Editor's note: *Amity between the people holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. China Daily will come out with a series of stories highlighting Chinese cities' special connections with sister cities, mutual understanding, trust and friendship between peoples of different countries and cultural backgrounds, and shining light on "city diplomacy".*

BEIJING'S SISTER-CITY LINKS GET RIO BOOST

China, Brazil ride on waves of possibilities as they mark 50 years of diplomatic ties





Cultural exchanges enrich heritage

Brazil's vibrant, multicultural heritage is enriched by historical connections with China.

In the early 19th century, a group of Chinese tea farmers brought tea seeds and saplings to Brazil, aiming to grow tea and introduce cultivation techniques. The planting site at the time was located within what is now the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Garden, where their efforts became a symbol of China-Brazil friendship, rooted deeply in Brazilian soil.

Today, Rio de Janeiro honors these early Chinese immigrants through lasting tributes.

The Vista Chinesa in Tijuca National Park, which was built in the early 1900s, is a Chinese-style pagoda-like structure offering breathtaking views of the city and standing as a permanent homage to those first tea farmers.

A plaque unveiled on Aug 15, 2018, in the Rio Botanical Garden commemorates the bicentennial of Chinese immigration. The plaque reads: "In 1812, the first Chinese immigrants to Brazil planted tea trees here, marking a testament to China-Brazil friendship."

This unveiling was part of the events celebrating Brazil's first Chinese Immigration Day, aligning with the anniversary of China and Brazil establishing diplomatic ties in 1974.

Rio de Janeiro's official recognition of this friendship continues through annual observances.

In 2018, the Rio de Janeiro State designated Aug 8 as China-Rio de Janeiro Friendship Day.

In 2022, the city of Rio established Sept 28, widely observed as Confucius' birthday, as Mandarin Day, honoring the growing cultural exchange between both countries.

In Rio de Janeiro State, the Spring Festival, or Chinese New Year, is recognized as an official holiday.

SHAO XINYING



Households hail Samba soccer stars

In Brazil, soccer is more than just a game; it's a way of life, a cultural emblem and a quasi-faith. All it takes is a few people, an open space and a simple ball to create a game.

This enthusiasm for the Brazilian team, also known as the Samba Stars, is also shared by Chinese fans. The king of Brazil's legendary players is the late Edson Arantes do Nascimento, better known as Pele, whose expertise led his country to three World Cup titles in 1958, 1962 and 1970, earning him wide admiration throughout China and indeed the world. Another Brazilian favorite among Chinese soccer fans is Kaka, whose skills won him the 2007 Ballon d'Or. Other Brazilian players who are household names in China include Neymar, Ronaldo and Ronaldinho.

Brazil's national team, nicknamed Five-Star Brazil for its five World Cup wins, holds a special place in the hearts of Chinese fans. Zhang Zhang, a Beijing tourist guide, said, "We've always had a deep affection for Five-Star Brazil. To us, they represent more than just passion and skill."

The 1970 Brazil team is often considered to be the greatest soccer team in history.

CR Flamengo, a popular club in Rio de Janeiro, has a large fan base and connects with Chinese soccer fans through an official Weibo account. Renato Augusto, a Brazilian footballer, spent five years with Beijing Guoan and now plays for Rio's Fluminense Football Club, further strengthening the strong bond between Chinese and Brazilian fans.

SHAO XINYING





Children practice Brazilian jiu-jitsu at the Nova Uniao Beijing gym. SHAO XINYING / CHINA DAILY

By SHAO XINYING and **DU JUAN**

Eliandro Libania, a Brazilian jiu-jitsu black belt coach, has found a unique bond with Beijing, where he has lived for the past five years.

"I feel comfortable here. Beijing is my favorite Chinese city," said Libania, who was born in Rio de Janeiro. "I decided to stay because I have great friends and supportive students. I love my job, and it's rewarding to see my students grow and gain confidence."

Libania, who teaches at Nova Uniao Beijing, which draws its name from a well-known martial arts team in Rio de Janeiro, said the key to jiu-jitsu is building confidence. "Like kung fu, it's about respect. Many Brazilians know kung fu, thanks to figures such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan."

