

EDITORIAL

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BRAZIL-CHINA RELATIONS: THE RISE OF MODERN INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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Why are Brazil-China Relations Important?

"The Brazil Federation is neither sufficiently small to be ignored, nor sufficiently strong to leverage the global stage on its own. However, Brazil is an important player in South-South relations, and China discerningly values that role" (Leandro, 2024).



Brazil-China relations are an unavoidable topic in the context of international relations. They are both major developing countries and emerging markets in the Global South and have broad common strategic interests (MFA-PRC, 2024). This bilateral relationship is the result of a prolonged process, dating from the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1974. The physical distance between Brazil and China is another factor that has tended to bring them together, as the two countries do not bear the weight of historical disputes or rivalries. They are both undeniably important in their respective regional environments, and both play a relevant role in their neighbors' development. The relationship "(...) has been built around two main lines of action: (1) joint efforts to promote economic development; (2) multilateral collaboration in search of a multipolar world" (Santoro, 2022, p. xi).

The idea behind this special issue is also associated with the "International as an Everyday Practice". Within the field of international studies, the everyday can be read as a text that illuminates central practices at the heart of the production of "international" representations, the reproduction of relations of domination — gendered, economic, social — at the international "level," as well as the consumption of "international" goods, ideas and norms" (Guillaume, 2011). In the light of this, what is current practice in the context of Brazil-China relations?

Brazil and China are regional pivot states, are states displaying interregional interests — namely in Africa — are among the largest developing economies, are both members of large economic organizations such as BRICS+ and MERCOSUR, are perceived as key states in the context of the Global South, and have been developing a strong bilateral commercial relationship. In 2000, China became Brazil's largest trading partner in Asia and Brazil's position in Mercosur has not been overlooked by China. Since 2009, China has been its largest trading partner and in 2012, it became the main supplier of products imported by Brazil (GOV.BR, 2024). In fact, the sector that best illustrates their commercial complementarity is the agricultural sector as Brazil contributes decisively to China's food security — an issue of strategic importance for the Chinese government and people. In 1974, "China accounted for 0.24% of Brazilian exports but by 2023, China was the major destination for Brazilian exports, accounting for 30.7% of foreign sales" (CEBC, 2024, p. 19). Indeed, in 2023, approximately a quarter of all imports of agricultural products in China came from Brazil.

Brazil was the first country to establish a strategic partnership with China in 1993. As Table 1 illustrates, this partnership has been one of the most dynamic and has been deepened five times. Particularly important is the fact that the strategic partnership was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2012. This made Brazil the first country in Latin America and the Caribbean to establish such a partnership with China (Xinhua, 2023).



Table 1- China-Brazil Partnerships and Economic Spaces

China and Brazil	1993	Strategic Partnership (战略伙伴关系)	In July 2024, Brazil revealed a plan to join the Belt and Road initiative (MoU) (SCMP, 2024).	Brazil is a leading state in the Southern Common Market (Mercosur)
	2009	Further strengthened		
	2012	Comprehensive strategic partnership (全面战略伙伴关系)		
	2014	Further strengthened		
	2019	Strengthened and deepened		
	2023	Deepened		

Source: Authors

The Brazil-China High-Level Commission for Coordination and Cooperation (COSBAN) was established in 2004. This has played a significant role in strengthening bilateral relations and in promoting dialogue and cooperation in various fields. Furthermore, in 2014, the China-Brazil Foreign Ministerial-Level Comprehensive Strategic Dialogue was created, and four of these have been held to date. Technology, the digital sector, aviation (Embraer), infrastructure, agriculture, mining, energy and sustainability are the leading sectors in Sino-Brazilian relations. Brazil has one of the world’s largest offshore oil and gas reserves, and cooperation in the area of green energies, including hydrogen and electric vehicles, is extremely promising.

