

CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES: TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF BRAZIL-CHINA RELATIONS FROM THE CARDOSO ERA TO LULA'S THIRD TERM (1995-2023)

Alexandre Ramos Coelho*

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the evolution of Brazil's foreign policy towards China from the era of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) through to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's third term (2022-present). It explores the varying dynamics of this bilateral relationship under different Brazilian administrations, highlighting the key aspects and shifts in policy. The Cardoso era initiated Brazil's engagement with China, focusing on globalization and technological cooperation. The Lula administration (2003-2011) saw the rise of the BRICS nations and a diversified foreign policy, intensifying Brazil-China relations amidst complex political and trade challenges. Under President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), the focus shifted towards science, technology, and culture, with a nuanced approach to China. Despite industrial challenges, Michel Temer's presidency (2016-2018) marked a return to economic strengthening in China. The Bolsonaro era (2019-2022) was characterized by ideological alignment with the United States, affecting Brazil-China relations with political tensions and economic pragmatism, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Lula's third term (2022-present), it has seen a reinvigoration and intensification of bilateral cooperation, enhancing economic, environmental, and technological partnerships. The paper concludes by highlighting the resilience and institutional consistency in Brazil-China relations, which have remained crucial for continued bilateral cooperation, irrespective of the changing political landscape in Brazil.

Keywords: Brazil-China Relations; Foreign Policy; Bilateral Cooperation; Political Dynamics; Economic Engagement

1. Policy and Brazil-China Relations / Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995 – 2002)

This essay seeks to critically examine the trajectory of Brazilian foreign policy towards China, traversing the tenures of Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) in both his earlier and current terms, Dilma Rousseff (Dilma), Michel Temer (Temer), and Jair Bolsonaro (Bolsonaro). It offers a narrative that tries to capture the complexities and strategic recalibrations underpinning Brazil's engagement with China—an ascendant global power. The analysis not only delves into the economic, diplomatic, and political dimensions that have shaped this partnership but also considers the influence of domestic and international vicissitudes on this crucial bilateral relationship.

* Specialist in Politics and International Relations. Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of São Paulo (USP). Secretary - Research Committee of Asian Studies at the International Political Science Association (IPSA). Non-Resident Fellow at *China Observer* – Brazil. Masters in law – Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV-SP); Specialist in Geopolitics - Geneva Institute of Geopolitics-Geneva/Switzerland; Specialist in Politics and International Relations - São Paulo School of Sociology and Politics (FESPSP). Certificates and extensions in politics, economics, and International Relations from Hunan University, Tsinghua University, Harvard, and Sciences Po. Former Researcher at Global Trade and Investment Studies (CCGI – FGV-SP) and Global Law and Development Center (NDGD – FGV SP). Former Legal Advisor of the Bank of China in Brazil.

Based on Mariano (2007), the ascensions of Presidents Fernando Collor in 1991, Itamar Franco in 1992, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1995 marked pivotal shifts in Brazil's geopolitical stance amid an evolving global landscape. In 1991, President Collor assumed office at the dawn of a post-Cold War era characterized by the dissolution of the bipolar ideological divide that had previously dominated global relations. This transition fostered a new world order where international organizations and inter-state cooperation emerged as cornerstones of international diplomacy.

The 1990s witnessed the burgeoning reality of globalization, a transformative process that significantly increased the interconnectivity of individuals, institutions, and corporations on an unprecedented scale. (Maccgrew, 2008). Concurrently, the era underscored the ascendance of economic might as a bedrock of geopolitical influence. The United States exemplified this shift under President Clinton, who championed the expansion of “market democracy,” embedding economic imperatives within the core of foreign policy agendas. (Baracuhy, 2015).

Having this international scenario as a “backdrop,” in 1995, Fernando Henrique took over, who, except the first military government (Castelo Branco) and the Collor government, guided his foreign policy with two fundamental objectives, one of an economic nature and the other of political nature (Albuquerque, 2006). Regarding the economic aspect, according to Professor Guilhon Albuquerque (2006), FHC guaranteed an external environment conducive to Brazil's economic growth, trying to take advantage of international commercial globalization. In the political arena, the former president maintained the image of self-determination, especially regarding the foreign policy actions of the United States, seeking to expand its bilateral relations with other developing countries, such as Angola, India, and China (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009; Albuquerque, 2006). Furthermore, according to Vigevani and Cepaluni (2009), FHC's objective was to replace a reactive foreign policy agenda based on *autonomy through distance* with a proactive international agenda aligned with neoliberalism and by the logic of autonomy through participation.¹

Concerning China, the adoption of these objectives can be seen in the search for expanding bilateral relations with that country (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009). FHC, in his inauguration speech, defined Asia as an essential geopolitical aspect to be promoted by Brazil, having visited China before Japan in a symbolic demonstration of Beijing's importance in relation to Tokyo in Brazilian Foreign Policy. (Altemani, 2012). From a technological point of view, the agreement for the production of satellites is worth mentioning. Initially signed in 1988, the agreement was expanded in 1995 under the FHC government. The first satellite developed jointly between Brazil and China was launched in 1999, and the second was launched in 2003. (Altemani, 2012). In the commercial sphere, China reached second place as Brazil's trade partner in 2002 and was one of the first to support China's entry into the WTO.² According to

¹According to Vigevani and Cepaluni (2009): “the notion of autonomy is characterized by the ability of the State to implement decisions based on its objectives, without outside interference or restriction, through its ability to control processes or events produced beyond its borders.” Furthermore, based on Vigevani and Cepaluni (2009): “*autonomy through distance* has been characterized by an anarchic development, based on a strong nationalist feeling, and by distancing itself from major international issues, seeking South-South alliances. *Autonomy through participation* concerns greater international involvement and the acceptance of liberal norms and the main international regimes, with the expectation of influencing and participating in their elaboration. Finally, *autonomy through diversification* implies approaching the countries of the South to obtain greater insertion and greater power within the framework of international regimes, betting on multilateral solutions, instead of a unipolar world”.

²See Ministry of Foreign Affairs: < <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/pt-BR/ficha-pais/4926-republica-popular-da-china> >. It is accessed on 10/24/2023.