Zhang Zhang, a Beijing resident, said he has learned a great deal from Libania. "We see learning and practicing together as a great opportunity to get to know one another better."

In fact, the team feels like a family, said Zhang, now a purple belt Brazilian jiu-jitsu instructor.

"When I first started jiu-jitsu six years ago, it was still niche, but now it has a strong foundation, especially among young people. After practicing jiu-jitsu I've developed a desire to visit Brazil one day to experience its beaches, the ocean, and, of course, the passionate samba dancers," Zhang said. "Beijing and Rio may be far apart, but we're united by shared cultural ties."

Beijing and Rio became sister cities in 1986, and over the years that partnership seems only to have grown stronger.

Both cities have hosted the Summer Olympics — Beijing in 2008 and Rio in 2016 — and the Games spirit is embedded in both cities. To celebrate three decades of sisterhood ties, the Rio Olympic emblem was lit at the National Stadium in Beijing on Aug 4, 2016, the eve of the opening of the Rio Games.

"The Olympic Games were an opportunity for both cities to showcase their strengths," said Renan Ferreirinha, secretary of education of Rio de Janeiro, who paid a visit to Beijing earlier this year.

"I think Beijing is where humanity has created some of the most beautiful things on earth, and with Rio nature has gifted us with the most beautiful city in the world."

A group of architecture students from Tsinghua University recently went on an educational tour to Brazil, including Rio de Janeiro, where they met local professors and students. "Rio, nestled between mountains and the sea, is a cityscape shaped by nature," said Yue Kaijian, the group's student counselor. "We were amazed by its beauty."

In 2012, Rio's distinctive landscape earned UNESCO recognition and was inscribed on the World Heritage List under the title "Rio de Janeiro: Carioca Landscapes between the Mountain and the Sea". The term Carioca is used to refer to anything related to the city of Rio. Similarly, Beijing's Forbidden City, an imperial palace complex, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987.

"What impressed me most was the rich history and culture that Beijing carries," said Marcia Melchior, coordinator and artistic director of the Copacabana Fort Orchestra, named after the Copacabana Fort in Rio de Janeiro.

Warmth, hospitality

"Every place we visited, from the Forbidden City to the Great Wall, conveyed a sense of grandeur and tradition that was deeply inspiring. What truly marked this experience was the warmth and hospitality we encountered at each performance and meeting," Melchior said.

The orchestra, made up largely of young musicians from low-income families, was invited to Beijing to perform at a reception event at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Brazil.

They also had a chance to perform with students of Peking University and Beijing Technology and Business University.

Michelly Gondim, one of three singers with the orchestra, said the trip fostered deep friendships and cultural appreciation.

"It's an incredible opportunity to immerse ourselves in a new culture. Everyone is thrilled to be part of it."

Having learned to sing some Chinese songs, such as *Yue Liang Dai Biao Wo De Xin* (The Moon Represents My Heart) and *Wo Ai Ni, Zhong Guo* (I Love You, China), Gondim said she made many Chinese friends during the trip and enjoyed the tour.

With some orchestra members now singing in Chinese, "we feel very proud", Melchior said, adding that it has not only expanded their repertoire but also opened new doors for artistic exchange.

Melchior, who is also president of the Riomont Cultural Center, an organization dedicated to spreading Chinese culture in Brazil, said: "I started by introducing Chinese music into the orchestra, allowing members to connect with Chinese language and culture. This exposure deepened as our collaboration with Chinese companies and institutions expanded."



The Copacabana Fort Orchestra performs at an event marking 50 years of China-Brazil ties in Rio in August. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Gondim said her experience with the orchestra has been invaluable for her university studies in vocal performance and her path as a music teacher. "I'm grateful for it," she said.

Melchior talked of the impact of the orchestra on young musicians from low-income families. "We have many inspiring stories of musicians whose lives have been transformed," she said. "Many have been accepted into prestigious institutions as musicians, and for those who don't pursue a musical career, the discipline and dedication carry over, leading to professional success in other fields.

