

Chinese Migration and Economic Expansion in Brazil: Direct Investments in the Configuration of New Transnational Networks

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Abstract

The article analyzes the presence of Chinese economic immigrants in Brazil throughout the 21st century, highlighting their motivations, strategies, and socioeconomic impacts. The research addresses the global context of China's rise and its international projection, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative, linking these dynamics to migratory flows to Latin American countries. In the Brazilian case, a predominantly urban migratory movement is observed, with a strong concentration in centers such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The study identifies the existence of community support networks and entrepreneurial practices that contribute to the socioeconomic integration of these groups, while also emphasizing the challenges they face, such as language barriers. Furthermore, it highlights a transformation in the migratory profile—from family-based flows to more business-oriented strategies—mirroring the growth of China's influence in the global economy. In conclusion, the article proposes a reflection on the role of Chinese immigrants in the reconfiguration of South-South relations and in the new forms of China's international presence in the 21st century, pointing to the need for more inclusive and diversity-oriented public policies.

Keywords

Chinese Immigration, Entrepreneurship, International Mobility

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the People's Republic of China has emerged as a central global power on the international stage. This position is the result of the economic opening reforms initiated in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, which trig-

gered a rapid process of modernization and growth. China's development has led to disruptive transformations in the global order, deeply altering the structures of international relations. Given the scale of these changes in such a short period of time, their implications are being felt across the world.

In this context, the relationship between Brazil and China has been continuously intensifying. Since 2009, China has held the position of Brazil's main trading partner, a relationship sustained by strong complementarity between the two economies. While Brazil stands out as one of the largest exporters of commodities and primary products, China plays a leading global role in the export of high value-added goods, particularly in the technology sector. This convergence of productive interests has driven the growth of Chinese investments in the Brazilian economy and contributed to the progressive strengthening of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

China's strategic internationalization process is guided by the Belt and Road Initiative (Nedopil Wang, 2021), also known as the New Silk Road, which is its main international cooperation plan, primarily encompassing countries from the Global South. In this context, the expansion of Chinese capital on the global stage presents both opportunities and challenges for Brazil. As the main destination for Chinese investments in Latin America, Brazil occupies a strategic position in bilateral relations, even without formally joining the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In view of the growing convergence of economic and political interests between the two states, combined with the international strength of Chinese capital, Brazil's adhesion to the BRI emerges as a likely possibility in the medium term.

China's rise as a global power in the 21st century has contributed to the more favorable perception of Chinese economic migrants in many destination countries. As the internationalization of Chinese capital intensifies, so does the number of migrants linked to this movement, constituting a direct consequence of China's external projection. In this context, understanding not only the economic interests but also the cultural values that these migrants carry—such as the principles of Confucianism, which persist even when physically distant from their country of origin—proves to be essential for the integration process within host societies.

This article aims to analyze the presence of Chinese economic migrants in Brazil as an expression of China's development and international expansion process in the 21st century. By examining Chinese direct investments in the country, it seeks to understand how these capital flows contribute to the formation of new transnational networks, in which human mobility, economic ties, and traditional cultural values are articulated within the context of Sino-Brazilian relations. The complementarity between the productive structures of Brazil and China has favored the deepening of bilateral relations, encouraging the inflow of Chinese investments into the country. This environment of economic cooperation, in turn, contributes to the intensification of migratory flows, attracting a growing number of Chinese economic migrants associated with these investments.

The methodology applied in the study was based on bibliographic research as

the main tool for investigating the proposed topic and as a means of achieving the objectives outlined by the research problem. The research steps consisted of reviewing the literature on the subject, followed by an analysis of information in official documents from the People's Republic of China and the Federative Republic of Brazil, as well as reports from international organizations, dissertations, and theses. The final report was constructed based on the logical foundation of the inductive method.

This article is structured into three sections. The first addresses the complementarity of interests in Brazil-China cooperation in the 21st century, highlighting how economic and political convergences have strengthened bilateral ties. The second section analyzes the profile of Chinese economic migrants in the context of globalization, with an emphasis on the use of transnational networks made possible by communication technologies, which allow for the maintenance of sociocultural ties with China and the preservation of core elements of Chinese cultural tradition, even at a distance. Finally, the third section seeks to understand the relationship between migration, Chinese direct investment, and the reconfiguration of Sino-Brazilian connections in the 21st century, examining how these processes interact in the formation of new transnational dynamics.

2. The Complementarity of Interests in Brazil-China Cooperation in the 21st Century

In recent decades, the People's Republic of China has established itself as one of the world's main production platforms. Integrated into the logic of international capitalism, it began to attract major multinational corporations interested in using its territory as a base for exporting manufactured goods. This process began with the economic reforms initiated in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, which gradually opened the Chinese economy to the global market. The Chinese Communist Party, under Deng's leadership, implemented the "Four Modernizations" Program, which aimed to modernize the People's Republic of China through the development of strategic sectors: agriculture, industry, science and technology, and the armed forces. Since then, China's development has led to widespread modernization, enabling the country to accumulate significant resources. In 2002, China began the process of internationalizing its large state-owned enterprises in a movement known as Going Global. This initiative focused primarily on sectors such as infrastructure, energy, construction, banking, and industry (Barbieri Junior, 2015).

