern geopolitical and economic currents rather than a mere marine center. On the one hand, it reflects the logic of the BRI which Wallerstein understands as part of China's strategy for global preeminence; on the other hand, it accentuates the fault lines in a region historically shaped by Western influences that now faces a second "great power" attracting with capital and infrastructure (Chirot et al., 1982, 106).

The value of Chancay ultimately transcends a local engineering achievement. While the United States reinvigorates its interest in Peruvian infrastructure, Chile suffers with the loss of maritime influence, Colombia and Ecuador see a path to increase their exports, and Peru tries to capitalize on the newly acquired logistical centrality, the resulting game shows how one project can recast regional priorities and alliances. The megaproject becomes an example of how 21st-century infrastructure diplomacy both transforms and is itself changed by global power dynamics. It exposes a careful balance between opportunism and caution, as every actor tries to grab quick gains while handling the long-term expenses that can redefine Latin America's position in a fast-changing worldwide scene.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This work has investigated closely how Chinese presence in the Chancay Port megaproject is presented by state discourses, mainstream and alternative media narratives, and foreign voices. Official narratives from the Chinese and Peruvian governments have routinely promoted the program as a clear road towards strategic regional leadership, cultural rejuvenation, and economic progress. Nevertheless, positivism appears to be the strategy the state chooses to keep the Peruvian population distracted from the current problems they are facing in terms of security and national sovereignty. Under the BRI's mandate, China's image — presented through deliberate diplomatic and symbolic language — was constructed as that of a friendly provider, deftly balancing economic and cultural relations. Between 2019 to 2025, the Peruvian government raised China's hopes by subtly incorporating its aspirations for economic sovereignty inside speeches that hid more basic structural weaknesses to foreign geopolitical variables.

From both countries, mainstream media sources endorsed these official narratives, therefore marginalizing opposing points of view and providing a harmonious and inevitable route of bilateral prosperity. As this strongly implies a strategic connection designed to build a hegemonic narrative, the uniform positivity seen in key Chinese outlets including China Daily and Xinhua, and prominent Peruvian media as El Comercio and La República, show a deeper connection than the economic “benefits” they portray. It is evident that such discursive devices were aimed to marginalize opposing voices and conceal underlying structural inequalities by always accentuating short-term financial rewards and cultural unity.

Unlike these dominant narratives, research of alternative Peruvian media exposed notable local dissent, environmental damage, social turmoil, and problems regarding loss of community sovereignty. Offering a somber counter-narrative to the officially endorsed optimism, independent media such as SERVINDI, Peru Pesquero, and AndinaPe threw the serious environmental damage, threats to traditional livelihoods, and infrastructural neglect into sharp relief. By highlighting deeper systematic exclusions inherent in big infrastructure projects sponsored by foreign nations, these objections questioned the idealized pictures produced by the mainstream media discourse and the official government.

Globally, geopolitics experts, environmental organizations, and think tanks added complexity to the official narratives. Strategic remarks by Global Americans underscored the wider implications of the project for geopolitical stability and the strategic reorientation of Latin America into China's expanding sphere of influence. Scholarships from colleges like Universidad de Navarra and journals like El Observador drew attention to serious but often disregarded ecological, public health, and economical consequences in official presentations of the megaproject.

From this careful discursive examination, the Peruvian megaport can serve as a hedging instrument rather than only falling into the dependency trap. This deepens engagement with China while widening the nation's menu of external patrons which raises the opportunity cost for any partner — Trump included — of punitive action. That is when the stakes are no longer framed only as dependency versus autonomy, but as Peru's capacity to broker connectivity in an era when logistics equals power. By multilateralizing the asset, Peru diffuses risk of single-country over-reliance and elevates itself — rather than China — as the indispensable node in South-South supply lines.

Limitations and Future Work

This study has some limitations even with its strong conclusions. First, accessibility restrictions — especially in the tightly controlled Chinese information environment — hinder a more complete internal criticism of Chinese official narratives. Moreover, the dynamic and always changing nature of the Chancay project means that the findings drawn here remain temporary and should be constantly reviewed as incoming events unfold.

Future research should include more various Chinese voices and local Peruvian people directly affected by the project. Longitudinal studies could track public attitudes and economic impacts, therefore providing a more comprehensive knowledge of how infrastructure megaprojects especially alter political and social settings. Comparative studies of projects under the Belt and Road Initiative in different regions could also draw attention to more general patterns of geopolitical influence, economic reliance and local opposition. Emphasizing the essential need of discursive transparency, inclusive policy-making, and strong democratic dialogues in the face of hegemonic geopolitical and economic agendas, this study finally serves to improve theoretical knowledge of global investment narratives.

Finally, Lima does not have to scrap Chancay to make it fairer: it can pass a rule that charges every ship a 2% fee that would flow into a coastal fund for reef repair and better gear for small-scale fishers. At the same time, if the port publishes live data on ship movements, emissions, and worker-safety checks, it could grant faster customs clearance to operators who meet the standard, incentivizing adherence to environmental and labor regulations. Finally, by slotting Chancay into a wider Pacific Alliance network, Peru can cut dependence on any single buyer and position itself as the region's go-to connector. Perhaps with such implementations, both the Peruvian government and alternative media will be proud to share the same good news for their people.

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