"These journeys show how music can break down barriers and open new possibilities for the future."

The orchestra, in recognition of its artistic achievements, was recently designated an intangible cultural heritage of the Rio de Janeiro State.

"We're very happy with this recognition," Melchior said. "Without the support of CNOOC Brazil, we would not have come this far."

She was referring to China National Offshore Oil Corporation, whose president in Brazil, Huang Yehua, said supporting the Copacabana Fort Orchestra and participating in other community projects are integral to the company's commitment to engaging with local society and sharing the benefits of development.

"Through musical traditions, histories, culture, and stories of both China and Brazil, we can establish a lasting and solid bond for economic exchange between our two nations," Huang said.

The orchestra will adopt the name "Sound of the Sea" soon, symbolizing the harmony of cultures across a vast ocean of friendship between the two countries, Huang added.

Huang is a recipient of the Tiradentes Medal, the highest honor of Rio de Janeiro State, and has had honorary citizenship of Rio de Janeiro city bestowed on him.

"We have long considered ourselves Cariocas and seen Rio as our second home in this land filled with passion," Huang said, adding that these honors reflect the deep affection of and the high recognition from the people of Rio for Chinese companies such as CNOOC.

Technical expertise

"Leveraging CNOOC's technical expertise, we will work closely with Brazilian businesses and society, injecting new vitality into China-Brazil cooperation."

Since CNOOC entered Brazil in 2013, the Beijing-headquartered company has invested nearly $8 billion in the country, establishing close economic ties with Brazil. After a decade of growth, the company has become the fifth-largest oil producer in Brazil. It has implemented a range of localization initiatives to create growth opportunities and career paths for local employees, Huang said.

"China and Brazil enjoy strong commercial ties, backed by the complementarity of their economies," said Alana Camoca, a professor of political science and international relations at the Rio de Janeiro State University.

One of the key sectors benefiting from growing bilateral collaboration is mining, with Chinese demand for iron ore driving important exports from Brazil. Vale, a multinational corporation headquartered in Rio de Janeiro, has been at the forefront of this trade.



Martial arts performers showcase skills at an event celebrating 50 years of China-Brazil ties in Rio in August. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Vale's first iron ore shipment to China was delivered in 1973, "one year before diplomatic relations between Brazil and China were established", said Xie Xue, president of Vale China.

Since 2014, China has accounted for more than half of Vale's iron ore exports, solidifying its role as the company's primary export destination and as a cornerstone of Vale's growth and sustainability efforts, Xie said.

She noted the Sol do Cerrado solar energy park in Brazil's Minas Gerais State as an example of this collaboration, where photovoltaic modules and spare parts supplied by the Chinese solar panel manufacturer JinkoSolar helped Vale achieve total renewable electricity consumption in Brazil in 2023, two years ahead of schedule.

Since 2009, China has been Brazil's largest trading partner and a key source of foreign investment, and Brazil has emerged as China's largest trading partner in Latin America.

This year's 50th anniversary has been marked by vibrant celebrations in both countries, including light shows on Aug 15 at the Juyongguan section of the Great Wall in Beijing, illuminated with the flags of China and Brazil, and Rio's Lapa Arches, glowing in red.

Brazil was the guest of honor at the Beijing International Film Festival in April, where four Brazilian films showcasing the country's cultural diversity were featured. The Chinese Film Festival in Brazil opened in Rio on Nov 4, with nine Chinese films screened.

"Beijing-Rio city diplomacy plays a vital role in strengthening the ties between China and Brazil," Camoca said. "Increased interactions between cities facilitate the proliferation of trade opportunities and investment prospects in both Brazil and China."

It is hoped that both cities and countries will continue to build stronger connections, she said.

"Rio de Janeiro is one of Beijing's most important sister cities in Latin America. Since their partnership began almost four decades ago, the two cities have worked together in areas such as trade, culture, and the Olympics," said Chen Yang, director of the Pacific Rim Affairs Division of the Foreign Affairs Office of the People's Government of Beijing Municipality.