Vigevani and Cepaluni (2009), these facts have economic, political, and strategic importance. For them, this relationship consolidated “*the ideas of universalism, a global player and global trader*”.³ From an international political angle, the request for intermediation from the United States stands out so that Brazil, during a visit by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 2001, could intervene in the crisis of the Sino-American dispute caused by the invasion of Chinese airspace by a North American plane. (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009).

During the administration of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), Brazil-China relations saw progress, particularly in the realms of political and technical-scientific cooperation. However, these relations did not reach their full potential, mainly due to the internal economic crises Brazil faced at the time. (Altemani, 2012; Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009; and Albuquerque, 2006). This situation was partly attributed to the critics of the adjustments and devaluation of the Brazilian currency at that time concerning the successful implementation of the Plano Real, a monetary strategy designed to eradicate the severe inflation plaguing Brazil. Additionally, FHC's last term was marked by the significant energy crisis known as the “apagão,” involving widespread power rationing and attracting criticism towards his privatization programs.

According to FHC's diaries (2015), during his visit to Beijing, the former president emphasized the importance of deepening relations with China, recognizing the pivotal role the country was poised to play in the 21st century. Burges (2017) notes that Zhu Rongji, the Chinese premier during FHC's tenure, frequently highlighted the strategic partnership between Brazil and China. Despite this recognition and the former president's long-term vision, the enhancement of this partnership faced challenges. Why? In his first term, FHC was under intense pressure to stabilize Brazil's economy. His second term was further complicated by the currency crisis that affected the Asian Tigers, Brazil, and its major trading partner, Argentina (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009; Burges, 2017).

This scenario illustrates how a country's internal economic, political, or social conditions can significantly impact its foreign policy, either positively or negatively. Had these internal challenges been less severe, Brazilian foreign policy towards China might have been more successful, demonstrating a clear example of domestic circumstances influencing international relations.

2. Lula's Foreign Policy and Brazil-China Relations (2003 – 2011)

The period between 2003 and 2008 was characterized by the rise of emerging countries, particularly China, to new poles of economic and political power. Practically all regions, including Latin America and Africa, experienced an expansion in income and an improvement in the external and fiscal solvency situation (APEX, 2011). After joining the WTO in 2001, China began to expand its participation in the world economy through trade flows and foreign direct investments, which led to a rise in commodity prices (APEX, 2011)⁴. Contrary to this

³According to Lessa (1998), *universalism*: “Observation of Brazil's system of bilateral relations highlights the vocation for *universality*, which finds its origins in the fact that, to a greater or lesser extent, the establishment of peaceful relations was achieved and can be used with countries located on all continents” (gn). For Lafer (2001), cited by Ribeiro (2006): “*universalism* is identified as a trait of diplomacy in which the establishment of non-exclusive partnerships is valued to promote autonomy itself”.

⁴In what way? China caused an increase in demand for agricultural products and natural resources, contributing to the rise in *commodity prices* on the international market after 2002. (APEX, 2011).

positive cycle in the international economy, in 2008, the financial crisis occurred, which had a significant impact on central economies, revealing the excesses of financial and regulatory liberalization, especially in the United States. As a result, the eurozone is also hit by the financial crisis, affecting more developed countries (for example, France) or those with a lower degree of economic development (for example, Greece) without distinction. Given this panorama, the objectives become, from 2009 onwards, the search, by both developed and developing economies, for a new rebalancing “*of global economic and geopolitical power with the consolidation of China's notable economic rise and the emergence of other power poles among emerging countries, such as Brazil and India*” (Baracuhy, 2015). As essential characteristics of this geoeconomic transformation experienced by the world after the 2008 crisis, the political redesign of the G-20 stands out; the articulation of the BRICS; the geopolitical competition between China and the United States; the Chinese “*One Belt, One Road*” geoeconomics strategy; exchange rate misalignments and impacts on world trade, among others (Baracuhy, 2015).

In this international geoeconomic context, Lula took over the Brazilian government in 2003. He continued until the end of his second term in 2011, characterizing his foreign policy as the search for autonomy through diversification (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009). During his government, Lula seeks to leverage Brazil's power projection. Without disregarding international relations with the North, Lula brings to the government a new foreign policy vision for Brasília, focusing on the opportunities the Global South could provide for the country, with China being a key partner (Borges, 2017). Lula, FHC, and later Dilma also visited first China and then Japan in a clear demonstration of the prestige of Brazil-China relations within Brazilian Foreign Policy (Altemani, 2012). Thus, like FHC, China continued to be an essential partner in Brazil's international relations and, consequently, in its foreign policy.

In addition, between 2002 and 2005, China's share of Brazil's exports increased from 4.2% to 5.8%, while exports rose from around US\$2.4 billion to approximately US\$5.3 billion (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2009). In the second term of his government, China would further expand its trade partnership with Brazil, becoming Brazil's leading trade partner in 2009⁵. Ricupero (2017) points out that this moment was crucial for Brazil's external relations. The Chinese became Brazil's largest trading partner for the first time, displacing the United States, which had held the position since approximately 1870. He said this event was not trivial and represented “*tectonic changes in the configuration of world power.*”

China played an important role in Brazil's economic recovery during the 2008 financial crisis, as the country had China as one of the leading importers of Brazilian products. Furthermore, China stands out for the country's growing share of foreign direct investment. This role of China, however, is “*(...) in the function of China's economic and financial interests, and not as a result of a partnership*” (Altemani, 2012).

Finally, concrete advances in the economic field marked Lula's Foreign Policy towards China, although this aspect is still under evaluation by academia.

⁵ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/portal.itamaraty/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4926&Itemid=478&cod_pais=CHN&tipo=ficha_pais&lang=pt-BR> . It was accessed on 11/25/2017.