In 2013, China's capital internationalization strategy was expanded with the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is a cooperation program launched under President Xi Jinping's administration and is based on the theme of development¹ through investment, mainly in infrastructure networks, thus be-

¹In this work, "development" is considered as a concept that goes beyond economic growth itself. It is understood as a process of productive modernization that leads to improved socioeconomic conditions, in which the growth in the accumulation of economic resources is directed toward the advancement of the country's social infrastructure.

coming a driver of global cooperation among nation-states (People's Republic of China, 2019). The BRI consists of two interconnected routes: a land belt, which includes countries bordering China, and a maritime route connecting Chinese ports with the African coast, the Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean. The BRI reaches over 4.4 billion people and encompasses a GDP exceeding US\$21 trillion, representing about 29% of global output. Since its launch, China has expanded the network of participating states through the formalization of memorandums (Sacks, 2021). It is important to note that the BRI includes not only large infrastructure development projects but also the creation of connections through political and cultural exchange (Richter, 2020).

Brazil has not yet joined the BRI; however, the country's entry into the initiative could represent a strategic opportunity to boost national development through investments in infrastructure, innovation, and logistical integration. By joining the initiative, Brazil would gain easier access to Chinese financing for large-scale infrastructure projects, such as railways, ports, and highways, in addition to expanding partnerships in technological and digital areas such as 5G and artificial intelligence. Brazilian participation would also strengthen trade ties with China, its main economic partner, enabling export diversification and the attraction of new productive investments. Furthermore, by integrating into this global network, Brazil would increase its presence on the international stage, positioning itself as a relevant actor in a transforming multipolar order (Pinto, 2024).

Given the territorial and demographic scale of both countries, their growing closeness appears to be an unstoppable process from the perspective of international politics and economics. Since 2009, China has been Brazil's main trading partner, a potential source of business and investment, and has increasingly occupied a prominent position among the largest foreign investors in the country. Over recent decades, these economic relations have become deeply rooted.

Although diplomatic relations between the two countries date back to 1974, it was only in the past three decades (Barbieri Junior, 2015) that a meaningful political rapprochement took place, leading to the development of a series of cooperation agreements. These agreements fostered relationships among various actors and helped build an institutional and intergovernmental dialogue framework, becoming fundamental to the establishment of strategic partnerships in the international integration of both states.

Brazil and China established a Strategic Partnership in 1993, which was strengthened with the creation of COSBAN in 2004, the main bilateral coordination mechanism between the countries. Since then, several instruments have been signed, including the Joint Action Plans and the Ten-Year Cooperation Plan (2012-2021), culminating in the elevation of the relationship to the level of a global strategic partnership in 2012. The most recent COSBAN meeting took place in 2024 in Beijing, celebrating 20 years of the Commission and 50 years of diplomatic relations, with progress in several areas of bilateral cooperation (Brazil, 2025). These political actions provide strategic goals and guidelines for the bilateral rela-

tionship (Holanda, 2016). It is important to highlight, as Rosito points out, that Joint Plans serve as diplomatic instruments and reflect the best consensus possible. The implementation of planning between states depends on each country's governance and how its foreign policy aligns with development strategy and international engagement, as well as the evolution of the bilateral relationship itself (Rosito, 2016).

According to Rosito, political interaction between the two states is fundamental to fostering prosperity in their relationship, especially due to the unique characteristic of the strong role of the Chinese government in the country's economic management. Chinese institutions and companies respond actively when an official document is signed by their leaders; thus, such agreements hold more than just symbolic value. On the Brazilian side, however, plans are more aspirational and do not always translate into concrete actions. Often, due to a multiplicity of objectives and priorities, the absence of effective monitoring makes implementation difficult (Rosito, 2016).

An important bridge in the diplomatic relationship between Brazil and China is the BRICS group, created in 2006 as a dialogue forum among Brazil, Russia, India, and China—and expanded in 2010 with the inclusion of South Africa. The group entered a new phase of expansion in 2024 by incorporating Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia, forming what is now called BRICS+. This coalition of emerging countries aims to reform global governance, strengthen South-South cooperation, and promote a more multipolar international order. For Global South countries, the group represents an opportunity to diversify partnerships and global development strategies. In this context, it can be said that there are mutual interests between China and Brazil that go beyond economic issues, aiming toward the construction of a multilateral world order (De Castro et al., 2025).

