

A Sino-Brazilian Study on Values, Lifestyles and Horizons

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Abstract

This introduction tells of the origins and development of the research project which resulted in some of the works published in this volume 3 of Sociologies in Dialogue. Sino-Brazilian cooperation in youth sociology began after the 2004 Conference of the International Institute of Sociology organized by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing. The International Sociological Association's Research Committee 34, Sociology of Youth was instrumental in organising two meetings between Chinese and foreign youth researchers where the initial relations that led to the research were established. A considerable number of bi-lateral meetings were held before deciding to conduct a survey to investigate the values, lifestyles and horizons of over four thousand young university students in China and Brazil. This research was conducted in both countries in 2012, and the work originally published in both Chinese and Portuguese in 2016. As such the work published in this volume provides some of the results of the first major piece of comparative Sino-Brazilian research conducted in the history of the Brazilian Social sciences and this is placed in the context of a broader development of exchanges between China and Brazil.

Keywords: Youth Sociology, China, Brazil, Comparative Sociology, Student values, Student Lifestyles.

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I start by inviting the reader to consider the contrast between two sentences written only a decade apart. The first by an art historian as he introduced his pioneering book on Sino-Brazilian relations; 'China in Brazil', the second by Brazil's president upon the opening of the Center of Brazilian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing. "In this end of a decade, which is also the end of a century and of a millennium, the name China, certainly, raises certain confused ideas and in any case means little to 99.99% of us Brazilians, who are used to associating it with a misty country, so unknown and almost as remote as planet Mars or the Moon." (Teixeira Leite, 1999: 11). In 2009 President Lula pronounced: "We need to encourage exchange, dialogue and interaction between business people, scientists, students, tourists and, essentially, between Brazilian citizens and Chinese citizens." (Albuquerque, 2013: 80) The research introduced here was conceived of during the period between the above two observations. The project was based on the idea that social science research can help build a bridge between complete and utter lack of knowledge, and our country's necessity to get to know better both China and its people.

The survey on values, lifestyles and horizons of young university students upon which this book is based, was carried out in four 'city-regions': Shanghai, Beijing, São Paulo and Brasília. In other words in the city-regions where the principal financial, commercial and industrial hub and the political capital of each country is situated. Three tertiary education institutions were chosen in each. To select them on a basis that would permit comparison we used a shorthand in both countries: 'A, C, B' level institutions, since there is wide agreement in each country as to where each selected institution lies in terms of these three categories. Admission criteria were used to orient choice in Brazil. In each region the research teams chose an elite institution, a popular one, and a middle-range one: highly selective, low selectivity and

middle-range. In Brazil the A-type institutions corresponded to the elite public universities (in many of the disciplines there is an average of 20 candidates per vacancy, but in certain disciplines this can rise to well above 50), privately owned institutions (with very few candidates per vacancy, e.g. one institution selected had approximately one candidate per vacancy), and two distinct types of private tertiary institutions: either community (owned and controlled by religious orders), or controlled by foundations which receive direct public sector support. In each of these the candidate to vacancy ratio lies between the two extremes. The choice of the sample size (in Brazil $n = 2429$, in China $n = 1708$) and the random sampling procedure adopted in each country follow national research traditions and are limited by administrative capacities.

The procedures adopted on each side of the world give each research team confidence that the statements being made are based on accurate representations of the 18-24 year old undergraduate students in the three types of institutions in each of the four city-regions, and that the general applicability of the results extends beyond the place where research was conducted. Those included in our study can be seen to be somewhat as representative of Brazilian urban students in the most developed regions of the country. The same can be said for China. To the extent that the study was similarly designed in each country, we can take the data to be roughly comparable.

This journal last and present issues bring to light some first results of our cooperative effort. Our research attempts to combat the recognized deficits in knowledge about each other, to build comparative understandings and to identify possible bases of cooperation. In so doing, it also portrays Brazilian (and Chinese) university students as a group. The articles in the last and in the present issue on youth and higher education in the two

countries have been previously published in both Mandarin Chinese and Portuguese in a book launched in 2016.

