

From Entrepreneur to Transnational Corporate Worker: BYD Investments and Changes in the Profile of Chinese Economic Migration to Brazil

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Abstract

This article examines recent changes in the profile of Chinese economic migration to Brazil, taking the establishment of BYD's industrial complex in Camaçari, Bahia, as its main reference. For decades, the Chinese economic presence in Brazil was associated primarily with family networks, trade in imported goods, and small-scale entrepreneurship. The internationalization of Chinese companies has added another dimension to this process: the circulation of engineers, technicians, supervisors, managers, and other workers assigned to corporate projects, generally for limited periods. The study investigates how BYD's productive investment contributes to this change. It adopts a qualitative, exploratory, and analytical approach, guided by the inductive method and based on bibliographic and documentary research. The sources include migration statistics, reports from the Brazil-China Business Council, government documents, corporate information, and press coverage. In the first quarter of 2026, Chinese citizens received 3193 work authorizations, accounting for 38% of all authorizations granted to foreign nationals during the period. Bahia was the destination associated with 55% of the Chinese authorizations in the first quarter of 2026, while Passos, Prado, and Pitombo (2026), drawing on Ministry of Justice data and company-linked information, reported that approximately 2700 Chinese BYD employees obtained work authorization between early 2025 and May 2026. The evidence does not indicate the disappearance of entrepreneurial migration, but rather the emergence of an overlapping form of corporate mobility organized around industrial investment. In the case under examination, capital, technology, and labor circulate in an interconnected manner. This creates opportunities for industrial learning while raising questions about the localization of production, the incorporation of Brazilian workers, and the actual extent of technology transfer.

Keywords

Chinese Migration, Corporate Mobility, Foreign Direct Investment, BYD, Technology Transfer

1. Introduction

The international expansion of Chinese capital is one of the most significant transformations in the twenty-first-century global economy. After a long period as a major recipient of foreign direct investment, China began projecting its companies across different regions and sectors. This movement is not limited to the export of capital. It also involves the circulation of technology, forms of production organization, management practices, and workers. In Brazil, the process gained importance through the combination of intense bilateral trade and expanding Chinese investment. Although energy and infrastructure remain central, the most recent cycle also includes manufacturing, electric mobility, renewable energy, and strategic minerals.

This process has a migratory dimension. Studies of Chinese immigration to Brazil have rightly emphasized the role of families, ethnic networks, and commercial activities concentrated in major urban centers, particularly São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. This pattern remains present, but it no longer fully explains contemporary Chinese economic mobility. The establishment of companies and productive projects has brought engineers, technicians, supervisors, administrators, and specialists to Brazil to install equipment, organize production lines, and transmit knowledge accumulated in facilities located in China.

The establishment of BYD's industrial complex in Camaçari provides a particularly useful vantage point from which to observe this change. The project brings together industrial investment in electric and hybrid vehicles, the formation of a supplier network, the recruitment of Brazilian labor, and the temporary circulation of Chinese employees. In 2026, the scale of this movement became visible in national statistics. In the first quarter, 3193 work authorizations were granted to Chinese citizens, equivalent to 38% of all authorizations issued to foreign workers. Bahia accounted for 55% of the Chinese authorizations in the first quarter of 2026. [Passos, Prado, and Pitombo \(2026\)](#), based on Ministry of Justice data and information linked specifically to the automaker, report that BYD accounted for roughly one-third of the Chinese labor records and that approximately 2700 Chinese BYD employees obtained work authorization between early 2025 and May 2026. This company-specific estimate is reported by that source; it was not produced in this study by matching individual administrative records to employers.

Rather than merely recording a short-term increase, these figures point to a change in the relationship between investment and migration. Under the entrepreneurial pattern, migrants commonly mobilize family and community resources to establish an economic activity in the destination country. Under corporate mo-

bility, the movement begins with the company: investment creates the need for international assignments, determines the professional profiles required, limits the duration of stay, and links the worker's presence to particular stages of the industrial project.

Against this background, the research question is formulated as follows: how does BYD's productive investment in Bahia contribute to the formation of a profile of Chinese economic migration to Brazil characterized by skilled workers connected to transnational corporations? The general objective is to analyze the relationship among Chinese direct investment, labor mobility, and technology transfer through the BYD case. More specifically, the study distinguishes entrepreneurial migration from corporate mobility; examines the growth and territorial concentration of work authorizations; considers the role of expatriates in industrial implementation; and discusses the possible effects of this movement on production, labor, and transnational networks.

The central hypothesis is that the BYD project represents a new stage of Chinese economic migration to Brazil. This does not mean that trade and entrepreneurial activities consolidated in previous decades are being replaced. Instead, a form of mobility organized by companies is being added to them. Professional specialization, a frequently limited period of residence, and a direct connection with productive implementation distinguish this flow. Its significance for Brazilian development, however, will depend less on the number of expatriates than on the country's ability to transform knowledge temporarily brought from abroad into lasting local capabilities.

In addition to this introduction, the article is divided into five parts. The first presents the theoretical framework and methodological procedures. The next discusses the historical diversification of Chinese economic migration and the new cycle of productive investment in Brazil. The analysis then focuses on BYD's complex in Camaçari, the mobility of its workers, and the mechanisms of training and knowledge transfer. The final part examines the implications of the case for industrialization, regional development, and the configuration of transnational networks.

2. Economic Migration, Corporate Mobility, and Methodology

2.1. Economic Migration, Transnationalism, and Corporate Mobility

In broad terms, economic migration encompasses international movements motivated by work, investment, entrepreneurship, or the search for improved material conditions. Although it differs from forced migration because of its more direct relationship with labor markets and the spatial distribution of economic opportunities (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014), it cannot be explained solely as an individual decision. In the contemporary economy, states, corporations, universities, recruitment intermediaries, and outsourced companies also select, enable, and regulate the international circulation of workers.