3. Dilma's Foreign Policy and Brazil-China Relations (2011 – August, 2016)

In 2011, when former president Dilma Rousseff took over the government, the international situation differed from when Lula took office in 2003. Differently, the international economy, notably the central economies, was in contraction due to the 2008 financial crisis. On the other hand, while emerging economies grew 6.3%, advanced economies grew 1.7% in 2011.⁶ However, after that year and throughout the first term and the beginning of the second (12.05.2016), the domestic economic scenario gradually reversed in comparison to the international one in such a way that in 2016, the Brazilian economy ended the year with a drop of 3.6% in GDP.⁷

Based on this international and domestic economic scenario, former president Dilma Rousseff maintained her predecessor's foreign policy initiatives to improve relations with China on a smaller scale, giving special attention to science, technology, and culture. During his mandate⁸: (i) the Brazil-China Joint Action Plan on Health (2011) was signed; (ii) the cultural event "*Month of Brazil in China (September 2013) and China in Brazil (October 2013)*" took place; and (iii) the launches of the CBERS 3 and CBERS 4 satellites (2013 and 2014) took place.⁹

From a political angle, the Dilma government's actions concerning foreign policy concerning China were that of a discreet withdrawal. Unlike the universalist pattern that guided Lula's foreign policy, Dilma was more selective in relation to strategic partners, with one of the most striking changes being foreign relations with Japan. (Casarões, 2017). In 2014, the Japanese government – Brazil's sixth trading partner – elevated bilateral relations with Brazil to a Global Strategic Partnership. In addition, Dilma sought to distance herself from Ahmadinejad's Iran and improve relations with the United States, which had been damaged during former president Lula's last term. Among the reasons that led to Brazil's rapprochement was its growing commercial dependence on China,¹⁰ although attempts at rapprochement were interrupted in 2013 by the US spying scandal against Brazil. (Casarões, 2017).

Finally, during the Dilma government, foreign policy towards China could not avoid increasing economic dependence on the Asian giant. In contrast, the other achievements of the

⁶ See Central Bank of Brazil. Available at: < <http://www.bcb.gov.br/pec/Indeco/Port/indeco.asp> . It was accessed on 11/25/2023.

⁷ See Folha de São Paulo/IBGE. Available at: < <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2017/03/1864275-pib-do-brasil-cai-36-em-2016-e-amarga-Segundo-ano-de-fall.shtml> . Accessed on 11/25/2017.

⁸ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: < <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/pt-BR/ficha-pais/4926-republica-popular-da-china> >. It was accessed on 11/26/2023.

⁹ The Sino-Brazilian Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) program is a consequence of the signing, on July 6, 1988, during the presidency of José Sarney (1985-1990), of a partnership agreement involving INPE (for Space Research), linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology on the Brazilian side, and CAST (China Academy of Space Technology), linked to CASC (China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation) on the Chinese side, for the development of a program to build two advanced remote sensing satellites, called the CBERS Program. At the time, the project envisaged investments of over US\$300 million, with divided responsibilities (30% Brazilian and 70% Chinese), to implement a complete international-level remote sensing system. One of the fruits of this cooperation was obtaining a powerful tool to monitor the immense Brazilian territory with its remote sensing satellites, seeking to consolidate significant autonomy in this segment. (INPE, 2018).

¹⁰ As Saraiva (2014) noted, the commercial partnership with China began to prove disadvantageous for Brazil, creating an unwanted dependence on the Asian country. "In 2009, it became Brazil's main trading partner country and, in the following year, it occupied the position of the largest investor in the country. However, it is a buyer of raw materials emphasizing commodities, establishing a North-South style relationship and creating a dependence on Brazilian exports from the Chinese market". (Saraiva, 2014).

Lula government in terms of foreign policy were being diluted or dismantled, for example, in Africa. (Casarões, 2017; and Ricupero, 2017).¹¹

4. Temer's Foreign Policy and Brazil-China Relations (August 2016 – 2018)

According to Almeida (2019), with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, speculation arose that there would be a setback in relations between Brazil and China due to their character being supposedly based on political and ideological proximity. However, that was different from what was seen. On the contrary, between 2016 and 2017, relations between Brazil and China deepened, notably in trade and direct investment from the Asian giant.

The accumulated Sino-Brazilian trade flow between January and October 2017 totaled approximately US\$64 billion, a value 28% higher than that presented in 2016. Brazilian exports reached US\$41 billion, indicating a jump of 35%, while imports from the Asian country had a positive variation of 17%, totaling US\$22.6 billion. The balance between the two countries presented a surplus of US\$18.7 billion for Brazil. (CEBC, 2017).

According to the following table and graph, prepared by the Brazil-China Business Council (CEBC, 2017), based on data from the Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC), in global terms, the Asian country continued to be the main trading partner of Brazil, with a 21% share of the country's trade with the world, ahead of important jurisdictions such as the European Union (18%), Asia (15%), the United States (14%) and Mercosur (9%).

Table 1 – Trade Balance (US\$ Millions) – Comparison 2016-2017

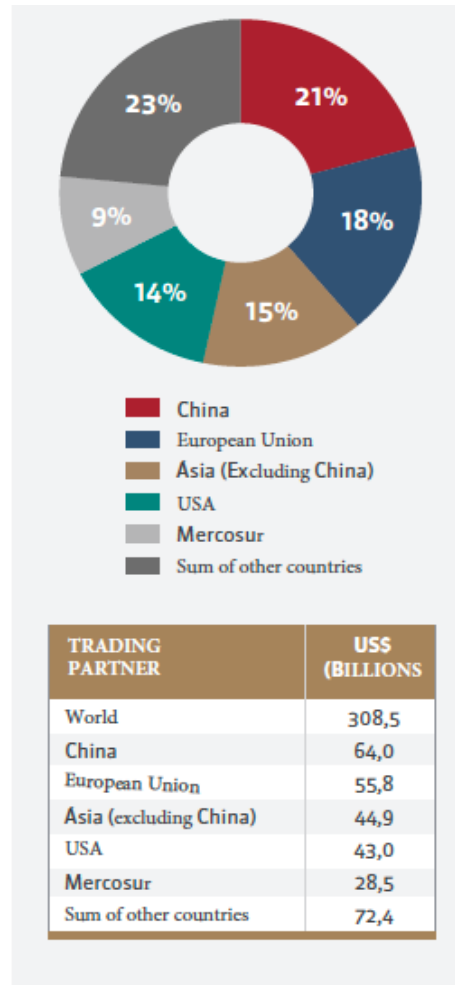
TABLE 1 - TRADE BALANCE (US\$ MILLIONS): JANUARY-OCTOBER 2017 IN COMPARISON WITH JANUARY-OCTOBER 2016

