

## Brazil-China bilateral relations: Between strategic partnership and competition from the Brazilian perspective

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### **Introduction: how prioritized is the Strategic Partnership between Brazil and China?**

The global order is in a process of transformation. After a brief unipolar moment after the Cold War the order is in a phase of transition and transformation. The United States and its partners encounter counter-power from emerging power coalitions and networks in central rule making multilateral institutions.

Both Brazil and China are engaged in a project of promoting a global order characterized by multi-polarity (Guimarães, 2006; Womack, 2004) and as the two biggest developing country economies from two different world regions Brazil and China are key political actors in this respect. This makes it interesting to analyze how prioritized the strategic partnership between the two countries is.

Their economies have strengthened considerably and China is now the second biggest national economy in the world while Brazil has advanced to become the seventh biggest economy. They are furthermore projected to rise further in the global economic hierarchy as well as India (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2011), another big developing country in the BRICS group that consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. While differing in many ways, these countries share interests in promoting their own economic and political rise in the international system in which they share the identity of having been kept outside the central management of the global order dominated by traditional “Western” powers with the United States as the dominant power for almost a century (Mielniczuk, 2013: 1080; Christensen and Bernal-Meza, 2014).

Brazil and China created a bilateral strategic partnership in 1993. At the outset it focused on bilateral economic relations as well as technological and scientific cooperation, but in the last decade the partnership has taken on a global dimension with a growing emphasis on cooperation through emerging power networks or coalitions. Amongst these the BRICS group has become the most prominent. The combination of an economic strengthening within the world economy of the BRICS and the use of “network power” through the BRICS coalition is a central component in the tendency towards power diffusion in the international system (Cooper, 2013: 981). Through network mechanisms and their bilateral strategic partnership, China and Brazil promote their rise in the global order. In order to work as an efficient tool in the advancement of

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<sup>1</sup> WORK IN PROGRESS – NOT TO BE QUOTED

the rise of the BRICS in the global order the coalition needs to maintain a sufficient degree of cohesion. The present analysis contributes to the exploration of the issue of cohesiveness in the BRICS group by looking into the dynamics of Brazil-China bilateral relations.

The paper analyzes the Strategic Partnership and discusses what characterizes this partnership, how prioritized this partnership is from the Brazilian perspective, and to what extent it has solid foundations or whether it is fragile and may be losing or is likely to lose priority for Brazil in the future as a consequence of frictions in bilateral relations.

In the following, the concept of a “Strategic Partnership” will be discussed and defined. After this, a historically chronological analysis of China-Brazil bilateral relations is developed and finally I present some final reflections on possible future scenarios of the bilateral relationship between China and Brazil.

### **The concept of a “Strategic Partnership”**

Antônio Carlos Lessa argues that the political understanding and use of the concept of a bilateral “strategic partnership” has changed. Initially in the 1970s and 1980s the concept was used with a definite meaning: “*priority political and economic relations*” (Lessa, 2010: 119).

In Lessa’s view there has been a change in the Brazilian understanding of the concept leading over time leading to its ‘vulgarization’ as it is now used more broadly and not only about Brazil’s fundamental partnerships, such as the traditional and long-lasting partnerships with the United States and Argentina and the fundamental, but relatively new, partnership with China. It has come to be used also about a number of new strategic partnerships with countries such as Japan, India, China, South Korea, Venezuela, Paraguay, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Ukraine, Russia, South Africa and a number of other European countries (Lessa, 2010: 122-124). These partnerships are seen to be useful to help Brazil in its strive for a rise in the international system but do not all live up to the older definition and understanding of strategic partnerships as “priority political and economic relations” (Lessa, 2010: 119).

