RELATIONSHIP, REPUTATION AND WEALTH: KEYS OF COLOMBIAN BUSINESS
DISCOURSE ON ASIA-PACIFIC

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Introduction

Classic and neo-classic economic approaches assume that business actors attempt to maximize their benefits and make rational choices because they have a complete knowledge of their own potential and limits, and their actions are determined by the market. Constructivist and post-structural approaches incorporate psychological and sociological concepts establishing that any economic decision implies the definition of a situation according to previous processes that exceed rational calculations. For example, different groups of actors, intentionally or unintentionally, project a variety of aspects related to their identity in the images they include in their discourse.

Since the creation of the Pacific Alliance (PA, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru) in 2012, large Colombian business actors have been promoting closer economic relations with Asia Pacific, i.e. supporting Colombian foreign policy in that direction. Different authors have interpreted their interest from rational perspectives, for example, that in Asia Pacific a growing middle class is enlarging the demand of all kind of products creating opportunities for Latin American firms to insert themselves into global productive chains. Though this vision may be justified, we argue that Colombian business interest in Asia Pacific represents more than an economic interest, and to justify it we look at the image of Asia Pacific diffused in Colombian big business discourse.

This paper analyzes Colombian business discourse about Asia Pacific focusing on published documents and public declarations by members of the Pacific Alliance Business Council (CEAP) -Colombian Chapter. Sources for this research were CEAP documents, and declarations, interviews, etc., recovered from national newspapers (El Tiempo, El Espectador), specialized publications (Dinero, Semana, Portafolio) and bulletins and webpages of influent business

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associations (like ANDI, originally Asociación Nacional de Industrialistas, and, since the mid1990s, Asociación Nacional de Empresarios).

In Colombian business discourse, Asia Pacific is more than a geographical reality and so, it is pictured as a more developed and dynamic “other” that enjoys what big business want for Colombia. We test the notion that Colombian business project the image of Asia Pacific as an economic development model for Colombia and, through this image, they aspire to legitimize their special relationship with the State, social reputation, and ability to achieve economic benefits.

First, our analysis concentrates on setting the socio-historical context for business discourse; secondly, we identify what big Colombian business think about Asia Pacific; and, finally, we explore how their image of Asia Pacific reflects the way they see themselves as successful economic actors with a privileged relationship with the State and an interest in promoting a new development model. This way we apply content analysis to business discourse combining approaches by Gutierrez (2003) -- content analysis belongs to a socio-historical context-- and Hansen (2006) -- discourse exalts values and perceptions of speakers.

I. Socio-historical Context of Colombian Business Discourse about Asia Pacific

The original document establishing CEAP (CEAP, 2012) considered the private sector the main protagonist of the PA and mentioned the need to deepen cooperation among top business associations: Consejo Empresarial Mexicano de Comercio Exterior, Inversión y Tecnología (COMCE), Sociedad de Fomento Fabril de Chile (SOFOFA), Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Colombia (ANDI), and Sociedad de Comercio Exterior de Perú (COMEX). Two years later, CEAP became the only approved business association with access to PA governments (CEAP, 2014).

Asia Pacific has been a central axis of CEAP discourse since 2012. Asia Pacific is the dynamic center of world trade in the XXI century; China is its hub and the main driver of trade and investment, since it applied its export-led development model, superior to other models. PA and Asia Pacific appear associated to terms and expressions such as “alliance is strength”, “boost to trade and investment”, “dynamism”, “productive growth”, defense “against piracy”, “strength against uncertainty” (titles of articles in a special issue about PA on Business Mail, 2018). They indicate that in their vision of Asia Pacific there are both proactive and defensive elements. Among the latter, some originate in the external environment,
To reduce trade and regulatory barriers and integrate regional value chains will be more critical as growth continues slowing down on both sides of the Pacific and Latin America faces the increasing competence of other emergent markets (PWC, 2016, p. 5)