	EXPORT			IMPORT			BALANCE			CURRENT		
	2016	2017	Var. %	2016	2017	Var. %	2016	2017	Var. %	2016	2017	Var. %
January	1.391	2.840	104%	2.305	2.291	-1%	-914	549	160%	3.696	5.130	39%
February	1.822	3.406	87%	1.714	1.863	9%	108	1.542	1323%	3.536	5.269	49%
March	3.752	5.539	48%	1.927	2.102	9%	1.826	3.438	88%	5.679	7.641	35%
April	4.302	5.170	20%	1.431	1.798	26%	2.871	3.373	17%	5.733	6.968	22%
May	4.427	5.141	16%	1.845	2.077	13%	2.581	3.063	19%	6.272	7.218	15%
June	4.076	4.858	19%	1.991	2.132	7%	2.085	2.726	31%	6.066	6.990	15%
July	3.370	3.836	14%	1.786	2.244	26%	1.583	1.592	1%	5.156	6.080	18%
August	2.816	3.994	42%	2.145	2.621	22%	671	1.373	105%	4.961	6.615	33%
September	2.323	3.356	44%	2.048	2.788	36%	275	568	106%	4.370	6.144	41%
October	2.431	3.216	32%	2.069	2.692	30%	362	525	45%	4.501	5.908	31%
ACCUMULATED	30.709	41.350	35%	19.261	22.604	17%	11.448	18.745	64%	49.971	63.955	28%

Source: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC) – Prepared by: CEBC (Carta Brazil-China Jan-Oct 2017).

¹¹From a commercial point of view, in 2012, China became the primary importer of Brazilian products - See Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: < <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/pt-BR/ficha-pais/4926-republica-popular-da-china> >. It was accessed on 11/26/2023. As Ricupero (2017) points out, in the final years of Dilma's government, China's share of Brazil's trade had increased by 17% (2014) and 18% (2015), while that of the Americans had fallen to 14% and that of Mercosur, the 8%.

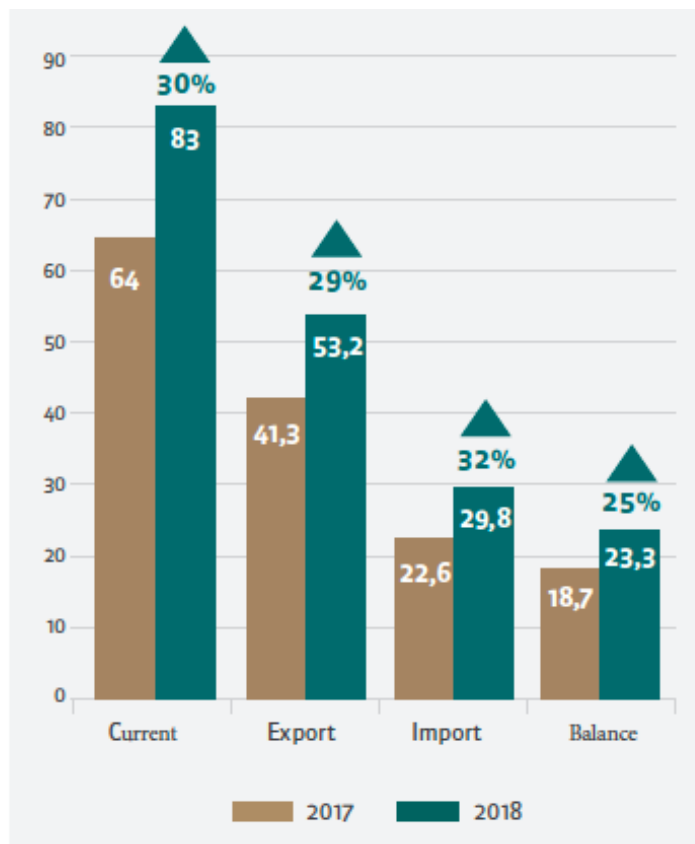
Graph 1 – Main Commercial Partners in Brazil (Jan-Oct 2017)



Source: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC) - Prepared by CEBC: (Carta Brazil-China Jan-Oct 2017).

Based on information from the MDIC and analyzed by CEBC (2018), exports from Brazil to China grew 84% when compared to October 2017, with sales equivalent to US\$5.9 billion. Imports grew by 14%, totaling purchases that totaled approximately US\$3 billion. The accumulated Sino-Brazilian trade flow from January to October 2018 totaled US\$83.1 billion, a value 30% higher than that presented in 2017. Brazilian exports reached the US\$3 billion mark, indicating a jump of 29%, while imports from the Asian country had a positive variation of 32%, totaling US\$29.8 billion. Between January and October 2018, the balance between the two countries presented a surplus of US\$23.3 billion for Brazil. (CEBC, 2018). Graph 2 illustrates the increase in trade volume between Brazil and China for the last and second consecutive year of the Michel Temer government as president of Brazil.

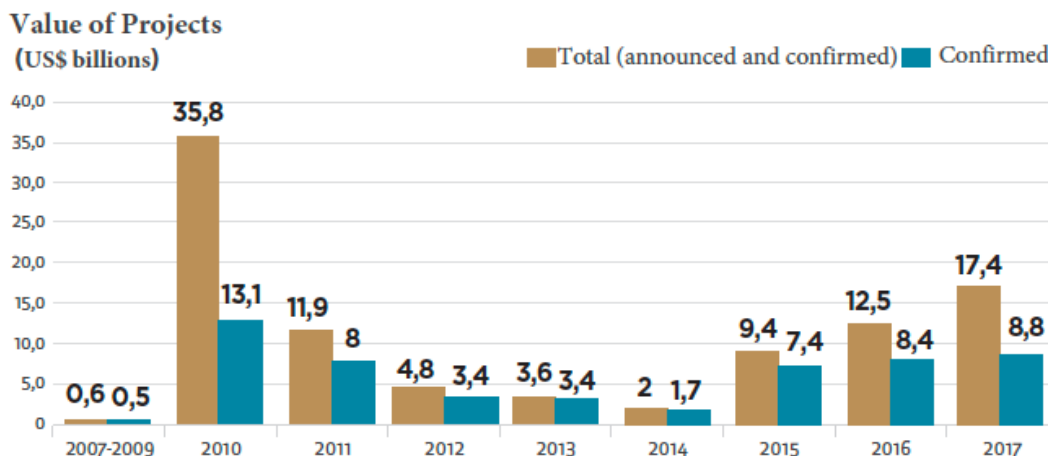
Graph 2 – Trade Balance: January-October 2018 compared to January-October 2017.