"Standing on the new milestone of China-Brazil 50 years of relations, we will continue to strengthen the friendship between the two cities, fostering greater fruits in their cooperation," Chen said.

Libania, the jiu-jitsu coach, said he plans to continue living and teaching in Beijing, and embracing the city's dynamism. He sees it as a place of opportunities and personal growth, both for himself and his students.

"I want to keep my name here and build my team," Libania added.

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Close bonds between China and Brazil, and the passion for Chinese culture are celebrated through events held in Brazil. PHOTOS BY WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA, AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Watch the video by scanning the code.

Signature touch of films mesmerizes audience

By SHAO XINYING and **DU JUAN**

As fans eagerly lined up for autographs, the Brazilian film director Carlos Saldanha made each moment memorable by adding a personal touch: sketching the beloved parrot from his animated film *Rio* alongside every signature.

On the opening night of the Brazilian Film Week, Saldanha took the stage to stress how the carefully selected Brazilian films offered a unique opportunity for Chinese audiences to explore Brazil at the Beijing International Film Festival.

Brazil was honored as guest of honor for the festival, held in April, as China and Brazil celebrate 50 years of diplomatic ties this year, and Saldanha was invited to serve as a juror for the Tiantan Award.

"The beauty of cinema lies in its ability to enchant us with visual spectacle and move us with emotional narratives," said Saldanha, who also directed the *Ice Age* series. "It is an honor to participate in any institution that celebrates this medium, especially those showcasing the beauty of Brazilian films."

The Brazilian Film Week was "an exciting opportunity" to showcase the country's cinematic works, with a diverse selection of films, which drew "an enthusiastic response" from Chinese audiences, said Cui Yan, executive deputy director of the Beijing International Film Festival organizing committee.

The opening film of the week, *Retratos Fantasmas* (Pictures of Ghosts), instantly captured the audience's imagination, with the theater filled to capacity. The film's co-producer, who was present, expressed his delight at how warmly the audience received the film, Cui said.

Saldanha talked of his love for Beijing, saying: "I always find something new to love in any trip to Beijing, from its intimate layers to its grand landscapes, all blending history and modernity. While there are many differences between Beijing and Rio, they share an energy unique to cities with rich cultural heritage, which are always magical settings for storytelling."

In the film *Rio*, Saldanha expresses his love for his hometown, infusing vibrant scenes and energetic music to introduce the world to Brazilian culture. One notable element is the inclusion of the Vista Chinesa, a beautiful Chinese pavilion in the city's Tijuca National Park, built in the early 1900s in tribute to Chinese immigrants to the country.

Saldanha also praised the richness of Chinese cinema, citing *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as a personal favorite. "China has a long record of remarkable films," Saldanha said, adding that Chinese filmmaking continues to thrive and exert its influence, with recent works such as *Lost in the Stars* and *Brief History of a Family*, enriching global cinema.

"My fellow Brazilian filmmakers and I have much to learn from our Chinese counterparts and vice versa," Saldanha said. "Regardless of our backgrounds, we should all strive to grow and enhance our craft by immersing ourselves in innovative, diverse storytelling."

As part of cultural exchange, Chinese movies hit big screens in Brazil when the China Film Festival in Brazil opened in Rio de Janeiro earlier this month, featuring a selection of nine Chinese films including the crime drama *Endless Journey* and the comedy *YOLO*, an acronym for you only live once.

In recent years, China and Brazil have bolstered their film collaboration, highlighted by a 2017 coproduction film agreement between the two countries and a collaboration deal signed in April by the Beijing International Film Festival and the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival.

"Despite the differences in culture and background between China and Brazil, the deep exploration of human nature and emotional expression in films resonate universally," Cui said.

With both countries emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural dialogue, Saldanha expressed his excitement about future collaboration between Brazilian and Chinese filmmakers.

"Movies can bridge cultures by speaking to the universal human experience. I would be thrilled to collaborate with any Chinese filmmaker passionate about creating something that resonates not only with our countries but with audiences worldwide," Saldanha said.