In 2014, during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Brazil to commemorate 40 years of diplomatic relations, Brazil and China deepened their political and economic cooperation with the signing of 56 agreements. Among the main accords signed in the presence of then-President Dilma Rousseff were partnerships in defense, information technology, infrastructure, railway transportation, electric energy, aviation, logistics, and bilateral trade financing, significantly strengthening the strategic relationship between the two countries (Lima, 2016).

In 2025, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva visited China, marking a new level in bilateral relations by consolidating the strategic partnership between the two countries. During the visit, Lula and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed 20 agreements and adopted 17 additional documents. Furthermore, the Brazilian president participated in the 4th China-CELAC Forum (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), reinforcing a commitment to multilateralism and South-South cooperation. The visit also resulted in the attraction of approximately R\$27 billion in Chinese investments to Brazil, signaling a significant strengthening of economic and political ties between the two nations (Brazil, 2025).

Although Brazil is not formally a member of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the effects of this Chinese strategy of capital internationalization reach the country through indirect mechanisms. The BRI operates as part of a broader globalization policy led by China, aimed at promoting global economic connectivity and ensuring energy, food, and technological security through strategic investments. Even without formal accession, geoeconomically relevant countries like Brazil are included in China's expansion logic due to their strong productive complementarity and potential return on investment. In this context, Chinese investments in Brazil—particularly in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and technology—are driven by the same structural objectives of the BRI: expanding trade corridors, securing access to resources, and consolidating transnational networks of cooperation (Tudoroiu, 2021).

The relationship between high-level diplomatic agreements and direct investment projects becomes evident in the case of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Brazil and China in 2012, which established guidelines for bilateral cooperation in the areas of infrastructure, energy, and agriculture. This diplomatic instrument contributed to the consolidation of an institutional environment favorable to the operations of Chinese companies in Brazil, encouraging the inflow of foreign capital into strategic sectors. A concrete example of the effects of this rapprochement is the expansion of the State Grid Corporation of China, which strengthened its presence in the Brazilian electricity sector through the acquisition of key assets and participation in major ventures, such as the Belo Monte transmission line. This case illustrates how Sino-Brazilian economic diplomacy plays a fundamental role in enabling large-scale structural investments in the country (CEBC, 2024).

Understanding the complementarity of interests between Brazil and China in the 21st century provides the foundation for grasping not only the economic and diplomatic ties that structure the strategic partnership between the two countries but also the social effects arising from this rapprochement. In this regard, the intensification of trade exchanges, direct investments, and technological cooperation creates favorable conditions for the international mobility of people, including the growth of Chinese migration to Brazil. The following section examines the dynamics of the Chinese economic migrant in the 21st century, aiming to identify how these flows are linked to the transformations driven by the bilateral relationship.

3. The Chinese Economic Migrant in the Context of Globalization

Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations that link distant localities in such a way that local events are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 1991). With the intensification of globalization, human mobility has become more frequent and complex. In the contemporary scenario, advancements in communication and transportation have enabled the creation and maintenance of continuous connections between

countries of origin and destination. Thus, current migratory flows fit within the logic of transnationalism, characterized by the simultaneous experience of integration into a new territory and the preservation of ties to the place of origin. In this context, the migrant builds new relationships in the host country without necessarily breaking social, cultural, and emotional ties to their homeland (Ribeiro & Mello, 2021).

Within this context, economic immigrants play a key role as integration bridges between countries. The advancement of transportation and communication technologies has facilitated the intensification of global migratory flows, allowing migrants to maintain constant ties with their regions of origin. From this dynamic, transnational networks emerge, marked by complex and continuous interactions between multiple local contexts (Guercini et al., 2017).

The term *economic migrant* refers to individuals who voluntarily move from their country of origin to another in search of better economic conditions, employment opportunities, investment, or entrepreneurship. Unlike forced migrants—such as refugees and asylum seekers—economic migrants are not driven by persecution or conflict, but rather by structural factors related to development and international mobility. This profile tends to show a greater capacity for adapting to the labor market and, in many cases, maintains ties with transnational networks that facilitate their economic integration in the host country (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014).

The contemporary economy, shaped by international competition, demands greater integration to achieve competitiveness. In this environment, the coexistence between native and immigrant entrepreneurship impacts local socioeconomic systems, potentially creating opportunities or tensions. The relationship between migrants and local populations depends on the complementarity or competition between them. According to Castells, developing countries must adopt policies to enhance their workforce and companies so they can integrate into transnational production networks and achieve greater prosperity (Castells, 1999). Therefore, in the context of globalization—enhanced by transnationalism—the presence of economic migrants in a country may represent a competitive advantage for the host country.

The forms and conditions of local culture by which a native community responds to social interaction with immigrant entrepreneurs are highly relevant. One contributing factor is the migrant's greater familiarity with transnational networks, which enables native entrepreneurs to establish direct contact with sources of productive resources (input suppliers, distributors, products, and clients) in globalized markets. In addition to these material opportunities, there are gains in intangible aspects, such as reduced psychological and cultural distance from foreign markets. Successful integration between natives and immigrants can foster productive dynamism and enhance regional competitiveness.

