

Unpuzzling the Immigration Process for Taiwanese and Chinese Community in Brazil

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Abstract

Immigration has significantly impacted nations' relationships, political, cultural, and economic. Overseas Chinese people, also known as overseas Chinese, have contributed to population mobility across continents, including China, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas. This study aims to analyse the differences of overseas Chinese in Brazil, focusing on Taiwanese nationality and first-generation immigrants. The research aims to understand the dynamic of overseas Chinese in Brazil, including their interactions with local culture, jobs, and the impact on future generations. Also, through deepening into the subject of the integration of overseas Chinese in the Brazilian society, considering factors like labour division, language proficiency, and purchasing power. The expected results are to identify settlement and living styles of overseas Chinese immigrants to Brazil and their first Brazilian-born generation, including Chinese and Taiwanese ethnicities, and their connection to their parents' homeland, and later develop provide practical information to build stronger relationship bond between the nations and cultures.

Keywords: Overseas Chinese, Community, Brazil, Culture, Taiwan

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Introduction

Immigration across nations and continent has had a great impact on how nations develop relationships, whether political, cultural, or economic. It is not possible to date when the first group of people started immigrating, however history has shown an increase of population mobility crossing international borders over the centuries, and more drastically crossing continents in pursuit of improvement of life. Finding out the real reason that encouraged people to immigrate is far more complex to unpuzzle than simply listing a couple of hypotheses to reason their decision that could shape the generations to come in the chosen land to make their new home. To solve this puzzle, in this research the unit of analysis will be in meso level of the Taiwanese community in Brazil.

The Chinese immigration, known as overseas Chinese people, has contributed to the impact of population mobility as a whole in every continent from China to Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas. This study aims to analyse the overseas Chinese as an ethnicity and the differences of the overseas Chinese community in different geographic areas. More precisely, there will be a closer look to the overseas Chinese people of Taiwanese nationality in Brazil in comparison to overseas Chinese first generation born in Brazil after their immigration process.

Towards the conclusion of this research, I aspire to find more concrete evidence to solve to the puzzle of how Taiwanese overseas Chinese integrate with the Brazilian dynamic in an economic and cultural matter combined with their means are to settle in Brazil and the differences among the communities under the Chinese ethnicity.

The objective of this research is to assess the differences of overseas Chinese, of both Chinese and Taiwanese nationality in Brazil as immigrants and as first generation of overseas Chinese born in Brazil, to understand the dynamic of the overseas Chinese and how they interact with the local culture, people, the sort of jobs they did when they first arrived in Brazil, whereas the jobs they and their children do now, and how it impacted the following generation born in a foreign land. It shall be considered the barriers they faced in Brazil, living in a country with a vast gap geographic and culturally speaking as well as language.

This research aims to explore the expansion of the Chinese ethnicity of the Taiwanese community in Brazil, with a cultural, commercial, and social approach to explore dynamic of the overseas Chinese in Brazil. This study aims to solve the puzzle of how overseas Chinese, with a special focus on the Taiwanese community, integrate with the Brazilian dynamic in an economic aspect and what their means were to settle in Brazil considering the division of labour, proficiency of the local language and purchasing power.

There are many studies focusing on overseas Chinese in other western nations and in macro levels, but not many studies have focused on Taiwanese overseas Chinese in Brazil, neither looked into meso level. The insufficient work directed to the Taiwanese communities leaves a lot of room to explore and understand the Taiwanese immigration pattern, leaving an empirical gap to be filled that this study can address.

The significant Chinese diaspora raises a crucial question in the academic field: what is the influence of international relations on overseas communities? Do states incentivise immigration?

Furthermore, in the context of the Taiwanese community in Brazil, specifically, it is crucial to investigate how Taiwanese people settled in Brazil both culturally and economically, where they went to work at first, whether they are still migrating to Brazil and how they differ from other Chinese-like communities.

In order to understand how overseas Chinese decided to immigrate to a land of great geographic distance, major cultural and linguistic gap and yet maintain the Chinese culture among themselves, there will be archival study from the time Taiwan and Brazil signed the diplomatic agreement to the time it was terminated in 1974 and shifted the diplomatic recognition to Peoples Republic of China (PRC). Although mid-1060s marks an era of population mobility, I shall initially focus on Chinese international migration as a global event, followed by regional impact in Latin America, with a special attention to Brazil and conclude with a study case of the Taiwanese overseas Chinese community in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil from the period of 1960 to 2020 to encompass different generations and disclose the resemblance and distinction between the immigrants and Brazilian-born citizen of Chinese ethnicity.

The methodology to study the relationship of overseas Chinese from Taiwan in Brazil will be conducted via national archival and visits to Taiwanese community organizations in Brazil combined with interviews with Taiwanese descendants born in Brazil.