A Short History of the Project

In July 2004, after a three hour meeting in the Brazilian embassy in Beijing, the members of the first Brazilian Sociological Society (SBS) delegation to visit China were convinced that the rise of China would not only change the relations between the two nations, but also sociology.¹ It was clear that Brazil and China would have a great deal to do with each other in the future but, at that time, it was not at all clear that in the short space of the following five years China would become Brazil's principal trading partner.²

The research project presented here is a direct consequence of that July 2004 meeting. In order to carry out this Sino-Brazilian survey it was necessary to engage in considerable institutional innovation. A bi-lateral agreement was slowly constructed between four institutions: one scientific society and one research institute in each country.

Under SBS and China Youth and Children Research Center (CYCRC) leadership the agreement was built up over the years, four Chinese missions have been welcomed to Brazil, and CYCRC have received three SBS missions in Beijing. Early meetings centered around getting to know each other, building mutual confidence and determining if and how we could cooperate by doing social research. From the Brazilian side, in order to make this research happen, it was necessary to mobilize some leading Brazilian social scientists involved in youth studies, to discuss possible research agendas, to organize seminars and to receive visiting delegations; this was carried out under SBS's leadership. In China, our partner is a research institute that, as

¹ This was the same year that President Lula's official mission to China, accompanied by many business people, demonstrated the existence of an important change in awareness on the part of Brazilian elites.

² <http://www.mdic.gov.br/sitio/interna/noticia.php?area=5¬icia=9041>

its name implies, is specialized in youth research. From a practical viewpoint this meant that once CYCRC leadership had made a decision to engage in a comparative research project with Brazil, it was able to very quickly put together a qualified team of specialist researchers and to use its already well-established channels to guarantee access to tertiary educational institutions and to conduct research expeditiously. In Brazil, we could move forward and commit to research only after successfully applying for external financing, which came from the 'Institute for Applied Economics' (IPEA). The obtaining of access to university students proved a very difficult business in Brazil, especially in the private institutions with low selectivity; of the ten institutions approached only two permitted the research to be conducted.

SBS developed contact with CYCRC from a very early date. The latter is a small center with a national mandate similar to IPEA's, but differs in that it is dedicated exclusively to research into and the formulation of policy advice on matters concerning youth and childhood. China does not have an equivalent of a ministry of youth affairs, such as Brazil's National Youth Secretariat (SNJ). However, an organ of the Communist Party, the China Youth Federation, has as its main member organization the Communist Youth League, and it is this structure that plays the leading role with regards youth affairs in China³, CYCRC is subordinated to the League.

The CYCRC functions as a type of a think tank to the Chinese government, among its major publications: the *All China Youth Federation Social Survey* the annual *Report on the Development of Chinese Youth and Children*. The second Chinese partner in this research enterprise is the *China Youth and Children Research Association* (CYCRA), this is a scientific society

³ "Established on May 4, 1949, the All-China Youth Federation (ACYF) is one of China's basic people's organizations led by the Communist Party of China. It is a federative body of Chinese youth organizations with the Communist Youth League of China as the core. It is a broad patriotic united front organization of youth of all ethnic groups and all walks of life in China." Available at: http://vweb.youth.cn/cms/2006/qlwx/ywb/abo/200605/t20060525_326585.htm (consulted on 10.10.14)

that represents the nation's researchers on youth and childhood issues. This organization is also subordinated to the China Youth Federation. The League itself has some 80 million members. China's past president ZIANG Zemin played a prominent role in the Federation, immediate past president HU Jintao was the League's first secretary between 1984–1985 and current prime minister LI Keqiang was the League's First Secretary between 1993 and 1998. The Federation and the League are at the very center of power in contemporary China.