Several market factors contribute to the success of immigrant enterprises, such as access to financial resources, the availability of disciplined and technically pre-

pared labor, effective work management, and knowledge of potential suppliers and clients. However, the cultural domain is a fundamental element, and local community respect for value pluralism is a key tool in mitigating liabilities between natives and immigrants.

In destination countries, economic migrants often face barriers to doing business, such as lack of credibility, difficulty having their professional qualifications recognized, and greater difficulty obtaining bank loans compared to locals. However, thanks to transnational networks, Chinese migrants gain access to private loans, which are predominant among Chinese entrepreneurs abroad (Zhang et al., 2021). Thus, entrepreneurship often becomes a necessity for immigrants due to challenges encountered in the host countries. Factors such as significant cultural-psychological distance and communication difficulties hinder interaction with the local community, while exposure to low-wage and degrading jobs makes employment by fellow migrants a viable alternative for staying in a given region.

Beyond economic dynamics, the interaction of transnational networks fosters sociocultural connection. The interaction between immigrants and locals often generates tensions and feelings of “tribal habits” in destination countries, resulting in the isolation of displaced individuals. Immigrants, therefore, undergo a process of “estrangement” that can lead to separation from locals. According to Bauman, migration represents an element of modern life in global cities, which are increasingly marked by the coexistence of diverse cultures in the same territorial space. The interaction between natives and migrants can provoke an uprooting of “tribal habits among the local population” as well as a sense of “compulsory isolation” among immigrants (Bauman, 2013).

Thus, immigrants are seen as outsiders to the cultural value systems that constitute fundamental elements for natives. In the host country, the dominant cultural standard is often imposed in matters of social interaction, promoting the segregation of foreign cultures and of the immigrants themselves (Ribeiro & Mello, 2021). Overcoming the tensions between local communities and immigrants should not rely solely on market conditions; it requires deliberate governance efforts from formal institutions, such as government bodies and business associations, to help mediate this process (Guercini et al., 2017). In this way, the benefits of economic migrants and transnational networks can be maximized, making decisive contributions to the productive development of the host country.

An important issue concerning the expansion of Chinese entrepreneurial migration in the 21st century is its potential to add economic value to local productive processes through the interaction of native and migrant knowledge. The globalization of the economy has led to global competition within productive systems, increasing the need for such integration due to new demand conditions and technological transformations.

Since the implementation of the Reform and Opening-Up Policy in China in 1978, the country’s increasing integration into the international market has intensified the presence and interaction of Chinese migrants on a global scale. Accord-

ing to Zhou, several factors explain the population movement from China in recent decades. Among them, the open-door policy stands out, which massively attracted foreign investment—approximately 75% of which came from the Chinese diaspora—thus strengthening transnational family ties and reactivating migration networks. Another important factor was the state’s encouragement of academic mobility, with funding for exchange programs involving hundreds of thousands of students and researchers. Lastly, China’s consolidation as an economy deeply integrated into the global production system—especially after its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001—further reinforced international migration flows (Zhou, 2017).

According to Muttarak, China’s position as the “world’s factory,” resulting from its productive integration into the global economy, spurred significant growth in Chinese migration across all continents, virtually doubling the number of emigrants, with a marked acceleration beginning in the 2000s. This movement was driven by China’s economic expansion, its open-door policy, and increasingly accessible international mobility. It is estimated that over the past two decades, millions of Chinese people have migrated to various regions, especially Southeast Asia, Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Oceania. This movement has expanded the Chinese diaspora to around 60 million people, including migrants and their descendants, reflecting the strengthening of transnational networks and China’s growing role in the global economy (Muttarak, 2017).

At the beginning of China’s productive transformation process during the 1980s and 1990s, many Chinese migrants were merchants who helped establish numerous small businesses that spread across various parts of the world, often replacing traditional merchants, such as those of Arab or Indian origin, in certain markets. Starting in 2003, with the advancement of the internationalization of Chinese companies—intensified by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—a new profile of Chinese migrant emerged, marked by distinct and diverse characteristics that reflect the heterogeneity of the economic sectors involved in the country’s global expansion.

According to Nyiri, the first wave of Chinese corporate globalization in the 2000s was linked to state-owned infrastructure companies, which relied on Chinese labor and remained physically and socially disconnected from their local operational environments. The second wave, more recent and characteristic of the last few years, is primarily associated with technology companies that operate in urban centers and manage teams of local employees. These tech companies employ young, skilled expatriate workers who are open to experiencing different cultures; their relationship with host locations is characterized by a greater capacity to understand and absorb spaces different from their original backgrounds (Nyiri, 2021).

The BRI is likely to contribute to the broader globalization of Chinese migration, and the diversification of workers and investors will promote a range of corporate and personal demands, often aligned with the preferences of the middle

class in Western countries, such as a taste for consumption, leisure, and culture.