Two projects are likely to have a significant impact on the global south. One is the Brazil-Peru Transcontinental (Bi-Oceanic) Railway, in which China continues to be involved, despite the challenges. “The Chinese side became the leading player in the development of the basic feasibility study of the Brazil–Peru Transcontinental Railway project (...) the Chinese state-owned company China Railway Eryuan Engineering Group (CREEC) was in charge of preparing the study (...). Meanwhile, Brazil and Peru assigned governmental institutions to perform supporting tasks and review the inception, interim and final reports prepared by the Chinese company (MOU on the Joint Conduction of the Basic Feasibility Studies for a Bioceanic Railway Connection 2015)” (Dourado, 2022). The second project is the China–Brazil Earth Resources Satellite program (CBERS), which is emblematic as it is the first high technology project in the context of South-South cooperation.

Brazil-China relations also have a multilateral dimension, particularly in the context of the WTO, G20 and BRICS+. Both strongly oppose unilateralism, protectionism and the decoupling and rupture of industrial chains. They defend inclusive economic globalization and the promotion of an open world economy. The relations between the two countries therefore also reflect China’s interest in Latin America: “China has always given priority to its relations with Brazil in its overall diplomacy and its diplomacy with Latin America, and supports Brazil in promoting state development and national rejuvenation (China Daily, 2024).” China regards Brazil as an important member of BRICS+ and Brazil uses this organization to leverage its international bargaining power and it hosted the G20 in 2024. Its agenda priorities were aligned with China’s global interests: (1) The fight against hunger, poverty and inequality; (2) The three dimensions of sustainable



development (economic, social and environmental); (3) Reform of the global governance institutions. Brazil has adopted a hedging position, seeking to maintain a position close to China, but without producing adverse effects on the US - China Great Game. In fact, although Brazil did condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, President Lula's government expressed its neutrality in the conflict, and denied direct material support to Ukraine. In May 2024, China and Brazil released "Common Understandings Between China and Brazil on Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis". Thus far, this has gained widespread support (110 countries) (RUBRYKA, 2024). In addition, Brazil seeks China's support for its candidacy to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and Brazil shares most of China's views on the reform of the United Nations.

Structure of this Special Issue

This special issue is divided into two sections. The first consists of 15 articles and the second contains four short articles (these short articles included the participation of junior researchers). The articles cover issues such as: economics, partnerships, multilateralism, political relations, gender, health, technology, international security, foreign policy, the Lusophone world, climate change and energy – which we believe is part of the "International as an Everyday Practice". The range of themes is designed to encourage more research on this topic, as well as contribute to decoding the current scholarly discourse on Sino-Brazilian relations, and also anticipate the future state of affairs between Brazil and China.

The first paper by **Rodrigo Franklin Frogeri, Pedro dos Santos Portugal Júnior, Francisco José Leandro, Fabrício Pelloso Piurcosky, and Sheldon William Silva** presents an overview and a critical analysis of international relations between Brazil and China in areas of mutual interest to the two countries. The authors suggest that it is important for Brazil and China to develop initiatives reflecting mutual and sovereign interests and that are aimed at establishing environmentally sustainable trade with reduced asymmetry. The second article, by **António Tavares, Asya Gasparyan, Cátia M. Costa, José Palmeira, Paulo Afonso B. Duarte, and Sabrina Evangelista Medeiros**, examines the role of bilateralism, multilateralism and mini-multilateralism in Sino-Brazilian relations. The authors focus on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, the BRICS, the Basic Four, and the G20. They conclude that the interplay between bilateralism, multilateralism and mini-multilateralism will play an increasing and complementary role in Sino-Brazilian relations.

The article by **Mohamad Zreik** focuses on how the BRICS, in particular, serve as a platform for enhancing relations between China and Brazil and explores the future development prospects within this framework. The author argues that the strengthened partnership between China and Brazil not only promotes mutual development but also facilitates broader South-South cooperation, positioning the BRICS as a crucial player in shaping a multipolar world order.

In January 2023, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was re-elected President of Brazil and began his third term. The article by **Pedro Steenhagen** focuses on why the reform of global governance was (re)prioritized in Brazil's foreign policy during the first year of "Lula 3". The author seeks to give readers a better understanding of the importance of this for an



examination of the interactions between domestic and international politics and the demands of Brazilian foreign policy.