Amado Luiz Cervo (2008) points out that “strategic partnerships”, which are known in the Brazilian use as “*parcerías*” are related to inputs to the national development strategy and constitute bilateral relations that reciprocally contribute to the “national formation” of the two countries of a *parcería* (Cervo, 2012a: 9). In fact, as Hirst and Lima have argued (2006: 21-23) it is a common feature of foreign policy in Brazilian development thinking historically and today that foreign policy should contribute to national development. For this reason it makes sense to expect that Brazil would consider bilateral relations with countries that contribute more to the “national formation” as the most important. In this sense it is unsurprising that Cervo considers China, United States and Argentina to be fundamental *parcerías* as they are Brazil’s three biggest export destinations. Other elements such as investment links and mutual political

relations could be brought in to discuss the relative priority of different *parcerías*. These elements are important when one seeks to characterize a strategic partnership and discuss its degree of priority to Brazil. Cervo (2012a) speaks of fundamental “*parcerías*” for Brazil as those where the partner gives highly significant and extensive inputs to Brazil’s national formation and highlights the *parcerías* with the United States, Argentina and more recently China. This focus on scale seems quite relevant when discussing the issue of the degree of priority Brazil attaches to specific strategic partnerships. However, the scale or degree of importance that another country has to Brazil does not *per se* explain the characteristics of the strategic partnership or *parcería*. The present analysis therefore seeks to take both scale or degree and characteristics of the strategic partnership of China and Brazil

Lessa has attempted to list the most important elements that, in his view, should go into an assessment and characterization of a strategic partnership. He speaks of “testing” a strategic partnership through empirical analysis of these elements, which he lists (Lessa, 2010: 120) as: “*trade and investment flows, the density of political dialogue, the potential for scientific and technological cooperation, the dialogue channels, the convergence of agendas at multilateral forums, and the involvement in joint development projects.*” These elements will be considered in the following chronological historical analysis of China-Brazil relations. The analysis does not attempt to be exhaustive but emphasizes a discussion of relevant changes in the scale/degree and characteristics of the bilateral relations between China and Brazil after 1993 with a particular focus on the period since 2003.

## Analysis

Relations between Brazil and the People’s Republic of China (China hereafter) basically started in 1974 when Brazil recognized the PRC as the legitimate representative of China (Lessa, 2010: 124). To a start the relationship was quite distant and not prioritized by Brazil. This changed over time and in 1993 the two countries agreed on establishing a “strategic partnership”. The two countries had already started collaborating bilaterally on the technological and scientific front in the 1980s on the China-Brazil space satellite program known as CBRIS (Pereira and Castro Neves, 2011: 8) that is often highlighted as the most noteworthy example of scientific and technological collaboration between Brazil and another emerging economy. **(nævn betydning af strategisk teknologi + fortsat udvikling af satellit-teknologi)** The strategic partnership emphasized bilateral the promotion of mutual trade as well as cooperation in science and technology (Lessa, 2010: 124) and in a number of areas that with time came to cover a broad array of areas such as “*energy and mining, finance, agriculture, quality supervision, inspection and quarantine, industry and information technology, space cooperation, science, technology and innovation, and education, among other areas*” (Haibin, 2010: 185). According to Lessa

(2010: 123-124), China became very central in the strategic thinking of Brazilian foreign policy from 1995 and ahead, particularly due to scientific and technological cooperation potential and significant bilateral trade flows. However, in 1995 bilateral trade links were still relatively modest with just 2.6 % of Brazilian exports going to the Chinese market (Brazilian Central Bank, 1997: 124). This share grew modestly to 4.0 % by 2002 (Brazilian Central Bank, 2003: 149). The fact was that Brazil prioritized its traditional partners such as the United States and Europe as well as Mercosur and within this grouping especially Argentina (Christensen, 2012). More than 50 % of Brazilian exports went to the United States and Europe in 2002 (Brazilian Central Bank, 2003: 149).