There is a strong correlation between business discourse on Asia Pacific and the one that appears in Colombian development plans since 1999, when the government stated its intention to take advantage of the Asian crisis to promote closer links with that region (Velosa, 2012, p. 365). According to Cepeda (2014), cooperation with Asia Pacific has been constructed on shared ideas, discourse, and identity by public and private actors. Since 1999, the Bogota Chamber of Commerce (CCB) and ANDI have generated different agencies in support of the government Asia Pacific strategy. CCB developed the Colombian Foundation of the Pacific (2005), to promote trade between Colombia and Asia Pacific while ANDI established Focal Point Asia (2006) to provide information about that region (Cepeda, 2014). In 2008, the founding of the Non-Governmental Group to Coordinate International Relations (CORI) granted business more capacity to influence economic cooperation and they strengthened that capacity by establishing direct links with business in other PA nations (Cepeda, 2014). Even before, the Colombian private sector participated in different initiatives to insert Colombia in Asia Pacific (Consejo Colombiano de Cooperación en el Pacífico, COLPECC in 1987, and Consejo Económico de la Cuenca del Pacífico, PBEC in 1993, Fernández de Soto et al., 2012) by itself or through the Andean Community (CAN).

In coincidence, official Colombian discourse extols business participation declaring that global insertion demands the cooperation of the major sectors of the economy (Colombian Ministry of Foreign Relations, 2008, quoted in Borda and Paz, 2012, p. 217). In the Cali PA summit meeting (2017), Maria Claudia Lacouture, Minister of Trade, Industry, and Tourism, stated that the agreement represented an opportunity for Colombian business. Martin Carrizosa, President of the Colombian Chapter of CEAP, declared that PA is an instance of public-private cooperation without bureaucratic interference and entrepreneurs are the moving force of the agreement (CEAP-Capítulo Colombia, el gran aliado de la integración comercial, 2016, p.8).

Different authors have tried to explain coincidence in governmental and business discourse about PA and Asia Pacific from diverse perspectives. For Pastrana, Castro and González (2017), it is born from the government desire to transmit a new image of Colombia like
… a reliable and prosperous country, that no longer has the status of a problem-country and is building a new image to participate in many transaction scenarios, generating diplomatic and legal trust [after the end of the government negotiations with guerrilla groups] …

This is part of a modernization project based on liberal economic and political principles, and big Colombian business identify with that project. Interest in Asia Pacific derives from the need to build a new foreign policy that reflects the new image of the country by diversifying its external agenda (Pastrana, Castro and González, 2017). But Castañeda (2010) considers the foreign policy change evidence of an attempt to develop a feeling of national unity in Colombia. Participation in international organizations, like the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and international insertion aim at generating a feeling of “colombianidad” through shared pride due to foreign recognition of Colombia as a reliable nation.

Flemes and Castro (2016: 82-83), however, think that through PA the Colombian government attempts to move its foreign policy towards the South but with a regional integration model different from that of Brazil and MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market, made up by Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay). Though Colombia has supported Brazil in its intention to get a permanent seat in the Security Council, it signed a special agreement with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) – criticized by Brazil – and in parallel Colombia has criticized Brazilian involvement in Haiti. According to Flemes and Castro, an increase in Colombian material indicators influenced the government, together with business perception about the right way to behave in the global and regional scenarios². Nolte (2016) adds that PA allows Colombia to improve its international status, associate with the most competitive economies of the region, and construct a positive country-brand.

Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism Sergio Díaz Granados extolls the economic dimension of PA when declaring that

…PA is the fundamental axis of the Colombian internationalization and Asia Pacific insertion strategy, that will promote market diversification to reduce vulnerability to international economic crisis. … through PA, Colombia can accelerate its integration process in Asia Pacific by negotiating together with countries like Mexico, Chile and

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² For example, after the closure of the Venezuelan market for Colombian exports, industrialists became interested in associating with groups and governments that share their view of the world and of Asia Pacific
Peru that have already developed strong commercial links with that region (Colombia: Más allá de una apertura comercial Asia-Pacifico, 2013).