In Brazil, the SBS is a non-profit scientific association, founded in 1950. It brings together over one thousand sociologists who hold at least a master's level degree qualification. It has members throughout in the whole nation, and serves to promote and defend sociology and also to promote cooperation among members as they pursue their scientific interests. SBS organizes a biannual conference, publishes a newsletter and in 2013 started to publish the "Brazilian Sociological Review" (*Revista Brasileira de Sociologia*) and more recently *Sociologies in Dialogue*. Among the objectives of the SBS is the promotion of international exchanges between Brazilian sociology and representatives of research and scholarly bodies in other countries.

Finally, IPEA is a Brazilian federal government foundation linked to the Secretariat of Strategic Affairs of the Presidency of the Republic. It is responsible for providing advice to central government about policy related issues, its brief includes examining questions related to economic development. Among its researchers a group has been formed that seeks to examine the importance of the rise of China for Brazil's economic development. Another group addresses issues linked to youth, and especially issues around poverty, education and the labor market. To some extent the agendas of these two groups were brought together when the decision was made to finance this project. IPEA has around 600 full-time staff and, like the CYCRC, its head office is situated in the nation's capital. It publishes technical bulletins

on a regular basis, books and in 2013 published the *'Atlas of Human Development in Brazil'*.

The coming together of these four institutions provides a unique basis upon which it became possible to execute this first piece of Sino-Brazilian social science research. That it took place at all is due not only to the rise of China, but also to the challenges that Brazil faces in coming to terms with today's complex world.

Brazil in the World where Science is a way to build Understanding

For decades Brazilian scholars have reflected upon the eventual possibility of Brazil passing from being a subaltern economic actor on the world stage, to one capable of taking on a leading role as an economic power and, as a consequence, acquire respect from, and take its place among, those nations that are at the top of the world order. Among the scholars who stand out are Celso Furtado, Gilberto Dupas and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. A book published in 2008 on "Globalized Brazil" used the title of Cardoso's article, 'Brazil in a surprising world' as its sub-title. This is indeed the way that many Brazilians have come to see the situation in which our country now finds itself. The rise of East Asia and China had inverted the old world order "favourable to the industrialized countries, in which prices for raw materials tended to fall as prices of manufactured goods rose." The diagnosis made is that the functioning of the world has changed considerably, and also the conditions of Brazilian competitiveness. Our efficient manufacturing base that had been capable of supplying medium quality mass-produced durable goods to the world has been undermined by the rise of China in terms of both costs and innovation. At the same time we have been exporting raw materials to China at increasing prices. Everyone in Brazil knows this, as Ambassador Amaury Porto de Oliveira (2013: 60) stated, "In order to get out of this trap, Brazil must reinvent itself."

It was Affonso Ouro Preto, Brazilian Ambassador to China, who, at a 2004 meeting with an SBS delegation⁴, threw down the gauntlet. His last words were precise and concise; he emphasized that all areas of science in Brazil need to place China on their agenda, including Sociology. Sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso wrote "It is convenient to return to [Max] Weber's words, politics requires perspective and passion... the passion to reconstruct, to open new paths should be accompanied by a realist perspective which people can latch onto because they believe in it and because they see the path to be taken and the benefits that they can derive." (Cardoso, 2006: 675).

The comparative Brazil-China research justified itself from its earliest moment in terms of the need to quickly learn more about our new and commercially important partner. To learn, as President Lula was quoted in the opening paragraph, it is necessary to talk and to build contacts. Each, of course, does this with the instruments that they know how to use, for a musician by playing instruments with others, for a trader one gets to know the other by buying and selling, for a scientist one way to get to know others is by conducting joint research. From the very beginning the construction of our relationship was institutional. The first contact between CYCRC and SBS was intermediated by the International Sociological Association's (ISA) Research Committee on the Sociology of Youth – (RC 34). It occurred in October of 2004 at the '6th International Conference on Asian Youth Issues' in Beijing. At one stage during this conference a very tense debate was held between the leaders of two different youth organizations, each had a different vision of China's future and of youth's role. All was translated for the foreign guests to hear. After the session, the author spoke to one of the debaters Mr. AN Guoqi, deputy director general of CYCRC, and asked

⁴ Made up of former SBS presidents José Vicente Tavares dos Santos and Sérgio Adorno and the author who was at that time the first vice president of SBS.

some questions about his intervention. Our initial conversation, made possible by the translation skills of a remarkable youth researcher Mr. CAO Kai, led to an invitation to dine with Mr. AN and other researchers, and subsequently to a series of meetings over nearly a decade, which this journal issue crowns.