In 1998 and 1999 Brazil experienced financial and developmental instability. This led to criticism by the Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso of what he termed the “asymmetrical globalization” process and it contributed to the strengthened emphasis on trade diversification and economic cooperation more generally with other major developing countries as well as with South America (Lessa, Farías and Couto, 2009; Christensen, 2013). Furthermore, Brazil entered into conflict with the United States at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999 over patent issues of AIDS medicine leading the United States to accept Brazil’s insistence on treating the AIDS epidemic as a threat to public health that should allow Brazil to use compulsory licensing for the domestic production of medicine (Oliveira, 2005: 58). But, it was not until the change in government in 2003 where the Workers’ Party and President Lula da Silva came to power that a more fundamental shift in Brazilian foreign policy was introduced, inspired as it was by the critical view of the “asymmetrical globalization” process and the desire to strengthen Brazilian autonomy and to promote more multi-polarity (Christensen, 2012). A most central component to this shift was the introduction of South-South cooperation and the establishment of developing country coalitions within multilateral institutions such as the WTO. In the WTO Brazil along with India and South Africa as well as China and a number of other developing countries established the developing country coalition known as the G20 with the aim to promote the liberalization of developed countries’ agricultural sectors (Christensen, 2012; Casanova and Kassum, 2014). Some analysts have criticized this policy for its promotion of neoliberal policies, an orientation also promoted by the dominant Western powers (Andreasson, 2013). However, it should be noted that this policy was intended to promote developing country interests through what Andrew Cooper (2013: 987) has called “network power”. As argued by Raúl Bernal-Meza (2010), Brazilian foreign policy from 2003 was characterized by *realist* thinking with its focus on defending national interests, and using what Cervo (2008) has called *counter-power* in the defense of developing country interests vis-à-vis developed country interests. The result of this in terms of the strategic partnership between Brazil and China was that this relationship started to expand from its initial bilateral economic focus to a more global and political focus.

In 2004 the leaders of the two countries exchanged formal state visits (Pereira and Castro Neves, 2011: 3), and in November of that same year Brazil decided to recognize China as a market

economy and thus to support its full entry into the WTO (Lessa, 2010: 124). This decision reflects the Brazilian strategic thinking on the importance of building “emerging power” coalitions as a way to gain prominence on the international political scene as well as on the importance of further diversifying economic links towards the developing world. It also reflects the Brazilian idea of assuring “autonomy through diversification” (Pereira and Castro Neves, 2011: 1) and that such South-South strategic cooperation could promote greater influence for emerging powers in global affairs and thus lead to greater multi-polarity and cooperation between established powers and emerging powers in terms of world order (Brazilian government, 2012: 30).

Although China supported the G20 at the WTO on the specific issue of international trade rules in the agricultural area, China did not support Brazil’s attempt to widen out the scope of coordination within the WTO negotiations towards industrial issues (Pereira and Castro-Neves, 2011: 8) and in the political-strategic dimension China did not prioritize South-South cooperation and establishment of a counter-power position to the extent that Brazil did. According to Daniel Flesmes (2010: 149-151) this was due to China’s prioritization of its bilateral relations with the United States.

The recognition of China as a market economy was a controversial decision inside Brazil and led to some criticisms from academics and in Brazilian society. Paulo Roberto Almeida (2010), a prominent foreign policy scholar with links to the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, the *Itamaraty*, found that Brazil’s China policy was bizarre. He argued that China was the main beneficiary of mutual relations. Similarly, the industrial employer interest organization Fiesp was against the recognition of China as a market economy and defended protectionist measures against the rising imports of Chinese manufacturing products and the consequent higher competitive pressure faced by the Brazilian industrial sector (Pereira and Castro Neves, 2011: 5-6). Brazil was hopeful that China would support Brazil’s ambition to gain a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, but was disappointed by China’s unwillingness to support such a reform in 2005, a position that has not been contradicted until the present. Pereira and Castro Neves argue that China mainly sees Brazil as a source of natural resources and not so much as a partner in a strategic sense (2011: 9). In the meantime, China has become a more significant source of foreign direct investments in Brazil starting in 2010 (Oviedo, 2012: 123) and by 2010 China became the biggest export destination for Brazil, although the vast majority of Brazilian exports to China derive from a few categories of natural sources, namely soy, iron ore and oil (Oviedo, 2012; Peters, 2012). In 2011 16 % of Brazilian exports went to China with the United States and Argentina as significantly smaller export destinations in the second and third rank (BCB, 2013: 105)