Meanwhile, Cepeda (2017) criticizes ANDI for its unconditional support of the Asia Pacific government policy. He considers Colombian foreign policy towards Asia Pacific part of an obsolete view of the international system, which does not incorporate two facts: emergent economies now threaten the western economic model, and the objectives of multilateralism have changed. ANDI’s position in favor of Colombia joining APEC does not recognize that this organization, for example, has lost dynamism in the new global scenario. An option like ASEAN, explored by the CCB, seems more appropriate. But ANDI and CCB discourses, however, do not show appreciable differences with that of the CEAP-Colombia, and both have signed a Memorandum of understanding in 2018 to facilitate direct links among business of PA member nations (see https://www.ccb.org.co/La-Camara-CCB/Vicepresidencia-de-Relaciones-Internacionales-Alianza-del-Pacífico-un-desafíoempresarial/Conferencistas). Since the economic deceleration of Colombia in 2015, ANDI has publicly called the government not to rely only on signing free trade treaties and to develop an industrial policy (Grandes empresarios colombianos inician cumbre asediados por…, 2015; MacMaster, 2015).

Business reinforce the Colombian government foreign policy by establishing direct links with Asia Pacific business and that way they enlarge their importance in the process (Cepeda, 2017, pp. 11-13). The fact that the axis of that foreign policy is promotion of economic development makes the government more willing to grant them a bigger participation based on their technical knowledge. Barbosa, Posada and Serrano (2011, p. 183) summarize the situation by saying that the Asia Pacific foreign policy “starts from the premise that the economy is the most expeditious way for insertion and it would be impossible to advance without an economic compromise of the private sector that allows the existence and creation of knowledge about the region…” Foreign Minister Maria Angela Holguin justifies promotion of the first Business Forum of FOCALAE in Colombia, with the objective of establishing a business community that will increase trade and investment between the two regions (Barbosa, Posada; Serrano, 2011, pp. 185-186), taking advantage of Colombian business knowledge about Asia Pacific.

Regarding Colombian business knowledge about Asia Pacific, the collapse of exports to Venezuela in 2009 increased business interest in Asia Pacific (Avellaneda, 2009; Reina, 2013, pp. 17-18). In 2000 exports to Venezuela represented 10 % of Colombian exports but by 2011 they have fallen to 4 %, while exports to other countries (including those in Asia Pacific)
represented 21% and have grown to 22% by 2011 (Pineda et al., 2012, pp. 163-176). Bilateral Colombian trade with China, its main Asiatic partner, reached $10.5 thousand million in 2013, an 11.3% more than in 2012.

But Colombian large companies like Nutresa (member of Sindicato Antioqueño) had previous links with China as its president, Miguel Moreno, declared in 2017 that they had been participating in that market through exports and investments for more than 50 years (Zárate; Marino, 2017). Insertion in Asia Pacific by Colombian firms followed a learning curve that by 2000 already included portfolio investment and acquisitions by Bancolombia, ISA, Argos, Nutresa, Sura (Vélez-Ocampo; González-Pérez, 2015). Most of Colombian companies in China sell high-end products -- Juan Valdez coffee, shoes and leather goods by Vélez, leather and canvas goods by Totto and ceramics by Corona --, and trade is supported by the Chinese-Colombian Chamber of Commerce (Ellis, 2014). All Colombian administrations promoted this strategy since President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) applied to become a member of APEC (Pastrana, Betancourt; Castro, 2014).

Since the nineties, Colombian large economic groups (Sindicato Antioqueño, Ardila Lulle, Santodomingo or the Bavaria Group, etc.) supported the opening of the Colombian economy and free trade treaties with the United States (US) and the European Union (EU). This is due to their diversification that allows them to move assets from non-competitive sectors to sectors with more potential (Santodomingo, to TV and radio; Ardila Lulle, to mobile telephony). Close links with government have increased and recently the groups and ANDI had an active role in dialogues between government and FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) (Rettberg; Landinez, 2013). Business justified their participation because “a single large company has more employees than the whole of the guerrillas” and that fact gives the private sector a key political dimension when negotiating Colombia’s reconciliation (Los empresarios y la paz, 2015; Rettberg; Landinez 2013, p. 50).