Source: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC) – Prepared by: CEBC (Carta Brazil-China November 2018).

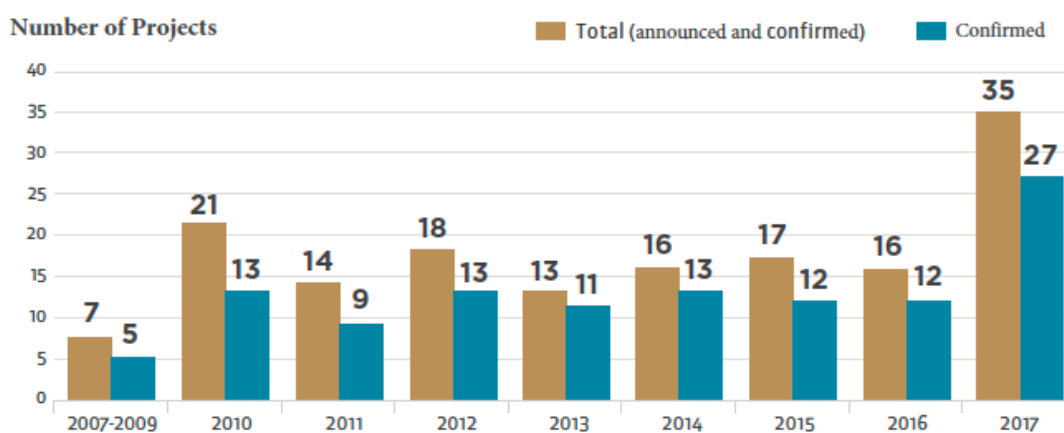
In 2017, China's leadership in the ranking of acquisitions in Brazil was notable, reaching a total of US\$8.8 billion in confirmed projects, according to CEBC (2018). This value represented an increase compared to US\$8.4 billion in 2016, a year in which China had already stood out as the country's leading investor, as shown in Graphs 3 and 4 (CEBC, 2018). According to Almeida (2019), during that period, Brazilian businesspeople and market analysts considered this flow of Chinese capital extremely beneficial, particularly in a context in which the then-president of the United States, Donald Trump, signaled a reduction in American investments abroad and the possible repatriation of capital already invested.

Graph 3 - Historical series of Chinese investments in Brazil (2007 - 2017)



Source: CEBC (Chinese Investments in Brazil – August/2018).

Graph 4 - Historical series of Number of Projects in Brazil (2007 - 2017)



Source: CEBC (Chinese Investments in Brazil – August/2018).

When analyzing comparatively registered investments in 2017 and the historical series of projects in previous years. It is possible to notice the progressive increase in the value of investments from 2014. The number of projects in 2017 surpassed the values recorded in the previous year, taking into consideration both confirmed investments as advertised. The total number of projects listed showed considerable growth, going from 16 enterprises in 2016 to 35 in 2017, a variation of 119%. If only investments are confirmed, the increase is even more significant, presenting a jump from 12 projects in 2016 to 27 in 2017, an increase of 125%. This is the most significant number of Chinese investments registered in Brazil in a year. (CEBC, 2018).

In June 2017, Brazil and China took a significant step by operationalizing the Brazil-China Cooperation Fund for Expansion and Productive Capacity. With an initial contribution of US\$20 billion, this fund was made up of US\$15 billion from *Claifund* (Chinese Cooperation Fund for Investments in Latin America) and US\$5 billion from Brazilian sources, whose specific origin was not clearly defined at the beginning of its operations. The creation of this

fund was announced in 2015 during the Chinese Prime Minister's visit to Brazil, an event that then-President Dilma Rousseff also attended. (Almeida, 2019).

This context of growing Chinese investment in Brazil reflects the strategic importance of the South American country for China, not only as a consumer market but also as a critical partner in its global economic expansion.

From the perspective of political relations, it was witnessed several high-level visits and dialogues. Michel Temer visited China in 2016 and 2017 to attract investment and expand Brazilian exports. These visits were fundamental to strengthening the global strategic partnership between the two countries. Temer visited China shortly after taking office in 2016, when he participated in the G20 leaders' meeting, trying to increase the participation of foreign investors in Brazil. In 2017, Temer traveled to China to conduct a state visit and participate in the BRICS summit meeting, a group formed by Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa. (Agência Brasil, 2017; 2016). During this visit, several agreements were signed, including (i) a memorandum of understanding on electronic commerce, (ii) licensing of Phase 2 of the Belo Monte Plant, (iii) framework agreement between the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) and *Sinosure* to provide guarantees to Chinese investors in Brazil; and (iv) financing contract from China *Communication and Construction Company* (CCCC) for the Construction of the Private Use Terminal at the Port of São Luís.

In summary, relations between Brazil and China during the Temer government were characterized by economic strengthening and increased trade and investment. However, we understand that improvements were needed in the industrial field and the export of products with more value added, as illustrated in Tables 2 and 3, prepared by CEBC (2018), which compare Brazil's export and import patterns.

Table 2 – Export Schedule / January-October 2018 compared to January-October 2017

TABLE 2 - EXPORT AGENDA							
JANUARY-OCTOBER 2018 IN COMPARISON WITH JANUARY-OCTOBER 2017							
EXPORT	2017		2018		Var. (%) US\$	Var. (%) Ton (K)	PARTICIPATION AGENDA 2018 (US\$)
	US\$ MILLIONS	Ton (K)	US\$ MILLIONS	Ton (K)			
Soy, even crushed	18.821	49.913	23.944	60.104	27%	20%	45%
Crude petroleum oils	6.223	19.103	11.464	25.951	84%	36%	21,5%
Iron ores and their concentrates	8.786	179.649	8.840	187.564	1%	4%	16,6%
Chemical wood pulps, except for dissolving	1.719	3.896	2.583	4.798	50%	23%	4,9%
Beef, frozen	717	166	1.198	259	67%	56%	2,2%
Edible poultry meat and offal	645	334	669	365	4%	9%	1,3%
Iron garters	473	63	634	58	34%	-9%	1,2%
Chemical wood pulp, for dissolving	338	524	280	402	-17%	-23%	0,5%
Fresh, chilled or frozen pork	78	38	258	133	230%	247%	0,5%
Tuned copper and copper alloys, in raw forms	167	28	247	37	48%	36%	0,5%
Others	3.382	7.927	3.131	6.741	-7%	-15%	5,9%

Source: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC) – Prepared by: CEBC (Carta Brazil-China November 2018).