Sectors such as energy, minerals and agri-business and specific companies within these sectors in Brazil, however, gained from the fluid relations with China in a context of a massive improvement in Brazil’s terms of trade with China due to strong rises in international prices of primary goods (Xing and Christensen, 2012: 42), whereas China’s exports were strongly

dominated by manufacturing exports (Xing and Christensen, 2012). Bilateral trade thus corresponded to a North-South pattern with China taking the role as the North (Oviedo, 2012: 117; Pereira and Castro Neves, 2011: 4). However, official rhetoric described the relationship between the two countries as a relationship between equals (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 2009) and was dominantly treated in this way in the academic community, probably due to the fact that China and Brazil were working cooperatively on the international political scene through different coalitions and networks such as the BRICS, the BASICs (in climate negotiations) and in the G20 at the WTO (Casanova and Kassum, 2014). Eduardo Daniel Oviedo explicitly characterized the political strategic relationship between Brazil and China as a relationship following a North-North pattern, whereas the political relationship between China and the rest of Latin America followed a North-South pattern (Oviedo, 2012: 117). This argument builds on the extensive element of network efforts of Brazil and China within emerging power networks. Nevertheless, it is still clear that different asymmetries exist between China and Brazil. In the economic dimension the characteristics of bilateral relations is that China takes the role of the North exporting mainly manufacturing products while Brazil exports natural resources as well as it invests much more extensively in Brazil than Brazil invests in China. In the political dimension China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council which Brazil is not, and China has not clearly supported Brazil's accession to this status (Haibin, 2010, Haibin, 2012).

The competitive pressures from China in the manufacturing sector led Brazil to introduce a large number of anti-dumping investigations against China within the WTO during the 2000s, and in some cases China offered Brazil to show voluntary export restraint (Xing and Christensen, 2012: 44). However, trade patterns have become increasingly asymmetrical with China exporting goods with high value added and Brazil on the other hand specializing increasingly in primary products (Pereira and Castro Neves, 2011: 4). The tendency was exacerbated by the international financial crisis that broke up in 2008 with its epicenter in the United States, and in 2010 Brazil's finance minister Guido Mantega started talking about the existence of an international "currency war" that impacted on trade patterns, criticizing the loose monetary policies of the United States and the Chinese exchange rate policy that sought to maintain a competitive Chinese currency (Christensen, 2013; Casanova and Kassum, 2014).

According to Niu Haibin (2010: 191), however, the international financial crisis led to a Chinese reconsideration of China's strong emphasis on their relations with the United States and to an upgrading of the importance attached to Brazil and other developing countries.

From the perspective of Brazil, China was becoming an increasingly important partner both in terms of fostering Brazilian economic development and for enhancing Brazil's international political influence. In 2010, China became Brazil's biggest trading partner (Xing and Christensen, 2012) and China's foreign direct investments in Brazil increased explosively from a very low level until 2009 to substantial investments of around 10 billion US \$ in 2010 (Oviedo, 2012: 123) with investments concentrated in natural resources such as energy, minerals, land as

well as infrastructure and to a lesser extent manufacturing investments. The Chinese focus on Brazil as a provider of natural resources resembles China's approach to Latin America as a whole as well as its approach to Africa. At the same time investments in manufacturing reflect a growing Chinese interest in diversifying its markets towards expanding markets in the developing world. The occurrence of the international financial crisis which hit the developed world hard explains China's growing interest in this sort of diversification. What is noteworthy here is that the economic relationship between China and the developing world including its economic relationship to Brazil follows the traditional North-South pattern where China takes on the role of the capital exporting country that specialized in manufacturing exports while the role of its developing country partners is to provide natural resources to China.