No question then that the Colombian groups played a key role too in Asia Pacific foreign policy, witnessed by the fact that important representatives of CEAP- Colombia were in 2013 Mario Hernández (Marroquinería SA), Carlos Julio Ardila (Grupo Ardila Lülle) and Juan Camilo Nariño (ANDI vicepresident) (Consejo Empresarial de la Alianza del Pacífico planteó nueve…., 2013). In 2016 they were David Bojanini (Grupo Sura), Bruce MacMaster (ANDI), Martin Carrizoza (founder of Philippi Prietocarrizosa & Uria) and, again, Carlos Julio Ardila and Mario Hernandez (CEAP-
In summary, CEAP members come from Colombian large firms already doing business in Asia Pacific, so their economic importance would suggest that they have less need of government support in their endeavours. From an institutionalist perspective, the need to strengthen their negotiating position in Asia Pacific by associating with Chilean, Mexican, and Peruvian business (Pastrana Betancourt; Castro, 2014) would explain the PA.

However, additional reasons may exist, especially from a cognitive perspective because the behavior of economic actors is not immune to filters such as their image of themselves and their relations with other actors (Queiroz, 2013). Social constructivism (Jorgensen; Wong, 2016) considers that business power is not merely the result of the social structure, but the product of an interactive relationship built by ideas and images. This perspective emphasizes business agency (actorness) to construct power by disseminating ideas and images (Bell, 2012, p. 662). In this approach, analysis of business discourse is key for understanding business behaviour and, in our case, for answering the following questions: *What does Asia Pacific represent for Colombian business grouped in CEAP? How do they build or legitimate their authority by means of the subject? Why do they do it?*

Our argument is that Colombian business extol the image of Asia Pacific because it represents their ideal economic development model and because through that image they justify their preferential relationship with government, legitimate their social reputation, and reach economic benefits. In their discourse about Asia Pacific all these aspects are present and contribute to disseminate an image of that region based on material and ideational factors. But the socio-historical context of Colombian business discourse is not complete without a look at big business relations with the State/government.

 Colombian groups and the government have a mutual restrictive relationship: the government depends on the groups to generate employment, invest, pay taxes, and support their political candidates and the groups expect the government to provide them with tangible (credits, investment) and intangible resources (brand or intellectual property protection, stability, etc.) to develop their activities (Rettberg, 2005). This acts as an incentive for groups interest in keeping their special relationship with the government. According to Rettberg (2005), groups accepted the costs of the political and economic crisis of the nineties in Colombia because in the long-term they expected to reap benefits from their relationship with it.
An example of their close relationship was the negotiation of the Colombia-US free trade treaty. According to two negotiators -- Gómez and Gamboa (2014, pp. 73-74) -- each draft of the treaty was shared with the private sector in meetings with the negotiating team. During the negotiation, ANDI, that supported free trade, offered technical advice to the Trade Ministry. Besides representatives of business associations, the government invited large companies and economic groups already internationalized to participate in the dialogue, but the government kept the initiative during the whole process (Langebaek, 2002).

Latin American companies’ advantages in internationalization are assumed to depend on business access to natural resources and cheap labor, but Andonova and Ruiz Pava (2016: 4377) have demonstrated that large Colombian companies do not depend on that access but on specific advantages of their own. Almost 60% of their advantages depend on intangible resources (patents, specialized brands, know-how, etc.) because they are difficult to imitate and are legally protected. This situation, normal in developed countries, is considered non-existing in developing nations because institutional weakness prevents their governments from prosecuting and sanctioning intellectual or industrial piracy. However, studies made in Brazil show that there is protection of intangible advantages when the company enjoys preferential links or nearness to the State (Andonova; RuizPava, 2016), like the Colombian groups (Rojas Morales, 1997, pp. 118-122, 127-128, quoted in Avilés, 2006).

In 1996, the largest Colombian groups supported president Samper when he was accused of receiving campaign funds from the Cali Cartel, while the National Council of Business Associations (Consejo Gremial Nacional, CGN) called for his impeachment (Rettberg, 2001). The CGN was concerned that the political scandal would mean the end of the US program (ATPDEA) that granted tariff-free entry to Colombian goods in exchange for Colombian actions against illicit drug production and trafficking. When Colombian was decertified by the American government (March 1996) for not having complied with its expected duties in that regard, CGN actions languished.