Table 3 - Import Tariff / January-October 2018 compared to January-October 2017

TABLE 3 - IMPORT AGENDA JANUARY-OCTOBER 2018 IN COMPARISON WITH JANUARY-OCTOBER 2017							
IMPORT	2017		2018		Var. (%) US\$	Var. (%) Ton (K)	Participation AGENDA 2018 (US\$)
	US\$ MILLIONS	Ton (K)	US\$ MILLIONS	Ton (K)			
Machines, electrical materials and parts	7.331	508	8.017	588	9%	16%	27%
Machines, mechanical instruments and parts	3.427,4	449,5	3.977	521	16%	16%	13%
Vessels and floating structures	1,3	0,2	3.688	182	*	*	12%
Organic chemicals	1.809	394	2.375	441	31%	12%	8%
Motor vehicles and parts	727	173	894	210	23%	22%	3%
Plastics and their products	690	268	850	300	23%	12%	2,8%
Instruments, control /precision devices	566	25	700	29	24%	17%	2,3%
Cast iron, iron and steel	555	801	639	749	15%	-7%	2,1%
Synthetic or artificial filaments	519	205	575	218	11%	6%	1,9%
Cast iron, iron or steel products	435	228	530	254	22%	11%	1,8%
Others	6.545	4.548	7.614	4.824	16%	6%	26%

Source: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC) – Prepared by: CEBC (Carta Brazil-China November 2018).

5. Bolsonaro's Foreign Policy and Brazil-China Relations (2019 – 2022)

The international context in which President Jair Bolsonaro took power in January 2019 was marked by geopolitical uncertainties and a global trend toward nationalism. These factors profoundly influenced Brazil's foreign policy, leading to significant changes in how the country positioned itself in relation to traditional partners, regional integration, and engagement with multilateral institutions. The Bolsonaro government's foreign policy reflected a new dynamic in international relations, where unilateralism and ideological alignment with certain countries became more prominent.

Leaders such as Donald Trump in the United States and Viktor Orbán, among others in Europe, promoted a nationalist and, often, anti-globalist agenda. This global trend influenced Brazilian foreign policy, with Bolsonaro adopting a more assertive and, at times, confrontational stance on the international stage. The Bolsonaro administration has sought closer alignment with the United States under the presidency of Donald Trump. This rapprochement represented a significant change, given the previously more balanced relations with other global powers, including China. This alignment was reflected in several areas, including the stance towards Venezuela, security issues, and environmental policy.

The period was also marked by intense trade tensions, especially between the United States and China. As an important trading partner of both countries, Brazil found itself in a delicate position. The need to balance these complex relationships directly impacted the formulation of Brazilian foreign policy.

The pandemic, which began in late 2019, added another layer of complexity. Management of the health crisis and relations with countries that supply inputs and vaccines, such as China, have become central elements of foreign policy.

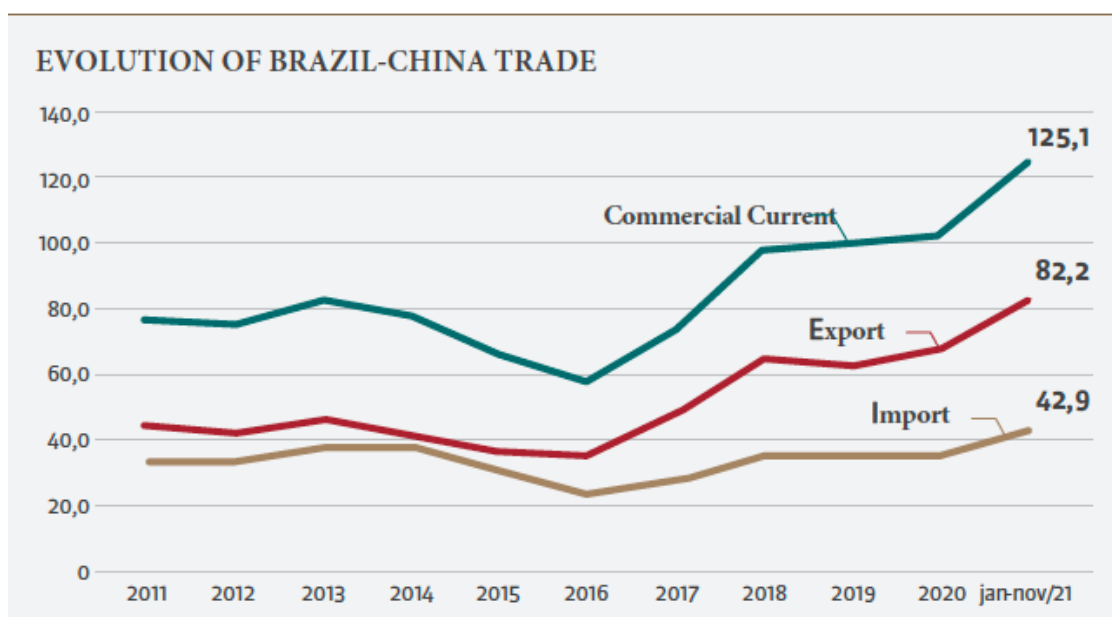
Notably, about China, relations between Brazil and our largest trading partner since 2009, during the government of President Jair Bolsonaro, represent a complex mosaic of political tensions and economic pragmatism. This period was marked by a dichotomy between political rhetoric and economic reality, reflecting the challenges and opportunities inherent to the relationship between the two nations.

The Bolsonaro government initially adopted a critical stance towards China. During the election campaign and in the first years of his term, Bolsonaro and his close circle expressed skepticism about Chinese influence in Brazil and the world. These criticisms aligned with a broader vision of alignment with the United States under the Trump administration, which saw China as a strategic rival. Bolsonaro's visit to Taiwan in 2019, an unusual diplomatic move for a country that adheres to the “One China” policy, exacerbated tensions, raising concerns about the impact on Sino-Brazilian relations.

However, despite this initial rhetoric, the economic reality between the two countries followed a different path. China remained Brazil's largest trading partner, a link strengthened by Chinese demand for Brazilian commodities such as soybeans and iron ore.