According to Xiang, from the 2000s onwards, developed countries such as the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, and European nations began to receive many highly qualified Chinese immigrants, who often prefer developed countries due to their economic and social stability (Xiang, 2015). However, migration also occurs toward developing countries that have received infrastructure investments, such as those in Africa. This movement consists of temporary migrant workers and public officials involved in large projects supported by the Chinese state. Chinese workers have comprised approximately 50% of the unskilled labor force and 90% of the administrative professionals in Chinese construction companies. Many of these migrants stayed in the destination countries and started new businesses—small service sector enterprises such as restaurants, shops, and small factories—promoting the arrival of friends and family (Mohan et al., 2014).

BRI investments in transportation infrastructure positively impact bilateral exports, just as migration significantly facilitates commercial activities through increased mobility of productive forces, contributing to reduced spatial inequalities and improved economic well-being. A study conducted in East African countries on the impacts of the BRI in the region found that bilateral migration had a positive effect on bilateral exports among all BRI participating countries (Dumor et al., 2021).

This study understands that Chinese economic immigrants can contribute to the economic advancement of developing countries and that they often become entrepreneurs, as they are frequently excluded from the local labor markets in host countries, especially in Western nations, where cultural distance from Eastern traditions is evident (Zhang et al., 2021).

Therefore, it is essential to identify elements of the sociocultural formation of the Chinese individual to better understand the interaction between immigrants and the host community. Respect for tradition represents a fundamental amalgam for the Chinese people (Fairbank & Goldman, 2008). Chinese history is characterized by deep roots and marked by an ancient civilization; thus, a crucial aspect of understanding the country lies in comprehending the cultural elements that shape its social behavior. Among emigrants, the notion of a “civilizational state” is always present; there is a constant force of attraction from the homeland upon those who have been displaced. According to Tu Wei-ming, the political nature of the Chinese state, based on its historical constitution in relation to society, is shaped by a unique dynamic in which the state controls the symbolic resources necessary for its cultural identity (Barbieri Junior, 2015).

Tu Wei-ming states that Chinese emigrants often nurture the hope of returning and being recognized in China, despite the physical distance from their motherland. There is a strong sense of cultural connection among the Chinese. Through transnational networks, the Chinese emigrant community remains in contact with relatives and friends who keep them informed about the country’s economic and political environment. Some return “home” or send their children back to receive

a Chinese education (Tu, 1991).

According to Cohen, there is a point of unity among Chinese emigrants tied to the existence of a Cultural China, constructed through an almost mystical inclination toward *hsiang*, an idea connected to “home” (Cohen, 2008). For Tu Weiming, this connection represents a psychocultural element among the Chinese, based on a notion of belonging to a long-standing civilization, shaped by the grandeur of its physical dimensions and the weight of its population (Tu, 1991).

Pye defines China as a “civilizational state,” whose greatness manifests in all aspects of its traditional culture, such that the strength of its civilization is the structural factor that has held it together as a unified entity for millennia (Pye, 1993). According to Jacques, the Chinese have a paradigm different from that of the West regarding how the state relates constitutively to society. While in the West the legitimacy of the state is founded on the ideal of democracy, for the Chinese, the state is regarded as the guardian of Chinese civilization, a sort of patriarch of traditions (Jacques, 2009).

In this sense, if we take as a central point that the Chinese civilizational idea is grounded in cultural tradition and its continuity, it can be inferred that, for a favorable environment for Chinese business and host countries to exist, it is essential to understand key elements of Chinese culture. According to Chung, one of the factors driving the success of Chinese businesses is the influence of Confucian cultural values. Confucianism², a philosophical doctrine based on principles of respect for tradition and hierarchy, plays a decisive role in shaping Chinese society in terms of moral behavior, social hierarchy, discipline, and the appreciation of hard work. A key characteristic is the collectivist spirit. The family is the prototype; in a social organization, the individual is not an isolated being but a member of a broader social whole, and must act in accordance with their social role (Chung, 2006).

This deep-rooted cultural sentiment fosters a preservation of customs among Chinese immigrants. In host countries, Chinese people strive to transmit their cultural traditions across generations. Cultural gatherings such as festivals and commemorative events serve as a means of dialogue with the local community, but they also represent a form of preserving ancestral values and serve to strengthen the bonds among Chinese emigrants (Ribeiro & Mello, 2021).

The Confucian value of reciprocity plays a central role in the functioning of transnational migration networks. In Chinese culture, the importance of interpersonal relationships—known as *guanxi*³—is deeply rooted in social and cultural values. *Guanxi* networks, based on relationality, create and develop social capital (Sullivan & Cheng, 2018).

²The concept of *Confucianism* refers to the figure of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (circa 551-479 BCE), who established a moral and political ethic that continues to influence social relations. The teachings of this doctrine can be found in the *Analects*, a collection of texts attributed to Confucius and his disciples.