The internal business conflict ratified the political power of the economic groups, shown already in 1994, when they supported the Group of Three (G-3) (Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela) free trade treaty against the opposition of business associations like ANDI (Giacalone, 1999). By that time,

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3 In the nineties, the Colombian private sector exaggerated the dangers of opening up the economy. The government took the leading position in negotiations with Venezuela (1992) and the G-3 (1994), until the positive economic results
relations between the State and business have moved from a rather formalized and institutionalized structure with a central role for business associations to a more informal pattern of individual links with the largest firms and economic groups (Giacalone, 2015). Rettberg (2001) credits this movement to the groups economic weight (the four largest groups control 300 firms, employ 200,000 persons, and their operations represent almost 13 % of the GNP) and their multisectoral organization that prevents a single association from representing them.

2. The Asia Pacific Image in Colombian Big Business Discourse

In Colombian business discourse about Asia Pacific different ideas complement each other to present a positive image of big business. Expressions such as that of the Colombian Ambassador to Mexico, Patricia Cárdenas – "businessmen are the blood that runs through the veins of the PA, i.e. without you the Alliance would not have a reason to be" (quoted in Salinas, 2016) contribute to increase the positive self-image of big business. Not only their economic success but also their political success in conflicts with other business sectors have helped develop that image. In 2011, a Portfolio survey to find out who were considered the most successful Colombian businessmen placed in the first spots David Bojanini, Sindicato Antioqueño, Carlos Ardila Lulle, Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo and Julio Mario Santodomingo with Hyundai (a foreign multinational company) and the State company Ecopetrol (Los empresarios más exitosos de Colombia, según la audiencia, 2011).

In Colombian business discourse, certain qualities separate businessmen from the rest of society. In their self-image it is usual to find expressions such as …" the ability to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty", “the strength to defeat fear and assume risks,” plus intuition, previous experience, and so on (survey of PA businessmen in PWC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016).

The following are examples of businessmen’ statements in Colombian media that demonstrate the existence of a self-confident image of themselves.

…”Because I don’t want us to be remembered for being the richest, the most powerful, none of that interests us, but to be admired businessmen, but for everything, that is, to have a balance in everything: successful in the sense of their products, to provide a service to the community, to include people, that people have human quality, that our people live dignifiedly, all that respects [sic], Housing, health, education, recreation, fulfilling your

of both agreements changed ANDI perspective and the association began to support free trade treaties (Langebaek, 2002, pp. 47-49).
parents' duty, controlling a successful business, all that really is what fills us with (quoted in Barrera and Hoyos, 2012, p. 15)⁴.

Another attempt to legitimize their self-image as positive persons who produce the wealth that the country needs and have the right to be close to government is

_The businessman is an educated person who has good information and can form an idea of what is going on, for that reason it is important to have a pedagogy, and a clear communication strategy. For example, [we should] not tire of repeating the unmovable [issues] [as the non-negotiation of the economic model] (David Bojani, Group Sura, in Los empresarios y la paz, 2015)⁵._

Other self-legitimizing declarations can be found in _Construir paz. Un propósito común para los empresarios_ (2017):

… a serious and rotund declaration of those that negotiate in Havana and of those that are designing the post-conflict is that the private sector is the main economic driver of the country. There is not a single peso in the economy not produced by the private sector, excepting the State enterprises. Working citizens and the firms where they work produce the whole of the economic activity (Bruce Macmaster, ANDI president, 2017)⁶.

_People sometimes forget that business produce wealth, generate employment, pay taxes, which contributes to improving the quality of life of communities_ (Soraya Montoya, 2017)⁷

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⁴ Whole quotation in Spanish: _Porque yo no quiero que seamos recordados por ser los más ricos, los más poderosos, nada de eso nos interesa, sino ser unos empresarios admirados, pero por todo, o sea, por tener un equilibrio en todo: éxitosos en el sentido de sus productos, prestar un servicio a la comunidad, incluir a la gente, que la gente tenga calidad humana, que nuestra gente viva dignamente, todo lo que eso respecta [sic], vivienda, salud, educación, recreación, cumplir con su deber de padres de familia, controlar un negocio exitoso, todo eso de verdad es lo que nos llena de satisfacción._

⁵ El empresario es una persona educada que con buena información es capaz de formarse una idea de lo que está pasando, por eso es tan importante la pedagogía, tener una estrategia de comunicación más clara. Por ejemplo, no cansarse de repetir los [temas] inamovibles [como la no negociación del modelo económico con la guerrilla].