Trade between the two countries reached the historic mark of US\$125 billion. The result was driven by records in exports and imports, which registered US\$82.2 billion and US\$42.8 billion, respectively. The historic mark was driven by the growth in exports and imports, which also reached new peaks. In the comparison between the first eleven months of 2021 and 2020, sales to China grew 30.2%, reaching US\$82.2 billion and surpassing the US\$67.8 billion recorded in the year. In the same period, purchases originating in Asian countries increased by 32.2%, reaching US\$42.8 billion, surpassing the previous record of US\$37.8 billion recorded in 2014, according to Graph 5, which shows commercial records from a historical perspective, highlighting the values in the period from January to November 2021. (Cariello e Amigo, 2021).

Graph 5 – Historical Evolution of Trade between Brazil and China between 2011-2021



Source: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC) – Prepared by: CEBC (Carta Brazil-China December 2021).

Regarding to the Chinese investments in Brazil, “The year 2022 was marked by contrasting movements.” (Cariello, 2023). On the one hand, Chinese companies demonstrated a significant presence in Brazil, investing in 32 projects, marking a 14% increase from the previous year. This surge surpassed the peak seen in 2018 and established a new record in the volume of projects. Conversely, in financial terms, there was a notable decline. Investment values

plummeted by 78% compared to the previous year, amounting to just US\$1.3 billion – the smallest figure recorded since 2009. (Cariello, 2023).

As previously mentioned, the Bolsonaro administration's confrontational rhetoric towards China introduced additional complexities into Brazil-China relations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2021, President Bolsonaro's insinuations that the pandemic might be a part of China's "biological warfare" significantly heightened tensions. However, in a paradoxical twist, Brazil found itself heavily reliant on Chinese-produced vaccines to combat the pandemic. This reliance underscored a pragmatic interdependence between the two nations, highlighting international relations' intricate and sometimes contradictory nature where practical needs can override political rhetoric.

Over the years, relations between Brazil and China have demonstrated remarkable resilience and an ability to remain stable and productive, regardless of ideological changes in Brazilian governments. This finding is particularly evident when we analyze the governments of Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro, who kept diplomatic relations flowing effectively despite their ideological differences in relation to China.

Under the Bolsonaro government, for example, high-level diplomatic relations were maintained and even reinforced through the Sino-Brazilian High-Level Commission for Concertation and Cooperation (COSBAN), in which vice-president Hamilton Mourão represented Brazil. The sixth plenary session of COSBAN, held in May 2022, is an emblematic example of this continuity and pragmatism. COSBAN, created 18 years ago and co-chaired by the Vice President of Brazil and the Vice Prime Minister of China, is the main forum for strategic discussions on bilateral cooperation.

During this session, the diversity and depth of the bilateral relationship became evident, covering areas such as trade, investment, finance, energy and mining, agriculture, science, technology and innovation, space cooperation, industry and information technology, culture, and education. This broad spectrum of cooperation illustrates Brazil-China relations' multifaceted and robust nature.

Brazil and China's relationship has unique characteristics not found in relations with other countries. An example of this is the decision by the governments of both countries to move forward with medium-term plans, defined with precise objectives in the context of the Strategic Partnership established more than a decade ago.¹² This was evidenced by implementing the Joint Action Plan 2015-2021 and the Ten-Year Cooperation Plan 2012-2021. At the COSBAN meeting in 2022, negotiations on new ten-year plans for the bilateral relationship were concluded: the Strategic Plan 2022-2031 and the Executive Plan 2022-2026, which express the priorities that Brazil and China intend to impose on their relationship in the coming years. (Barbosa, 2022).

This highly institutionalized and strategic approach demonstrates that, despite political and ideological changes in Brazil, relations with China have remained consistent and focused on long-term objectives. Trade between the two countries, for example, continued to break records during the Bolsonaro government, reflecting the strength and importance of this partnership.

¹² Brazil maintains consultation mechanisms with many other countries. However, the United States is the only one with whom the bilateral relationship has been institutionalized. Although in a less ambitious manner and without ten-year plans with established goals, high-level consultations, and dialogues take place, as well as joint working group meetings in areas such as trade, science and technology, agriculture, and energy, in addition to a forum with presidents of major companies from both countries. (Barbosa, 2022).

In short, Brazil-China relations during the Temer and Bolsonaro governments illustrate how diplomacy and economic cooperation can transcend ideological differences. The continuity and pragmatism in these relationships, especially evidenced by COSBAN's performance, reinforce the importance of China as a strategic partner for Brazil and vice versa, regardless of the head of the Brazilian executive. The ability to maintain and deepen these relationships despite internal political changes is a testament to both countries' long-term vision and mutual commitment to strengthening their strategic partnership.

Furthermore, this duality between politics and economics reflects a fundamental characteristic of contemporary international relations, where economic ties often transcend political divergences.

In conclusion, Brazil-China relations during the Bolsonaro government illustrate the complexity of international relations in the 21st century. While political and ideological tensions presented challenges, economic reality and interdependence prevailed, underlining China's importance to the Brazilian economy.

6. Lula's Foreign Policy 3 and Brazil-China Relations (2022 – present)

At the international level, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva resumed the presidency of Brazil in January 2023, and his government has been immersed until now in an international political context marked by several complex dynamics and significant challenges. Among them, the following stand out: (i) COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences: The world is dealing with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered health, economic and social crises on a global scale. Pandemic management and economic recovery are priorities for many countries, including Brazil; (ii) global geopolitical tensions: the international scenario is characterized by growing geopolitical tensions, including rivalry between the United States and China, conflicts in Eastern Europe, especially the war in Ukraine, and instability in the Middle East. These tensions reflect an international system in transition, with changes in the balance of power and world order; (iii) climate change and environmental challenges: environmental issues, especially climate change, remain at the top of the global agenda. Brazil, which owns a significant portion of the Amazon, faces international pressure to implement adequate environmental protection and combat deforestation policies; (iv) reconfiguration of International Relations: President Lula's government is inserted in a context of reconfiguration of International Relations, with countries seeking new alignments and strategic partnerships, notably due to the war in Ukraine, the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas, the elections in the United States in 2024, and the recent election of the libertarian-leaning President in Argentina, Javier Milei. For Brazil, this represents an opportunity to redefine its relations with global and regional powers and to reaffirm its position as a relevant actor on the international scene; (v) economic challenges: The world faces significant economic challenges, including inflation, high national debts and the need for post-pandemic economic recovery; (vi) technology and digital transformation: digital and technology transformation, as well as the advancement of artificial intelligence, continue to reshape global societies and economies. As a large emerging market, Brazil faces the challenge of integrating into this new digital order, taking advantage of opportunities, and managing the associated risks.