Brazil could not really be satisfied with this pattern in bilateral economic relations in the long term, but in the short term the substantial exports to China helped Brazil stabilize its current account and to strengthen economically (Christensen, 2013b). With regards to the international political dimension China was increasingly important for strengthening Brazil's weight on the international political scene through the different networks with China and other emerging powers. This tendency was significantly strengthened in the aftermath of the international financial crisis which paved the way for the rise in importance of the financial G20, an informal grouping of the biggest developed and developing economies in the world, in informal talks on global economic governance issues. The BRIC network established itself as a coalition within the G20 and held its first high level presidential summit in Russia in 2009 (Christensen, 2013). In 2009 China and Brazil coordinated positions with India and South Africa in a new grouping, the BASIC countries, in the negotiations on global climate change policies during COP 15 in Copenhagen. In both cases, the network coordination carried out in these negotiations increased the centrality and negotiating power of these groupings (Casanova and Cassum, 2014). Brazil was thus increasingly prioritizing global political networks and links with big extra-regional countries and developing countries more generally. Amongst these China was a pivotal partner. This was reflected in the decision by the two governments to strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership still further. In 2010, President Lula and China's leader Hu Jintao signed the "Joint Action Plan Brazil-China 2010-2014" in Brasília. This plan focused both on enhancing bilateral cooperation and dialogue as well as to cooperate on the broadest multilateral issues such as *"arms control and climate change, coordination in UN, WTO, and G20, support of cooperation mechanisms for major developing countries, need to safeguard the rights and interests of developing countries"* etc. (Haibin, 2010: 186).

A number of achievements and results of the strengthened network cooperation of emerging powers in the time after this can be observed both with regard to BRICS countries and their mutual cooperation as well as in their coordination of policy positions in multilateral arenas for negotiation. In terms of the mutual cooperation of BRICS countries, mechanisms were set up to foster cooperation between BRICS development banks, while arrangements for trade with own currencies was made through BRICS central banks thereby reducing the role of US \$ for mutual trade (Christensen, 2013; Casanova and Kassum, 2014). At the level of coordination of policy positions in multilateral negotiation arenas the BRICS cooperated on a policy of quota reform within the IMF and on broad governance forms within this institution. In terms of quota reform BRICS were supported by the US while Russia was a loser of reforms (Lima and Castelán, 2011). Another result can be observed in negotiations in 2010 over rules for setting caps on allowed accumulation of foreign reserves in central banks, a policy supported by the developed countries led by the United States and wanting to “rebalance” international trade balances. However, the BRICS led by China resisted this policy and argued against such rules and the maintenance of national autonomy in exchange policies noting the important stabilizing factor reserve accumulation had proved for these countries after prior financial crises and during the international financial crisis. At the same time, the BRICS insisted on equal treatment between different types of countries from the IMF. This position built on the view that the EU countries experiencing financial crisis situations should not be treated differently by the IMF than developing countries should (Lima and Castelán, 2011). In other words the same strict financial criteria would apply in all world regions. Some analysts have criticized the big developing countries within the BRICS for supporting neoliberal policies joining ranks with “neo-imperialism” or “neo-colonialism” giving as examples the liberal policies defended in international trade talks for the agricultural sector and the policies defended at the IMF as well as their individual bilateral policies towards African countries (Bond, 2013; Andreasson, 2013; Ayers, 2013). However, with regard to the BRICS position on lending rules at the IMF, Brazil has criticized the EU itself for its fiscally orthodox treatment of the consequences of the international financial crisis within the South of the EU (Casanova and Kassum, 2014) implying that the stagnation and growing unemployment in a number of Southern European EU countries is largely an EU internal problem. At the BRICS Summit in 2012, the creation of a BRICS Development Bank was discussed. The purpose is to create an alternative or supplementary



financing mechanism for intra-BRICS investments as well as for investments in other developing countries, notably in African infrastructure development (Christensen, 2013). This plan still has to be implemented to show real life results, but it is an example of the growing financial muscle and relevance of emerging powers that is supported by China and Brazil in their attempt to promote a multi-polar and more balanced world order.