⁶… Una declaración contundente y seria de quienes negociaron en La Habana y de quienes diseñan el posconflicto es que el sector privado es el principal motor económico del país. No existe un solo peso en la economía que no sea producido por el sector privado, la excepción son las empresas del Estado. El ciudadano que trabaja y las empresas donde lo hace producen la totalidad de la actividad económica.

⁷ A la gente a veces se le olvida que las empresas tienen que producir riqueza, generar empleo, pagar impuestos, lo cual contribuye a mejorar la calidad de vida de las comunidades.
... business is very important. Colombia would not be where it is [now] without business... The businessmen are making a hard effort. We need to find a way for all Colombians to surround the private sector... Peace is very important. It is starting again. It is forgiving everything. It is the beginning of a new country that we are all going to be built by all, but only based on trust, [because] on distrust it is impossible (Gonzalo Restrepo, 2017).n

The media contribute to business self-image when they highlight successful firms. *Latin Trade* granted Bancolombia (owned by Sindicato Antioqueño) the “bank of the year” mention in 2005, exalting its ability to augment benefits in a constant way since it entered the New York Stock Exchange. A positive image of Bancolombia increases its reputation, helps Bancolombia´s products (credit cards, insurance policies, credits) and means more economic benefits (see *Reputación y ciudadanía*, 2014, p. 168).

According to Fernando Jaramillo, vice president of Bavaria, a good reputation is a more valuable intangible benefit than most current assets, including trade marks. A Colombian study (*Dinero*, 2017) found that 25 % of businessmen surveyed considered more important to protect a firm´s reputation than to secure its profitability. Reputation reflects the level of consumers´ trust on a company or product, its relationship with other companies and interest groups, and attracts national and international financial support (Juan E. Calle, Argos president, in *Dinero*, 2017). Carlos I. Gallego, Nutresa president, stresses that Nutresa´s growth is possible due to the company’s ethics that, besides offering goods and services, focuses on giving back to society through supporting environmental programs (*Nutresa-Motor Innovador*, 2017).

Miguel Cortés (Bolivar Group) (*¿Cuáles son las empresas que más aportan crecimiento en Colombia?* 2018) links reputation to daily activities in support of the State but, for him, presently business also needs to promote ideas for changing or improving the nation:

> *In a developing country like ours, entrepreneurs have more responsibilities than in other countries because of the limitations of the State […] - In every juncture business are important because no country grows if business do not. [Business] generate*
employment and pay taxes, that the government uses to strengthen health, education, infrastructure, and so on. At this moment [in the so called “postconflict” after the signature of the peace agreements with the guerrilla], we have an additional role: to generate credibility, aspiration, vision, and leadership⁹

Accordingly, there is no mere coincidence in government and business discourse when they extol business role – both share the image of businessmen as reliable and needed actors in the post-conflict Colombian scenario, able to spread the development model both prefer. Business discourse about Asia Pacific shows this because in their discourse Asia Pacific is not only a region where they can do good business deals.

Asia Pacific discourse is linked to a non-economic line of thought that aims at justifying and protecting big business privileged relationship with the State, their good reputation (know-how, wealth generating function, etc.) and at projecting a development model for Colombia with strong business presence. The aspiration to get economic benefits by projecting a more assertive Colombian presence in Asia Pacific does not disappear, but that aspiration has other readings as well.

Regarding the motivations for this discourse, Colombian big business depicts Asia Pacific as a desirable horizon, probably to face the reticence of other business and the potential resistance of parts of the Colombian society, after the national reinsertion of demobilized political groups¹⁰. Within the present context, the Asia Pacific image strengthens identity elements that justify business privileged relationship with the State and highlights its capacity to generate wealth as useful for the wellbeing of the Colombian society.