While this research is a pioneering project in the social sciences, other scientific areas have made earlier efforts and produced results before ours. The pioneer Sino-Brazilian research effort was the *China Brazil Earth Resources Satellite Program*, (CBERS). It was initiated in 1988 after the USA had imposed restrictions on technology transfer to both our countries. At that time China and Brazil dominated different technologies involved in launching and making satellites, and cooperation around a shared interest led to both working together. The project was innovative on several fronts but, importantly, it broke the traditional pattern of North-South cooperation on scientific and technological projects. At the time it was reputed to be the world's biggest research project between two developing nations. It is important to mention that communication between scientists was greatly facilitated by the fact that, through mathematics and physics, they share common languages and understandings. A first CBERS satellite was launched in October 1999.

To quickly give another example, an agreement was celebrated in 2010 between the COPPE of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and Tsinghua University in Beijing, as a result the *Brazil-China Center for Climate Change and Innovative Energy Technologies*⁵ was set up. In a different initiative, a team of COPPE researchers went to Tsinghua University to study innovation in three areas: electro-electronics, metalworking and mechanical, and chemicals. This team concluded that 'secondary innovation' was very important

⁷ <http://www.centrochinabrasil.coppe.ufjr.br/en/conheca-centro/>

for China's development. "[B]ased on enterprise initiative, this process is articulated by taking small steps along already known technological routes, steps which, when added to China's huge domestic market and to low labor costs, represent competitive advantage." (Porto, 2013: 61)

Before engaging in such pioneering Brazil-China cooperation efforts, academics and researchers from each country had, of course, engaged in projects with many other countries. To work together it is necessary to develop, justify and finance projects and to cooperate within the bounds of a common research culture. Specific factors contributed in the above cases to make cooperation possible: shared interests and complementary technical capacities on each side in the case of CBERS. The climate change center treats a theme of common interest to humankind, and our different approaches and capacities build the possibility of exploring new horizons together in areas such as biofuels, wind power and carbon capture and storage. In a world marked by China's rise, each country must redefine its interests and action. Brazil is no exception. The Chinese host institution welcomed the members of the Brazilian innovation study team and provided the resources and support to enable them to carry our research *in loco* and, as a result, to attempt to make a relevant contribution to Brazil's understanding of some of the nation's economic challenges.

The development of the questionnaire

From the moment we decided to conduct a survey centered upon the investigation of lifestyles, values and horizons of youth our bilateral exchanges intensified. Each side came up with a series of questions some heavily influenced by those of the World Values Survey, others from a China-Russia university student questionnaire, and members of the national research teams elaborated original questions. The questionnaire is organized in eleven blocks: 1) demographic and residential questions; 2) mothers'

and fathers' occupations and educational levels; 3) university studies; 4) culture and sociability; 5) free time activities; 6) internet and social networks, (six questions being asked in Brazil and one in China) 7) religion; 8) current and future work; 9) participation and the public sphere; 10) the environment; 11) Brazilians' perceptions of China and vice versa. As the reader can see the survey is wide-ranging, not only are perspectives in relation to the future examined (horizons), but also what people do (lifestyles) and think about important issues (values).