In recent years the BRICS group has attempted to coordinate positions in the realm of international security issues to some extent at least. The BRICS countries were negative towards the policy of NATO countries towards Libya with their focus on political regime change and the removal of Libya's dictator Muamar Khadafi from power. The experience of how the focus of the NATO countries in the Libya case went from supporting a no-fly zone in order to protect civilians from atrocities committed by the regime to promoting regime change instead arguably led Brazil to stress non-intervention and the negotiation path in the context of the Syrian civil war. According to Cervo (2010: 9 and 2012b: 42-44) there are two competing models for dealing with humanitarian crises provoked by domestic political instability involving armed conflict. One is NATO's inclination to use violence and armed intervention while the other is the Brazilian/Chinese approach focused on non-intervention and a strong commitment to promote dialogue between the actors involved in armed civil strife in order to find a solution through diplomacy. In the view of Cervo the BRICS group has had successful results from its collaboration and coordination in the security dimension of the international order as well as in the case of IMF quota reform. However, China and Brazil do not always agree in the dimension of international security. One example is the case involving Iran's nuclear policy in which Brazil and Turkey sought to broker a deal through diplomatic means in 2010. However, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council decided on sanctions against Iran instead before exhausting the diplomatic path to a negotiated agreement as Brazil and Turkey favored (Christensen, 2013). This could be seen as an example where China preferred to cooperate "responsibly" with the United States and the other Security Council members. Another example of a lack of Chinese support for the Brazilian position in the security dimension involved Brazil's promotion of an extension of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm to include the principle of Responsibility while Protecting (RwP) which Brazil argued for at the UN in 2011 based on its disagreement with the way R2P and humanitarian military intervention was carried out in practice in cases such as Libya. The central component of RwP is not a principled

rejection of humanitarian military intervention but instead a defense of the need for the intervening parties to strengthen efforts to promote the conditions for peaceful co-existence in the aftermath of a military intervention. However, also in this case China did not support Brazil's efforts to introduce the RWP principle (Casanova and Kassum, 2014).

These examples suggest that the BRICS are more able to coordinate policy views in the dimension of global economic governance than in the dimension of international security. At the same time it should be stressed that Brazil and China have their own national security concerns in their geographical neighborhoods. When it comes to these core national interests the two countries arguably do not form a strategic cooperation. Brazil is particularly concerned with defense and security issues in the South Atlantic, Western Africa and South America. China does not get involved in these issues. It has been argued that this is due to China's preference for not challenging the United States in its "sphere of influence". Similarly, Brazil does not seem involved in the issues pertaining to defense and security matters in the South China Sea that is of vital interest to China and where China is pursuing policies that are controversial in the eyes of certain of its regional neighbors as well as in the eyes of the US government that has shifted its main perception of security threats towards the Pacific due to worries of Chinese ambitions and actions in the South China Sea.

In the economic dimension emerging power networks such as BRICS and BASIC, both including Brazil and China seem much more able to coordinate positions in terms of global economic governance than they are at coordinating positions on security issues. However, it should not be forgotten that the situation is different when it comes to bilateral economic relations. At this level there is significant cooperation as well in terms of cooperation on knowledge and technology in a variety of areas or sectors, and the central banks and development banks of the two countries have cooperated significantly in recent years. Nevertheless, the economic dimension is arguably mostly characterized by competition at the bilateral level, and from a Brazilian perspective China is to be feared both due to issues of competition in the Brazilian market as well as in Third markets such as in Latin American markets and in the US market. Similarly, some worries have arisen regarding Chinese purchase of land in Brazil, i.e. the Chinese policy of "land grabbing" also pursued in other regions such as Africa as a way for China to secure provisions of food and feed. To some extent, Brazilian