³Etymology of the word *guanxi* in Mandarin: *guan* (关) means “gate” or “portal,” and *xi* (系) means “to tie” or “to attach.”

Guanxi refers to the influence of one's network of connections or relationships on professional or social outcomes. It represents a cultural element that establishes obligations among people with the goal of maintaining group integrity, based on a complex web of expectations regarding the fulfillment of mutual favors. Relationships with Chinese individuals are built gradually and cautiously over time, grounded in bonds of respect and obligations aligned with Confucian values, and established with the aim of achieving mutual benefits. In *guanxi* culture, through contact, one assesses how much the other party can offer in return based on their social position and personal interconnections. The Chinese rarely make agreements with those with whom they do not have a good relationship. Each person in a *guanxi* network has the capital to make requests, and at the same time, a certain commitment to grant favors when approached; this keeps the network of connections strong (Chung, 2006).

The immigrant's attachment to the principles of cultural tradition becomes a form of protection when facing the challenges of globalization, such as economic instability and the resulting social disorientation, or the lack of guiding values in the face of a significant influx of new cultural influences. This attachment contributes to the cohesion of the Chinese people and helps establish a common foundation—serving as a defense against potentially negative foreign influences (Sullivan & Cheng, 2018).

4. Migration, Chinese Direct Investment, and the Reconfiguration of Sino-Brazilian Connections in the 21st Century

In the 21st century, the Chinese migration process has come to be characterized by a more qualified profile of migrants, reflecting China's growing role in international relations. In this context of globalization, Chinese immigrants tend to belong to more educated segments of the population, mostly composed of exchange students, specialized professionals, and entrepreneurs linked to business-related migration (Xiang, 2016).

Chinese economic migrants hold competitive advantages as entrepreneurs, particularly due to their command of transnational networks and the maintenance of economic ties with their country of origin. These factors enable their businesses to extend beyond ethnic enclaves and achieve greater competitiveness. Globalization and the internationalization of China, driven by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), are expected to further intensify Chinese migration flows (Silva, 2018).

The Chinese presence in Brazil has historical roots dating back approximately 200 years. It is estimated that the population of Chinese migrants and their descendants in Brazil numbers around 250,000, about 75% of whom live in the state of São Paulo (Silva, 2018). According to official Brazilian data, there were 50,401 registered Chinese immigrants in the country in 2024 (Brazil, 2024). Although the number of Chinese immigrants is relatively small compared to other historical immigrant groups in Brazil, their presence is increasingly significant in terms of

workforce participation and economic importance.

This expansion is associated with the strengthening of Sino-Brazilian relations, the increase in Chinese investment in the country, and the growth of transnational commercial and educational networks. The Chinese community in Brazil is diverse, with a notable presence in popular commerce, but also in strategic sectors such as technology, education, and healthcare—demonstrating their growing integration and contribution to Brazilian society.

The flow of Chinese migrants to Brazil intensified after 1974, when diplomatic relations between Brazil and the People's Republic of China were established. From this point forward, the Chinese government gradually began authorizing its citizens to travel abroad, including to Brazil. This movement gained momentum in the following decades, especially with the economic opening and modernization reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping starting in the late 1970s (Araújo, 2015). In the 21st century, this migration gained new momentum, driven by the strategic rapprochement between Brazil and China and the complementarity of their economies. The profile of Chinese immigrants became increasingly diverse, ranging from entrepreneurs selling imported goods and organizing urban spaces through commercial galleries, to qualified workers linked to Chinese direct investment in the country.

Among entrepreneurs in the trade sector, there is a traditional presence in commercial galleries of imported products in areas such as Rua 25 de Março and Brás, in São Paulo, which serve as supply hubs for various regions of the country. These sites form important links with the provinces of Guangdong and Zhejiang in southeastern China (Silva, 2018). Despite the thematic relevance of Chinese economic migrants involved in commercial entrepreneurship, this study focuses on identifying the structural economic sectors in Brazil that receive Chinese investment and drive the arrival of new Asian migrants.

According to the China Global Investment Tracker (CGIT) database, Brazil received USD 73.87 billion of China's total overseas investment. For comparison, consider the amounts received by other Latin American countries during the same period: Peru, USD 29.28 billion; Argentina, USD 13.69 billion; Venezuela, USD 5.57 billion; Chile, USD 17.28 billion; Ecuador, USD 13.84 billion; Colombia, USD 6.82 billion; Mexico, USD 5.59 billion; and Bolivia, USD 5.06 billion (American Enterprise Institute, 2022).

Of the total USD 73.87 billion invested by the Chinese in Brazil, the sectoral breakdown is as follows: Agriculture, USD 3.28 billion; Chemicals, USD 1.54 billion; Energy, USD 54.85 billion; Finance, USD 1.67 billion; Logistics, USD 460 million; Metals, USD 4.85 billion; Real Estate, USD 1.14 billion; Technology, USD 450 million; Transportation, USD 5.44 billion; and Utilities, USD 190 million. The Energy sector stands out as a key recipient of capital, aligning with the Chinese state's concern over securing energy resources—one of the main bottlenecks to the country's development (American Enterprise Institute, 2022).