The positive image of Asia Pacific started in the 1980s from the observation of the different impact of the external debt crisis in that region and in Latin America. But, at the same time, the insistence

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⁹ En un país en vía de desarrollo como el nuestro, los empresarios tenemos más responsabilidades que en otros países por las limitaciones del Estado [...] En todas las coyunturas las empresas son muy importantes porque ningún país cree si estas no lo hacen. Son... las que generan empleo y pagan impuestos; ... que el gobierno utiliza para fortalecer la salud, la educación, la infraestructura, etcétera. En este momento tenemos un papel adicional: generar credibilidad, aspiración, visión y liderazgo.

¹⁰ Dinero (2017) considers that now business face increased uncertainty due to new technologies, changing contexts and demands by different groups. In Colombia they also face the risks posed by the implementation of the peace agreements and the Odebrecht corruption scandals (Vega, 2017). These specific national threats add up to the other general threats.
on that positive image may result from the absence of a similar opinion in parts of Colombian business and society\textsuperscript{11}. Rodrigo Velasco Lloreda (former manager of ANDI-Valle del Cauca) remarks that there is a reticent attitude of certain business sectors towards Asia Pacific and PA, because they still focus on the domestic market, have not diversified production, and are afraid to internationalize (Alianza del Pacifico: Un gran mercado natural, 2013). The situation has led CEAP-Colombia to extend an invitation to the Colombian business sector “to enthusiastically cross this new door that opens towards a more integrated market among four of the most important economies of our region” (Bojanini, 2016, p. 3)\textsuperscript{12}.

3. Discussion

If discourse aspires to construct the present considering teachings and contributions of the past (Cerquería, 2016), Colombian big business discourse on Asia Pacific differs from other speeches of regional integration because it links the image of the PA with that of another region. This linkage has two levels: one tries to generate interest among entrepreneurs on the economic possibilities that the other region offers; the second seeks to project to the public the notion that the political power and wealth of entrepreneurs are not negative factors because, with their help, Colombia can achieve economic development and benefits for all. In such a way, economic groups and large enterprises are considered necessary intermediaries between the current economy and society of Colombia and the prosperity and development that they can achieve if they support their vision of Asia Pacific.

When those that project ideas through discourse and those that receive them share space, time and culture, their sociohistorical location is fundamental to understand what they say and why (Gutiérrez, 2003). There is in public opinion a pre-built cultural construction (“preconstruido cultural”) based on what persists from actors’ previous speeches. In Colombia, entrepreneurs have a divided image in public opinion. While Cuellar in 2000 placed them in fourth place on a positive confidence scale (behind the Catholic Church, environmental and military groups), in 2014 a survey by the firm Yan Haas showed that only 36% of Colombians trusted the business sector (4 points below the 2013 survey). According to the president of ANDI, this arises from “a conceptual error”--believing that the entrepreneur is the one “that increases sales and profits”, without recognizing “the role he plays in the dynamics of the country” (Solo el 36 % de los

\textsuperscript{11} PA received a positive perception of 50 % in the “Colombia, the Americas and the World 2015” survey (Tickner et al., 2016), which shows a divided opinion about PA.

\textsuperscript{12} “...para que el sector empresarial de nuestro país cruce con entusiasmo esta nueva puerta que se abre hacia un mercado más integrado entre cuatro de las más importantes economías de nuestra región”
colombianos confía en el sector empresarial, 2014). He also stressed that the survey showed a lowered confidence in all Colombian institutions and the private sector was not in the worst place.

This critical image of their wealth and relationship with the State explains the need for entrepreneurs to self-qualify as "an educated person, with good information... able to form an idea..." when they address public opinion. In addition, to manage the political risk in the post-conflict it is fundamental to have a good "visibility", especially for consumer-oriented companies that "are... susceptible to reputational damage " (González-Pérez, 2018).

Gutiérrez (2003) highlights two types of discourse: one technical and pragmatic, concentrated on specific aspects (taxes, etc.), which in our study is found in statements of the CEAP addressed to the PA governments, and one argumentative that seeks to convince other entrepreneurs or public opinion. In our analysis of Colombian big business discourse about Asia Pacific we find both the entrepreneurs’ need to justify to public opinion both their privileged relationship with the government and their wealth. When the interlocutor is another entrepreneur, the need to be justified decreases and discourse concentrates in a dynamic Asia-Pacific region, the motor of global trade and a successful development model, which seeks to promote the advantages of being inserted into it.