The empirical gap is on the lack of emphasis on the Taiwanese community in Brazil, there are many studies focusing on overseas Chinese in western nations but insufficient studies focusing on overseas Chinese of Taiwanese nationality in Brazil which leaves a void to explore and understand the Chinese immigration pattern to provide better understanding of the community.

The Chinese Migration Movement

The nature of the mobility of people across nations and continents has raised innumerable theories to address the motives for a member or a whole family at working age to depart from the homeland to voluntarily, or involuntarily, pursue opportunities that couldn't be provided to them as consequences of various matters from economics to political and social reasons. The further the land, or the greater is the culture differences, the more enlarged the detachment of one's identity. Paradoxically, it is the detachment from the homeland and the involvement with the host land that might inspire one's patriotism, the emotional attached to the land where their families' strike roots.

Children of immigrants who are born abroad tend to have less connection with their parents' history and land, and more patriotism towards the land that hosted their parents. However, the same cannot be affirmed towards overseas Chinese 海外華人 (*Hǎiwài huárén*) as literal translation of Chinese living overseas. Overseas Chinese carry their identity and nationalism throughout generations regardless of their physical location.

In the scope of Overseas Chinese, it is not only the geographic factors that influence the identity of an individual but the social network they are inserted in, such social networks that are place-based and place-nourished formed through consanguineous cause which is strongly passed on in the overseas Chinese community (Ma, p.10, 2003).

However, although not every Chinese descent consider themselves as of Chinese which is related to acculturation of the host land, and many immigrants remain in isolation in the new culture and being unable to speak the language and engage in the local community. With the availability of Chinese restaurants and communities, in the case of Great Britain, Chinese immigrants created a shield that enable them to prosper, live and work without any contact with the British socio-economic environment (Watson, p.127, 1975). This isolation didn't protect the community from discrimination, moreover this discrimination sometimes among themselves, either for not being Chinese enough or being too Chinese. Surprisingly enough, prejudice was less often from local people toward Chinese, but more often than not from Chinese people towards Chinese-born with either superiority or disdain, although there also prejudice from the locals for not being local enough (Lee, p.95, 1992).

Nevertheless, some might find it offensive to be labelled as Chinese ethnicity and nationality when they hold no more reference rather than their ancestors and the term "overseas" should be dropped when referring to geographical location (Tan, p.31-32, 2004). The term attributes to the meaning of stateless people, neither belonging to the host land nor to the homeland regardless of how they identify themselves with the nationality of the country they were born at. Specially the generation born in another nation, they have accultured themselves with the host land their family immigrated to, behaving like the local, with deep interaction and dominance of the language, making it hard for them to assimilate themselves with China as their homeland.

The act of acculturating to a new society, language, and customs or even the usage of the host land language in their homes would encounter a great resistance in the Chinese community. Resilience, however, is found to be acquired by young Chinese descendant when facing socioeconomic disadvantages, language and cultural barrier, academic underachievement leading to racial discrimination (Mu & Pang, p.88, 2019) and yet in a multicultural context that creates a structural deficiency, their performance is outstanding despite the difficulties faced in the new context they are inserted, they adapt and thrive.

The culture assimilation also came through marriages with the local people. Marriages happened more often for those who were able to make a fortune and could afford a family, most likely to be the Chinese traders. The class people were from was a significant factor in an intermarriage, mainly these marriages happened to local women would rather marry a better-off Chinese man rather than local ones (Ng, p.76, 1968). Because strong religious ties were almost non-existent, intermarriages were easier for a Chinese man to marry a woman of any faith (Tan, p.46, 2004), and with a mixed-race household it would be easier for the kids of these marriages to acculture themselves with their birthplace and be unassociated to their Chinese identity.

It is in the socio-cultural environment that arises acculturation, specially through access to formal education that children learn to be more like the local people but the one who attend a Chinese education in the host land tend to experience less acculturation and have a strong Chinese identification. Tan (2004) points out that some cultural components are more likely to be adopted than others, being the linguistic change, the most fundamental aspect of acculturation (p.58) and education could be a pivot factor in the overseas Chinese communities. Through education, Chinese people went from traders and labourers to professionals and successful businesspeople.

Chinese in Brazil

In the land of richness in natural resources and the promises of prosperity, Brazil was the destination of the Chinese immigrant in 1810 when tea plantation workers departed to experience a whole new world. It was a few decades later when a greater number of Chinese people started to flood the Brazilian ground in 1950, fleeing the communism pressuring the people in China. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE – Brazilian acronym), it was in 1950 when immigration to Brazil started increasing drastically again, counting 1952 as the year that international immigration reached its peak in Brazil (Brasil, 2023).