worries related to the difference in regime form in the two countries as Brazil worries about the heavy hand of the Chinese state behind its approach to the market (Pereira and Castro Neves, 2011: 6). In other words, Brazil does not seem completely comfortable with China in the economic dimension, something that is also evident from the extensive use of anti-dumping investigations carried out by Brazil at the WTO and most extensively against Chinese products (Xing and Christensen, 2012). In 2011, Brazil's new President Dilma Rousseff expressed the view that the Brazil-China strategic partnership was maturing and that there was much potential for promoting mutual benefit (chinadaily, 2011) reflecting the win-win argument and rhetoric of the Chinese diplomacy in the area of South-South cooperation. However, at the same time the criticism inside Brazil of a strongly asymmetrical trade pattern between the two countries has continued due to worries of negative impact on Brazilian manufacturing and the difficulty of the Brazilian manufacturing sector to enter into the Chinese market. On its side China has criticized Brazil for raising taxes against Chinese-made cars and raising import barriers against different Chinese manufacturing products such as shoes, toys and men's suits (reuters, 2012). At the same time, however, bilateral talks continue and issues of cooperation in science and technology are being pursued with a view of strengthening both country economies in this strategic area but also of giving more space for Brazilian manufacturing exports (reuters, 2012).

### **Final reflections**

As a whole, the trends towards the greater use of BRICS coordination and network power seem to suggest an increased prioritization by Brazil as well as by China of the bilateral strategic partnership between the two countries. However, as we have seen, the relationship is not problem-free, and some analysts are not convinced by the rosy picture painted by the official rhetoric from the two governments. Analysts differ on their interpretation on the degree of priority that Brazil attaches to the strategic partnership with China.

Some analysts (Cervo, 2012; Christensen, 2013) argue that Brazil prioritizes its relationship with other emerging powers, particularly the BRICS, and that the relationship with China is of pivotal importance.

Raúl Bernal-Meza (2014) on the other hand, argues that problematic aspects of the bilateral trade relations as well as disappointment on the Brazilian side of the perceived lack of Chinese support of Brazil on the international political scene means that the Rousseff government is becoming increasingly skeptical of its relationship with China and turning more towards its own region, South America and Latin America. The win-win rhetoric of China is perceived by some to distort the reality of a relationship that is asymmetrical and particularly benefits Chinese economic and political interests. José Luis Fiori, on his part is skeptical of the long term prospects of the BRICS cooperation in terms of its durability in the area of geopolitics. He argues (2013: 47) that, in the geopolitics between different nations, economic similarities and ideological affinity can only function effectively when they coincide with the necessities of the countries from the perspective and their security. In his view, the differences that exist between BRICS countries in terms of their characteristics and interests mean that they will not be able to play an important long-term geopolitical role.

It is difficult to come up with a definite interpretation regarding the positions within this debate as both sides have some merit. Nevertheless, in my view the bilateral strategic partnership between China and Brazil has become increasingly comprehensive and profound despite the fact that there are frictions between the two countries related to their asymmetrical trade relations and despite the fact that the two countries do not agree on all aspects of international security issues and global economic governance. Obviously this study cannot claim to be conclusive in any way in any way in the discussion of the degree of priority attached to the bilateral relationship Brazil has to China as I have not compared it to Brazil's relationships to other countries and regions. The study is rather exploratory in character and needs further development on a number of issues involved in the bilateral relations. The view I would defend, though, is that Brazil's foreign policy and international relations broadly speaking can be thought of as following a pattern of "variable geometry" meaning that Brazil has varying relationships in different areas of international relations with different countries. By pursuing a broad and rather complex agenda, Brazil seeks to promote the national interest understood especially as national economic development and stronger international political influence. Within this broad and complex agenda, Brazil's relations with China have a high degree of priority in spite of certain tensions and differences of interest.