Business proactivity around Asia Pacific justifies asking whether that reflects their perception of the existence of a national environment that may not be as favorable to them in the short term. At the same time, according to Bull (2008), entrepreneurs not only act on the perception of threats, but also take advantage of new political spaces as the State delegates them responsibility for promoting or implementing policies and advising them. These two visions of the same phenomenon can be complemented in the Colombian case. On the one hand, the pacification of the FARC and its constitution as a party with electoral aspirations add to the political spectrum an actor with a negative view of the entrepreneurs, placing them in a defensive position. On the other, if their collaboration with the State in terms of foreign trade and attracting foreign investment is successful, their legitimacy in the eyes of society and government will be enhanced. Business discourse seeks to achieve both objectives.

The coincidence between business and government discourse has been interpreted as emerging from the need to build a new Colombian international identity after the negotiation with the guerrillas. This identity can include a geographical diversification of the foreign policy agenda (Pastrana, Castro; Gonzalez, 2017), a movement to the South that maintains the distance with
Brazil (Flemes; Castro, 2016) and an effort to promote national unity (Castañeda, 2010). But business discourse has some key points. They are: 1) the economic model is not negotiable; 2) big business are fundamental for regional integration and international insertion for their accumulated knowledge and experience; and 3) Colombia's economic future depends on partnering with Asia pacific, the center of global trade and investment, whose export development model they aspire to imitate.¹³

Velosa (2014, p. 417) has identified this specificity of the image of Asia Pacific, which he considers shared by the entire PA, by highlighting that only one dimension of that region is important – Asia Pacific is a place to do business. Our case study confirms it, but it associates it with the construction of other elements of business power related to Colombian domestic political dynamics. Therefore, business discourse about Asia Pacific does not present it only as a geographical diversification or a new positive partner but exalts it as a model of development for Colombia. With this image, they build and justify their power by supporting the need to maintain their privileged relationship with the government because they have the technical knowledge and experience to apply the model (reputation) and generate wealth and well-being for Colombia.

As for the images that big business project, in this case of a region that is not their own, all images have spatial, temporal and ethical dimensions.¹⁴ Although business discourse does not mention these dimensions, they can help us discover their political content. The legitimizing discourse of foreign policy, for example, projects the image of Asia Pacific as a model of development superior to the traditional one (based on producing for the domestic market). It also disseminates the image of the ethical responsibility of the great entrepreneur to support the efforts of the State/government to promote a new development model in Colombia. The three dimensions are present and relevant for capturing the complex web of ideas that appear in discourse inspiring or supporting foreign policy (Hansen, 2006, p. 51), but they are contingent on certain circumstances and, thus, may change according to them.

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¹³ If the discourse is a construction aimed at separating "us" from "another", the latter it is not necessarily inferior to the former – it can be worthy of emulating in the search for progress and prosperity (Hansen, 2006, pp. 48-49). The foreign policy of the Eastern European countries after the fall of the Soviet Union was based on the image of a more developed Europe (the EU) they wanted to emulate, although the process that originated the EU arose in the 1950s from a negative image of Europe before 1945, when disunity and war prevailed (Hansen, 2006, p. 40).

¹⁴ Hansen (2006, p. 214) exemplifies it with changes in the image of women over time and across geography based on ethical terms (responsibility to protect the weak, and so on).
In summary, in the Colombian business discourse, Asia Pacific represents the horizon to reach and, to the extent that it needs the technical knowledge and the ability to risk of big business, it legitimizes their privileged relationship with the State. A reluctant attitude among some entrepreneurs and a hostile attitude in part of public opinion, which may have electoral repercussions in the post-conflict, serve as an additional justification for that discourse. Both attitudes help explain why big business has generated a discourse in which the economic groups are projected as capable of driving Colombia towards a beneficial economic insertion, supported by their relationship with the State, good reputation, technical knowledge and previous economic successes.

In conclusion, a rational interpretation of business discourse combined with an institutionalist one are not enough to explain the complexity of the discourse on Asia Pacific of economic groups and large Colombian entrepreneurs. Cognitive approaches, social constructivism and post-structuralism add new dimensions that complement each other because, if the reality is complex, the explanations cannot be simple.

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