Visitors check posters of Chinese films at a cinema in Rio de Janeiro on Nov 4. The Chinese Film Festival was held from Nov 4 to 8 to promote the mutual understanding between Chinese and Brazilian people. WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA

Connections that bind pass through classrooms

By SHAO XINYING

Every Monday morning, students at the Rio Chinese International School gather on the school field to sing the national anthems of China and Brazil as well as the school song, watching as flags are raised.

Celine Yang Camargo, a seventh-grade student, said the school's cultural activities set it apart from other schools.

"Here I get to take part in Chinese cultural activities such as making mooncakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival and preparing *zongzi* (sticky rice treats) for the Dragon Boat Festival. I find them very intriguing," Celine said.

Her favorite poem is *Yong E* (Ode to the Goose), she said, a classical Chinese piece by the Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Luo Binwang.

"It's fun learning about animals through poetry," Celine said.

Yuan Aiping, chief principal of the school, said: "Our school emphasizes both language and culture, bringing together teachers and students during traditional Chinese festivals. We aim to offer first-class Chinese education in Brazil, preparing students with strong intercultural skills."



A teacher introduces tea culture to students at the Rio Chinese International School. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 2022, the city of Rio de Janeiro declared Sept 28, widely observed as Confucius' birthday, as Mandarin Day, recognizing the significance of the Chinese language.

The Rio Chinese International School, the first full-time Chinese school in Latin America, offers a standardized Chinese curriculum.

"The school is gaining more popularity. Even Brazilian federal deputies send their children to our school because of our cultural focus, long-term planning, and personalized teaching," said Yuan, who has over 40 years of experience as an educator.

"They believe that learning Chinese will make them more competitive, given China's importance as an economic partner," Yuan said.

Zheng Xiamao, the school's chairman, said: "As these students engage with Chinese culture, they contribute to the dialogue between our two countries, reinforcing the importance of cross-cultural communication in a globalized world."

Last year, Rio's public schools introduced Chinese-language programs. "Education is the key to transforming lives," said Renan Ferreirinha, the city's education secretary. "We've just inaugurated the first two public bilingual schools with Mandarin." Learning Chinese opens up opportunities, encouraging students to gain a better understanding of China, he said.

In visiting Beijing this year, Ferreirinha said, he gained a deeper understanding of the educational ties between the two countries.

Impressive trip

The visit to Beijing Foreign Studies University was "impressive", he said. "It was very important for advancing these new partnerships and showing that we're eager for more."

Ferreirinha hopes more Chinese will study Brazilian Portuguese because the majority of the Portuguese speakers in the world are Brazilians, he said.

Wang Yifan, a student at Beijing Foreign Studies University who has been learning Portuguese for almost eight years, said, "I first learned about Brazil in high school, where it was described as a melting pot of cultures, and that got me curious enough to decide to study Portuguese."

Ye Zhiliang, a professor in Portuguese studies at the university who has compiled many textbooks on the language, said: "We arouse students' interests by integrating interesting topics in our curriculum, including chapters focused on topics related to Brazil, such as soccer, which is highly important to Brazilians."

Wang said he finds Portuguese grammar particularly intriguing, comparing its varied verb conjugations, tenses and voices to a series of mini-games.

"It's like choosing the right game mode based on context, which is challenging and fun," Wang said.



Students and parents make *zongzi* at the school. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Learning Portuguese allows students to engage with Brazil's society, culture, politics and economy, Ye said.

"Mastering the language helps facilitate effective communication with Brazilians."

In 2016, Beijing Foreign Studies University established its Brazil alumni association in Rio, reflecting the ties between the two countries.

"Rio, once Brazil's capital, is rich in history, with many buildings and traces of the past," Ye said. "The city also boasts a vibrant cultural atmosphere, with important universities, research institutions and artistic organizations — somewhat like Beijing."

Wang, who has taken part in two exchange programs in Brazil, said: "The bond with Brazil will forever endure."