Maintaining the focus on Brazilian foreign policy, the article by **Florencia Rubiolo** and **Gonzalo Fiore Viani** provides an in-depth analysis of Jair Bolsonaro's foreign policy towards China from 2018 to 2022 and the first year of Lula da Silva's administration in 2023. The focus is on the diplomatic and economic dimensions of their respective approaches towards China, highlighting both changes and continuities. The authors believe that China retained a crucial role in Brazil's economic agenda and that the bilateral and multilateral relationship was restored when Lula returned to power in 2023.

The article by **Xuheng Wang** and **Carmen Amado Mendes** uses Guanxi theory as the theoretical framework for an analysis of China's attitude and policies towards Brazil during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors point out that, because China prefers to maintain the existing mutually beneficial model, the Lula government smoothed over the legacy of tense Sino-Brazilian relations inherited from the Bolsonaro government and has promoted the expansion of China-Brazil interaction to more and new areas.

Over the past three decades, China and Brazil have developed a robust and multifaceted relationship characterized by cooperation across various sectors. The article by **Rodrigo Franklin Frogeri** and **Yichao Li** is based on an extensive Systematic Literature Review that also applied bibliometric and lexical analyses to a total of 208 studies. The bibliometric analyses revealed that the peak of publications covering Brazil and China was in 2016. The authors further identify four central research lines that could be developed in future studies.

The article by **Luis Gouveia** draws on social identity theory to analyze official discourse and mass media posts relating to Brazil's position on the war in Ukraine. The author concludes that Brazil attempted to gain status by utilizing a 'creativity' strategy. Meanwhile, Brazil also faced a dilemma as to whether to capitalize on its image within the BRICS or maintain a 'do-good' state image.

Natalia Ceppi and **Gisela Pereyra Doval** examine the rise of China in Brazil's diplomatic agenda in the 21st century, with a focus on existing commercial interests. Based on a qualitative methodological design, the authors state that identification of the same objective, i.e. generating a business agenda with a medium- to long-term impact, means that strategic cooperation between China and Brazil is sustained, at least in economic terms and mainly in the energy sector.

Further exploring the evolving multifaceted engagement between China and Brazil, **Lorhan de Oliveira Pereira** and **Kai Yin Allison Haga** focus on the catalytic role of the iron ore trade in shaping the strategic partnership. The authors argue that the partnership, fueled by a mutual reliance on iron ore, exemplifies how resource-driven partnerships can evolve into strategic alliances that have significant implications for global politics and economics.

The article by **Baiba Biteniece** and **Dana Dūda** examines the strategic collaboration between China and Brazil in the renewable wind energy sector. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Liberal and Economic Interdependence, the authors consider that China's strategic engagement drives collaboration and growth in the wind energy sector in Brazil,



and that there are mutual interdependencies between the two countries. However, these interdependencies are asymmetrical, resulting in greater dependencies for Brazil compared to China.

João Simões and **Daniel Veras** draw on Cooper's (1989) framework on the international promotion of languages to explore Brazil's role in promoting the Portuguese language globally. The authors investigate the intertwined political, economic and cultural motivations behind language promotion initiatives. They emphasize the need for Brazil to effectively leverage Macau's strategic position to capitalize on these opportunities.

Teli Chen, **Suzana Lopes Salgado Ribeiro**, and **Francisco José Leandro** investigate the reversal of gender disparities in enrolment in higher education in Brazil and China. The authors explore factors contributing to this transition, such as feminist movements, the legal framework, economic development, the expansion of higher education, and demographic factors.

In recent decades, health has become a top priority in global governance. **Anabela Rodrigues Santiago** and **Carlos Eduardo de Andrade Lima da Rocha** therefore adopt a perspective based on bilateralism to outline both China's and Brazil's positioning in relation to health diplomacy between 2013 and 2023 and to analyze their articulation within the context of the BRICS. The authors believe that both Brazil and China have leveraged health diplomacy to strengthen their global influence. Also, that they use multilateral platforms like BRICS to strengthen collaboration in order to enhance their soft power and contribute to global health governance.

The Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) established in 1986 aims to promote regional cooperation and maintain peace and security in the region. **António Gonçalves Alexandre** explores how ZOPACAS can contribute to improving maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The author states that ZOPACAS appears to be an opportunity for Brazil to expand its role in the Gulf of Guinea, especially as it is seeking to increase its influence in the international arena and on countries in the Global South.

The second part of this special issue consists of four articles by junior scholars. The first, by **Alberto J. Lebron** and **Carlos M. Martin**, presents their view that empirical evidence is crucial to complement political considerations in their research. The authors measure the overall effects of Trade-in-Value-Added (TiVA) exchanges with both China and US on the Brazilian labor market, and determine which countries/industries might become the most optimal choice for Brazil in terms of TiVA.

The article by **André Luiz Reis da Silva**, **Juli Arusiewicz Berta**, and **Maiara de Almeida Cardozo Nunes** analyzes relations between Brazil and China since 2003 to identify major lines of continuity and change. The authors argue that changes in Brazilian Foreign Policy, especially in terms of how Brazil perceives its position in the world and its relationship with the major powers, have conditioned relations with China since 2003, causing fluctuations in the political relationship despite their growing economic interaction.

Henoch Gabriel Mandelbaum dissects Macau's role in evolving China-Brazil relations over twenty-five years. The author draws on soft power and paradiplomacy frameworks to explore how China has utilized Macau as an instrument of attraction in its dealings with Brazil. The author concludes that, while Macau has made significant strides in



enhancing China-Brazil relations, several challenges remain, and addressing these is crucial in order to fully capitalize on Macau's strategic position.

The last article, by **Chen Jianfei**, explores opportunities, challenges, and prospects for enhanced cooperation between China and Brazil on climate action and sustainable development. The author states that, despite the challenges presented by domestic politics and external pressures, Brazil and China have built common ground based on their interest in protecting vital and important ecosystems and solving climate change issues.

Why this Special Issue?

This special issue on Brazil-China relations marks a number of milestones: the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Brazil and China, the 31st anniversary of the establishment of their strategic partnership, the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the COSBAN, the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Brazil Foreign Ministerial-Level Comprehensive Strategic Dialogue, and the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Brazil-China Business Council (CEBC). It is the result of meaningful collaboration between scholars from the University of Macau (China), the Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University (China), and the Autonomia University of Lisbon (Portugal). As such, it contains contributions from renowned international scholars as well as from junior researchers publishing for the first time.

We believe that it is important to support young and emerging scholars from China and the Portuguese-speaking countries and regions and the special issue is intended to provide a safe space for critical learning and discussion. Several of the research projects have involved graduate students, providing exposure for young scholars and incorporating them within the academic community.

Our initiative brings together experts, scholars and students interested in Brazil and its international forays, and examines what the future may hold for emerging partners hailing from as far away as China. The contributing scholars have adopted qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches. The special issue attracted interest from International Relations departments, and we are pleased to have received high-quality proposals from scholars of cognate disciplines. All of the articles have been double peer reviewed and all are focused on Brazil and/or China and their global connections.

This special issue proposes new epistemologies for the study of Brazil with a focus on its world engagement preparedness. It also examines novel conceptualizations that advance our knowledge of Brazil-China relations. The studies are generally up-to-date and pertinent, and they consolidate Lusophone perspectives on “the rise of modern international”. Overall, the studies agree on the need to adapt western epistemologies in view of the multifaceted realities on the ground and to problematize universal assumptions about international systems and operations. The authors highlight the importance of knowledge production from within the Global South and its subsequent international dissemination. They show that expertise on Brazil and the South Atlantic is transferable and can benefit debates on China, Brazil-China Relations, and International Relations, broadly defined. This collection of articles is important in promoting greater



awareness of world connectivity and interdependence, while also pointing the way forward for area studies scholars.

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