Our major face-to-face bilateral exchanges were conducted in Portuguese and Mandarin, with consecutive translation, this proved to be an important element in our strategy because few researchers in either country have enough command of English to engage in conceptual discussions. As was indicated earlier, cooperation in the natural sciences is based on shared languages of science, in the social sciences the concepts are embedded in culture which requires in-depth understanding to permit progress. Resorting to translation permitted Brazilians and Chinese researchers to forward their reflections and arguments as equals, they examined the questions we proposed, as we did theirs'. We ended up having some interesting discussions, and we learnt a good deal about each other, and especially about some of the difficulties involved in conducting comparative social science research. It is important to note that at no time were vetoes raised about the questions to be asked. Where questions were suggested that did not permit meaningful comparisons these were, as a general rule, dropped, to give an example, a single ethnic group in China makes up 92% of the population, this made questions about ethnicity or race of very limited utility for comparative research, incapable of generating statistically significant results. From the beginning we agreed that each party could include questions different to the other in their own questionnaire, however, this was not resorted to. At the end of the process Brazilian researchers decided to include

some extra questions relating to the use of the internet, our Chinese colleagues thought that it would be possible to include these in their questionnaire, however, there proved to have not been enough time. Also both sides avoided suggesting questions that would not make sense in the other country, or which might offend sensitivities: earnings, sexuality and superstition were among the themes excluded by the Brazilian team.

The Brazilian instrument has 66 questions, and in the Chinese there are six less. Most questions are multiple choice, some ask people to react to phrases on a 10 point scale, others request a choice of between one to three items from a list. The questionnaire was pre-tested in both countries and modified as a result, in Brazil it was designed to be self-applied and to take around 20-30 minutes to reply to. A small number of responses, or parts thereof, were unable to be used in comparative analysis because of what were diagnosed as differences in the translation of key terms between Portuguese and Mandarin, or different meanings being attributed to terms by interviewees.

Data analysis

In December of 2012 a two-day seminar was held in Beijing where the first results of our comparative research were treated. The Brazilian delegation was made up of Wivian Weller, Marília Sposito, Ana Maria Nogales, Eduardo Zen, Marilena Nakano and the author. Papers presented by researchers from each country, and resulted in lengthy and in-depth discussions about results. Also, Chinese colleagues from CYCRC and CYCRA presented us with overviews on Chinese youth and youth studies. As had occurred after other meetings, both research teams had a meal together, socializing was carried out using a mixture of English, gestures and the help of cell-phone translation software! At this banquet, a ceremonial exchange of national survey data bases took place, this permitted us to conduct compara-

tive analysis upon our return to Brazil. In October 2013, a Chinese delegation, led by CYCRC's new Director General Mr. JIU Shuguang, visited Brazil for a seminar at Unicamp. On this occasion much discussion was held around a number of misinterpretations, induced by analyses of the data from the other country. Replies to some questions were reinterpreted, and a number of decisions were made which including the abandonment of arguments constructed around misunderstandings of the data, be these due to ethnocentrism, translation or other causes. To give one example, when Chinese students move away from home to live on a university campus, they continue to refer to their parents' residence as 'home', whereas most Brazilian students who live away from their parents seem to refer their temporary accommodation as 'home' – this corresponds to a standard Brazilian operationalization of 'home' as "the place where one washes one's clothes."

Other anomalies appeared in the data were promptly investigated, also there is a small difference in the size of one of our data bases.

The number of validated Brazilian questionnaires was 2429. This data set was used for comparative analyses by both Brazilian and Chinese researchers. At the CYCRC 1729 Chinese questionnaires were validated, in Brazil we validated only 1708, or 1.2% less. This difference was due to a decision to exclude any respondents who were outside of the 18-24 age range that we had initially defined as 'young' university students. The main effect of this exclusion is that some of the Chinese analyses will use slightly different percentages to Brazilian ones, but it certainly does not affect the overall direction of the analyses built.

It is quite extraordinary how much can possibly go wrong with such a large and complex comparative research project. Even though we had all agreed on which database to use, some of our Brazilian colleagues, for example, wrote their analyses using the slightly larger Chinese database. We

were only to discover this at the very end of the process of editing the final publication of the research findings. That so little did in fact go wrong is a tribute to the two teams of researchers and their assistants involved.