Still, from the point of view of the international environment in which the Lula government operates, there are also positive points to be highlighted: (i) relations with the Biden government:

Joe Biden's administration in the United States demonstrated goodwill towards the Lula government. Unlike the Trump administration, Biden emphasizes the importance of climate issues, human rights, and multilateralism, which tend to align more closely with the Lula government's priorities. This paves the way for potential closer collaboration between Brazil and the United States on global and regional issues; (ii) European support and climate agenda: Europe, under leaders such as Emmanuel Macron of France, also shows signs of a positive relationship with Brazil, especially around the climate agenda. The European Union, committed to the Paris Agreement and the promotion of sustainable environmental policies, sees Brazil as a crucial partner in the fight against climate change, especially with regard to the conservation of the Amazon; (iii) re-engagement with multilateral institutions: the Lula government indicates re-engagement with multilateral institutions, which could strengthen Brazil's position on the global stage. Actively participating in forums such as the United Nations, the G20, and other international platforms can reinforce Brazil's influence in discussions on sustainable development and global health; (iv) strengthening south-south relations: There is also the possibility of strengthening south-south relations, with Brazil seeking to intensify ties with other emerging economies and developing countries, such as, for example, the recent expansion of BRICS. This could not only diversify Brazil's economic and political partnerships but also consolidate its position as a leader among developing countries; (v) potential for leadership on environmental issues: With the growing importance of environmental issues on the global stage, Brazil, under Lula's leadership, has the opportunity to assume a leadership role in environmental initiatives. This can not only improve Brazil's image abroad but also open doors for new partnerships and investments in green and sustainable technologies; (vi) post-pandemic economic recovery: the post-pandemic period offers an opportunity for Brazil to restructure its economy, with a focus on greater sustainability and social inclusion. International cooperation, especially with countries with similar concerns, can be crucial to achieving a robust and sustainable economic recovery.

Concerning China, *"in 2023, the third term of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva began, notably the Brazilian president who most expanded relations with the PRC in the present century."* (Simões, 2023). As 50 years of diplomatic relations between Brazil and China approach (2024), the prospects for the following years are for a deepening in both the intensity and quality of bilateral relations, surpassing the dynamics of previous years. This strengthening of relations can be exemplified by several factors, including the agreements signed in April 2023¹³, with the presence of Dilma Rousseff, as president of the BRICS Bank. (Simões, 2023).

With Lula's election, there was a resumption and intensification of dialogue and strategic cooperation between Brazil and China. Lula, known for his foreign policy aimed at diversifying international relations and strengthening ties with emerging partners, has sought to strengthen relations with China. Bilateral trade between Brazil and China will likely grow during his term. China, which was Brazil's largest trading partner, may increase its imports of Brazilian commodities, such as soybeans and iron ore, and may also seek to diversify its imports with products with higher added value. In addition, Chinese investments in critical sectors of the Brazilian economy, such as infrastructure, energy, and technology, can be strengthened.

¹³List of agreements signed between Brazil and China in April 2023 – Source – Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/lista_-and-integrates-of-the-acts-signed-in-the-grand-palace-of-the-people-on-the-occasion-of-the-visit-of-president-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-to-the-popular-republic-of-china>. It was accessed on 11/27/2023.

Furthermore, there is also the highlight in the monetary area. In April 2023, Brazil took important steps to strengthen its commercial and financial relations with Asian countries further. The signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Central Bank of Brazil and the People's Bank of China, together with the accession of Banco BOCOM BBM to China Interbank Payment System (CIPS) and the designation of the Brazilian subsidiary of Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) as the official clearing bank for transactions carried out in *renminbi*, signals a pragmatic and future-oriented vision.

These institutional arrangements will allow the Brazilian payment system direct access to China's domestic and cross-border payment platforms. This possibility of carrying out foreign exchange transactions directly in *the renminbi* will not only favor the competitiveness of Brazilian companies, but it will also align the country with an emerging trend of monetary multipolarity. This could allow Brazil greater flexibility and resilience in its commercial relations, distinguishing itself from other nations that still depend exclusively on the dollar or the euro.

Finally, despite strengthening relations, the Lula government will face the challenge of balancing its relations with China with those of other strategic partners, especially the United States and the European Union. In this context, Brazilian diplomacy must navigate carefully to maintain balanced and mutually beneficial relations.

In summary, the period from January to November 2023 under the Lula government likely strengthened Brazil-China relations, emphasizing economic, environmental, and technological cooperation. This period will have been marked by a conscious effort to deepen the strategic partnership while maintaining a diplomatic balance with other global partners.

7. Concluding Remarks

This article analyzed Brazilian foreign policy in relation to China, highlighting a relationship marked by strong institutionality and strategic continuity. The analysis from the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso to the current mandate of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva demonstrates how this relationship developed independently of the ideological changes in the governments of both countries, notably in the commercial sphere, although too focused on exports, on the part of Brazil, of commodities.

The strong institutionality between Brazil and China has been a pillar for sustainable and effective diplomatic and commercial relations. Regardless of the government's political orientation, the bilateral relationship remained stable, with an emphasis on shared economic and strategic interests. As Brazil's main trading partner, China plays a fundamental role in the Brazilian economy, standing out in investments and bilateral trade.

Under Lula's presidency, we have seen a strengthening of economic, environmental, and technological cooperation, maintaining the trend toward deepening relations. This continuity indicates a pragmatic approach to Brazilian foreign policy, where economic interests and the search for technological development overlap ideological differences.

The resilience and institutional consistency of these relationships are essential for the continued success of bilateral cooperation. The future of Brazil-China relations will depend on the ability of both countries to maintain this commitment to cooperation, regardless of changes in the political landscape. This will continue to be crucial for Brazil's foreign policy and economic development.

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