In recent years, Chinese investments in Brazil have expanded significantly, with

a focus on strategic sectors such as renewable energy, electric mobility, and infrastructure. According to the Brazil-China Business Council (CEBC), 264 projects have been recorded, with a 33% increase in investment in 2023 alone, totaling USD 1.73 billion. Investments were primarily concentrated in the electric power sector (39%) and the automotive industry (33%). Notable projects include the installation of BYD's electric vehicle factory in Camaçari (Bahia), with an investment of BRL 3 billion, and SPIC Brasil's solar and wind energy generation projects in the states of Piauí, Ceará, and Rio Grande do Norte. Additionally, investments in the Port of Pecém and the West-East Integration Railway demonstrate China's interest in expanding its role in logistics infrastructure and the green hydrogen value chain. Geographically, São Paulo hosted the largest share of the projects (36.2%), followed by Minas Gerais (11.7%) and Goiás (6.3%), reaffirming Brazil's role as one of the primary destinations of Chinese capital in Latin America ([Brazil-China Business Council, 2024](#)).

Although agribusiness has become increasingly relevant in Brazilian exports to China—rising from 35% in 2010 to about 50% after 2020 ([Brazil-China Business Council, 2021](#))—and despite the recognized economic complementarity between the two countries, Chinese investment in Brazil is not limited to commodities. The value-added segment has also attracted Chinese capital, particularly in the Information Technology (IT) sector. In 2012, for example, Chinese investments in IT accounted for 36% of the projects carried out that year, totaling approximately USD 229 million, or 4% of the total invested. This marked the entry of major Chinese companies—such as Ant Financial, Alibaba, and Tencent—into Brazilian fintechs and startups like Nubank, QuintoAndar, and Cora. The year 2012 highlighted a growing interest from China in the digital sector, with involvement in ten projects—a number close to the total of all initiatives between 2007 and 2020, which saw 12 projects in total. These investments reflect Chinese groups' perception of the Brazilian market's potential in offering digital solutions for small businesses and consumers ([Cariello, 2022](#)).

In the manufacturing sector, in 2021, the Chinese automotive company Great Wall Motors acquired the Mercedes-Benz factory facilities in Iracemápolis (São Paulo). The Chinese investment included the purchase of the property as well as the production equipment. The company intends to produce electric and hybrid vehicles at this plant, aiming to meet the demand of Mercosur countries. This initiative brings benefits to Brazil by helping to preserve jobs ([Cariello, 2022](#)). Regarding the form of Chinese Direct Investment entry, in 2021, 51% of investments occurred through greenfield projects, while 49% were carried out via Mergers and Acquisitions. The oil sector accounted for 97% of the total value of greenfield investments ([Brazil-China Business Council, 2021](#)).

Geographically, in 2021, Chinese investment was mainly directed toward the Southeast region, accounting for 79% of the projects, followed by the Center-West (7%), South (7%), and Northeast (3%). This regional investment pattern has remained consistent since 2007. Over the last fifteen years, only the states of Ron-

dônia, Roraima, Sergipe, and Acre have not received any Chinese investment projects. The state of São Paulo hosts the majority of the projects (59% of the total, particularly in the areas of automobile manufacturing, finance, and electricity), likely due to its more diversified economy compared to other states. However, this percentage is not reflected in terms of total capital invested, since energy projects typically involve a higher volume of capital than those in Information Technology (Cariello, 2022).

It is undeniable that the globalization of the economy has led to the formation of a system based on production chains that both cooperate and compete globally, shaped by new demand conditions and contemporary technological transformations. In this context, the need for integration among peoples grows, and the cooperation process between Brazil and China has contributed to an increase in the number of Chinese migrants coming to Brazil.

To enhance local development in light of the migration of Chinese entrepreneurs—optimizing human capital and investment capacity—it is crucial for Brazilians to understand Chinese culture, which is rooted in Confucianism, as previously discussed in this work. Furthermore, understanding the concept of *guanxi* would foster greater sensitivity to core Chinese values in interpersonal and business relations: reciprocity, mutual trust, and credibility. Once a *guanxi* network is established, business tends to flourish. A strong *guanxi* represents a personal guarantee that often outweighs the strength of a formal contract. Thus, knowledge of intercultural negotiation dynamics is one of the key factors for successful business interactions with the Chinese (Chung, 2006).