Conclusion

In each of the chapters of the book and the articles published in this journal that are based on analyses of the survey data, some issues that are capable of establishing meaningful policy dialogue are highlighted. Potentially these can contribute positively to relations up between our countries. Brazilian and Chinese authors have explored a limited number of questions and, in so doing, have addressed issues that are either already a part their own national research agendas, or potentially make a meaningful contribution to international cooperation. Authors have done this – as can be expected - within the confines of their own scientific traditions and in function of their own theoretical sensitivities. Approaches to and styles of analysis vary greatly between our countries, as do many social phenomena surrounding youth. A number of interesting questions have been left on the sidelines, but may well be examined in the future.

In terms that now seem overly optimistic Barros and Giambiagi (2008) defined that the question that will dominate the next decades is how to develop the Brazilian economy in such a way as we arrive in the year 2020 with an economy and society that has few similarities to that of the time of writing, at the same time as Brazil remains a democratic country and preserves economic stability. When we look towards our BRICS partners we get the feeling that each of them has already redefined their own strategic interests. However, in Brazil we have yet to redefine our interests. As we already know “the society of the future will be a society of innovation and knowledge, and because of this the modernization of professional education and the univer-

university are fundamental for the country's development... will we be able to agree about the objective of restructuring Brazil's educational institutions, transforming them over say a 20 year period so that they will have them the capacity to fulfill their role?" (Cardoso, 2006: 681)

Universities have the responsibility to lead and – with honorable exceptions - they are addressing the consequences of the nation's changing economic and geo-political relations poorly. The Brazilian public university system in particular has proved unable to adequately incorporate the rise of China into its agenda. The causes of this state of affairs are well known, but the system seems incapable of reforming itself. From 2005 onwards the Brazilian Sociological Society (SBS) started inviting prominent Chinese and other BRIC social scientists to its bi-annual conferences. The president of the Chinese Sociological Society, LI Peilin, was a keynote speaker at the 2009 Rio de Janeiro Conference (LI, P.; LI Wei, 2011). An alliance between two general editors - LI Peilin and the author – has guaranteed the preparation of two handbooks. The first was mentioned above, the second is due to be published⁶. The articles included in Volume 3 of *Sociologies in Dialogue*, thus, fits into a wider and more general set of exchanges between Chinese and Brazilian social scientists.⁷

With regards to China, we have to define what we want out of this relationship, indeed we must build a capacity to deal with our important partners on the basis of knowledge and the established means of communication, the way forward lies in the development of linguistic skills, innovation, understanding and the formation of negotiators with a deep understanding of the contexts that they will be called on to deal with be it in the commer-

⁶ Dwyer, T., Gorshkov, M. K., Sharma, I., LI Chunling and Mapadimeng, S. M. (eds) 2018. *Handbook of the Sociology of Youth in BRICS Countries* Singapore, World Scientific. The Brazilian team – including four authors in this volume - was organized through SBS.

⁷ There is small but growing dialogue, and a variety of writers. The author co-organized a 2017 volume of *Hermès La revue* (CNRS, Paris) on *BRICS un espace ignore (BRICS a forgotten space)*.

cial, diplomatic, academic and cultural realms. In Fernando Henrique Cardoso's evaluation "it is possible to play with the Chinese, but if they are the only ones to have strategic objectives and know what they are seeking, we will not do very well at this game. Looking at the game board I still can't see what Brazil's game is..."⁸ For political or economic and commercial motives, some fear China. Others idealize and see advantages for us in everything. It's probable that they are right, under one condition, that we define, as do the Chinese, what we want. In the short run, it is undeniable that the Chinese voracity for food and minerals is giving a big boost to our balance of trade. In the medium term it depends on our capacity to formulate and to implement the proposals that we ourselves define." (Cardoso, 2006: 653).

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⁸ Twelve years later, this diagnosis was corroborated at a seminar on the "BRICS and Brazil," sponsored by the Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão (FUNAG) & the Instituto Relações Internacionais e Comércio Exterior (IRICE), held in São Paulo on 14.09.2018.

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