At that time, Brazil had liberal immigration policies that attracted Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese people. These nationals contributed to the development of Brazil in the agricultural and industrial sectors (Figueredo & Zanelatto, p.80, 2017), although they were not the nationality that immigrated to Brazil the most. In spite of being a minority in Brazil, the public facilities open economy and abundant natural resources offered unlimited opportunities for immigrants, making Brazil an attractive destination.

The experience of Chinese immigrants in Brazil was particularly challenging. Their jobs were resumed to sugar cane plantations and work conditions were similar to slavery (Hu-DeHart, p. 81, 1998). Such exploitation led many of them to commit suicide (Wu, p. 76, 1988) for living in miserable conditions and extreme hardship.

Although the two nations seem to be very distant, the distance has shown to be geographically rather than culturally, as the Chinese and Brazilian government have worked together to develop economic, cultural and science cooperation (Cardoso, p.34, 2013). In the aspect of cooperation and considering the influence of overseas Chinese in the Brazilian territory, it automatically requires a closer interaction between Brazil and China that both nations become strongly interdependent and become strategic with each other (Cardoso, p.34, 2013), involving political affairs such as security and welfare that led the states to become dependent on the policies of the other and to have such influence, a state must have power (Risse, p.89, 2012) and by developing a strategic partnership with another powerful nation, both China and Brazil can both impact international organizations in the process of decision-making.

However, before developing a harmonious relationship China and Brazil were, politically and culturally speaking, fairly adverse. It was during the Chinese Civil War that some political refugees left to Argentina, some other refugees found shelter in Taiwan which later when a political conflict with the priest Kao Ze-Chien, who had fled political crisis, was imprisoned. The incident drove the Chinese immigrants out of Argentina and into Brazil that eventually led the Taiwanese immigration wave to Brazil in the process of fleeing from communism, many Chinese who were already in Taiwan found a new land to prosper and flourish, they encountered new beginning in Brazil.

Taiwanese in Brazil

In the era of immigration, Brazil once was the land of dreams and the paradise of new opportunities. When Taiwanese people started immigrating to Brazil, they might have thought that Chinese community could offer mutual assistance in settling but to their surprise the oriental faces they encountered were of Japanese nationality. The presence of the Japanese

community in Brazil outnumbered any other Asian community in the nation, and it should have been expected to be so when their journey on a ship from Hong Kong to the new nation was arranged by Japanese companies and occupied by mostly Japanese people, but not only was the ocean-crossing trip organized by the Japanese, they also charged Taiwanese people double price for the trip, charging them US\$50 per person, whereas compatriots were charged only US\$25.

Despite the obstacles for Taiwanese people to immigrate, nonetheless the risk was worthwhile. In her article based on interviews she conducted with Taiwanese people in Brazil, Laura Li mentioned how some Taiwanese immigrants first went to Brazil as a stepping-stone to the United States, some were happy with what they encountered and stayed in Brazil, others were rather disappointed that Brazil wasn't as close to the US as it had been promised to them (Li, 1991), but there was an opportunity for them to settle and make a living with high-paying job in comparison to what they were used to earn in Taiwan, it all combined with the welcoming Brazilian society towards immigrants and more Taiwanese left Taiwan to reside in Brazil.

Granting the fact Taiwan and Brazil are culturally distinct, the Taiwanese community ensure to keep their culture alive by gathering their compatriots and family members to at times of Chinese New Year and tomb sweeping to honour their ancestors.

In relation to education, Taiwan has guaranteed its nationals a great support in providing access to overseas compatriots for over decades to promote the Taiwanese cultures and enrich the younger generation with their parents' homeland values. This overseas compatriot education program is an initiative via The Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC) that subsidize schools to promote the Taiwanese culture and influence the local community through cultural events and implementing Mandarin teaching system throughout the world (Taiwan, 2023), including Brazil.

Conclusion

As an ongoing research work, a conclusion to this study is yet to be developed in a very near future. Towards the conclusion of this research, I aspire to find more concrete evidence to solve to the puzzle of how Taiwanese overseas Chinese integrate with the Brazilian dynamic in an economic and cultural matter combined with their means are to settle in Brazil.

The expected results are to be able to identify what are the differences of settlement and style of living of overseas Chinese who immigrated to Brazil and the first generation that was born in Brazil, which should include both Chinese ethnicity of Chinese and Taiwanese nationality, also differentiate whether they identify themselves as of their parents' nationality and what their connectivity with their parents' motherland are.

If time allows, it might be possible to draw a comparison of the Taiwanese, Chinese and Japanese nationals, considering that the Japanese community is the biggest Asian community in Brazil which could have helped other Asian communities to choose Brazil to immigrate and soothed their first steps in the new culture.

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