In the context of globalization, transnational networks are empowered by new technologies. Smartphones have become a tool that connects domestic and foreign experiences and needs, allowing migrant entrepreneurs to monitor, in real time, aspects such as price competition, production, and risks—features inherent to any business. These technological advances enable economic migrants to maintain strong ties with their home country and community, a hallmark of transnationalism. The Chinese cultural tradition of *guanxi*, based on trust-based networks, is reinforced in the transnational context, as ties among members are strengthened, facilitating social interactions and boosting business synergy among Chinese economic migrants. It can thus be interpreted that contemporary communication technologies serve the millennia-old Chinese cultural tradition of *guanxi*, applications like WeChat, widely used among Chinese migrants and entrepreneurs, enable instant, continuous, and multimodal communication, which accelerates the formation of personal and professional ties. This constant use reinforces reciprocity, familiarity, and loyalty—core elements of *guanxi*—even in geographically dispersed contexts. Moreover, technology expands the scope of these networks, allowing connections that were once limited to the family or local circle to be extended to business partners, local authorities, and new transnational contacts, thereby enhancing the reach of cooperation and influence networks.

China is a 4000-year-old civilization-state that increasingly engages in interna-

tional cooperation. In this study, it is interpreted that the movement of Chinese investors and their business cooperation can decisively contribute to the modernization of Brazil's infrastructure. Due to China's expanding development, the Chinese economic migrant diaspora is one of the main migratory movements of the 21st century. Brazil, known as a major player in the primary sector, shows high complementarity with China's strategic interests. Thus, Chinese migration to Brazil is expected to grow throughout this century, as trade and investment ties continue to expand—an upward trend observed in recent years. It is also evident that, in the 21st century, the relationship between Brazil and China has become increasingly solid, both in the public sphere—through state-level meetings and agreements—and in the private sector, with various actors ranging from companies to business councils. In other words, the strengthening of relationships is paving the way for an increased presence of Chinese immigrants in Brazil.

Despite the cultural distance between the two peoples, the interaction between Chinese immigrants and native Brazilians, along with the building of relationships based on mutual respect for values and a convergence of economic interests, serves as a fundamental pillar for fostering prosperity and friendship. The cultural uniqueness of Chinese tradition, the role of transnational networks that are common among the Chinese, and the understanding of *guanxi* emerge as elements that increasingly shape daily life in Brazil in this century. Just as immigrants engage in a process of cultural adaptation in their host country, the welcoming attitude of the receiving society has historically proven to be the most effective mechanism for cooperation.

The realization and potential of infrastructure and human capital investments by Chinese economic migrants are likely to strengthen the business environment—an essential requirement for making Brazil more competitive in global value chains. China represents one of the central pillars of contemporary development. The presence of Chinese immigrants in Brazil, along with their transnational ties to their homeland, is driving force behind the country's development potential.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the movement of Chinese economic immigrants to Brazil in the 21st century, within the broader context of China's growing direct investment presence in the country. The Asian nation is one of Brazil's main international investors, and consequently, the significant influx of capital contributes to the expansion of Chinese migration to Brazil.

China's development boom over recent decades has been one of the main drivers of increased Chinese migration to Brazil, reflecting the deepening socioeconomic ties between the two nations. In the field of international investment, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stands as China's primary strategy for internationalization in the 21st century, with a focus on capital deployment in countries that align with its cooperation framework. Although Brazil has not formally joined the BRI, it stands out as the largest recipient of Chinese investment in Latin Amer-

ica—a fact that can be explained by the strong complementarity between the economic and political interests of both countries. This convergence, in turn, reinforces the possibility of Brazil joining the Initiative in the future.

In any case, Chinese investor interest in Brazil goes beyond the energy sector—where their presence is already consolidated—to areas such as transport infrastructure modernization, which would help reduce the cost of exporting Brazilian commodities to Asia. The greater the volume of Chinese capital investment in Brazil, the higher the number of incoming Chinese economic migrants—a scenario that seems irreversible throughout the 21st century.

In the contemporary context, globalization generates flows of ideas and materials that bring about an intersection of values and principles. In the global economic structure, it has led the productive system into global competition, increasing the need for new demand conditions and spurring technological transformations. In the coexistence between native and migrant groups, the interaction can result in either complementarity or competition of interests. Given that China is a major global power, the reception of Chinese economic migrants holds the potential to create positive impacts on Brazil's economy and to add value through interaction with the local population. Moreover, through the transnational networks typical of Chinese immigration—which traditionally maintain ties with the country of origin—the continued connection with China by Sino immigrants may foster competitive knowledge gains. This process of success, however, will only occur if the Brazilian state implements a strategic national economic development policy capable of leveraging the opportunity that emerges in the 21st century.

The participation of Chinese immigrants in traditional economic sectors—such as small businesses and shops in commercial galleries spread across Brazil—is widely recognized. However, this study highlights that the contemporary movement of Chinese economic migrants, often characterized by a more qualified profile and investment capacity, can help drive the growth of new dynamic industries. Although international economic prominence in recent years has been linked to the commodities sector, Brazil still holds regional hubs of technological industrial development that may attract skilled Chinese immigrants with technical expertise and strong international connections, thereby contributing to the country's potential development.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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