Transnationalism helps explain the simultaneous maintenance of social and professional ties in more than one country. Physical presence abroad does not necessarily sever relations with the place of origin, particularly when communication technologies, transportation, and corporate structures allow regular contact. Instead of a definitive passage between separate societies, interconnected social fields emerge through which people, information, and resources circulate continuously (Giddens, 1991; Guercini et al., 2017).

For the purposes of this study, entrepreneurial migration is operationally defined as mobility in which the migrant or household initiates the move and subsequently establishes or manages an independent commercial or productive activity, relying substantially on family, ethnic, supplier, or community networks. The identifying criteria used here are therefore migrant- or household-led mobility, relative autonomy from a pre-existing corporate assignment, and economic insertion through ownership or management of a business.

Corporate mobility is operationally defined here as international labor movement initiated, sponsored, or organized by an employer for a defined function within a cross-border investment or productive project. Its identifying criteria are: a pre-existing employment or corporate relationship; an assignment linked to a specific productive, technical, managerial, training, or implementation task; and a duration connected to the needs or stages of the project rather than primarily to permanent settlement. In this case, the company occupies the institutional position that, in entrepreneurial flows, belongs more prominently to the migrant, family, or community network. Employees may be assigned abroad to establish projects, enforce quality standards, provide technical assistance, train teams, or coordinate units while remaining professionally integrated with corporate headquarters.

The Chinese case has generated an important body of literature on the relationship between outward investment and migration. The early internationalization of state-owned infrastructure companies frequently involved enclaves with significant numbers of Chinese workers and relatively limited interaction with local labor markets. More recent internationalization, particularly in technology and manufacturing, has tended to involve more heterogeneous workforces and a larger presence of young, skilled expatriates working alongside local employees (Nyíri, 2021). Xiang (2015, 2016) likewise identifies the growing importance of highly skilled Chinese mobility associated with education, professional careers, and international business.

The relevance of these workers cannot be reduced to the positions they occupy. In the initial phase of a greenfield investment, they may transmit firm-specific knowledge, much of which is not fully recorded in manuals. Operational sequences, quality standards, fault detection, equipment maintenance, and supplier coordination contain a tacit dimension acquired through experience. The economic effects of mobility therefore depend on contact with local teams and on the ability to incorporate such learning into the institutions and productive system of

the host country.

2.2. Methodology and Sources

This study adopts a qualitative approach and is exploratory and analytical in nature. It employs the inductive method, moving from evidence concerning the BYD case in Camaçari and recent labor mobility data to identify broader changes in the profile of Chinese economic migration to Brazil. The study does not seek to generalize the case to all Chinese migrants. Rather, it asks whether this case reveals a form of mobility whose importance has increased with the internationalization of Chinese manufacturing.

Bibliographic and documentary research techniques were employed. The literature review covers international migration, transnationalism, ethnic entrepreneurship, skilled mobility, and the internationalization of Chinese companies. The documentary research draws on data from the Observatory of International Migration (OBMigra) and the General Coordination for Labor Immigration, reports issued by the Brazil-China Business Council, documents from the Government of Bahia, information released by BYD, and journalistic sources. For the labor-mobility analysis, the study uses aggregate administrative records on work authorizations for Chinese nationals: the comparison for the first half of 2021 and 2025 reported by OBMigra, annual/monthly figures for 2023-2025, and first-quarter 2026 figures compiled by [Passos et al. \(2026\)](#) from Ministry of Justice data. The unit reported in these sources is the work authorization or administrative registration, not a verified count of unique individuals, border entries, simultaneous physical presence, or distinct corporate assignments. The aggregate figures used here are not consistently disaggregated by authorization category in the published sources; consequently, the article does not infer occupational composition or skill level from the authorization category itself. Company-specific figures are used only when the cited source explicitly attributes them to BYD. Camaçari was selected because foreign direct investment, international labor mobility, local recruitment, and potential technology transfer are concentrated within the same project. As the available sources do not provide a complete occupational breakdown of authorized workers, the study avoids classifying the entire group as highly skilled. The expression “skilled and corporate-linked workers” refers to the segment analytically relevant to the case without disregarding the occupational heterogeneity of the broader flow.

3. From Entrepreneurial Migration to Corporate-Linked Mobility

Chinese migration to Brazil has a long history, but its contemporary economic expression has been strongly associated with urban trade and entrepreneurship. Shopping galleries, wholesale networks, and imported-goods markets created spaces in which family relations, ethnic ties, and connections with suppliers in China lowered barriers to entry and facilitated business formation. São Paulo, par-

ticularly the districts of Brás and Rua 25 de Março, became emblematic of these networks, with important connections to Guangdong and Zhejiang (Silva, 2018).

This pattern reflects a broader feature of Chinese diaspora entrepreneurship. Migrants frequently mobilize transnational social capital, including family resources, rotating credit, supplier relations, and *guanxi* networks, to overcome obstacles in destination countries. These networks may compensate for difficulties in accessing formal credit, obtaining recognition of qualifications, or securing stable employment (Zhang, Seet, Redmond, Sharafizad, & Tan, 2021). Entrepreneurship may therefore operate both as an opportunity and as a strategy of adaptation.

Previous research showed that Chinese migration to Brazil was becoming more diversified. Skilled professionals and workers connected to investment projects were being added to family and commercial flows, creating networks in which human mobility, economic activity, and bilateral relations were increasingly intertwined (Barbieri Junior, 2025). The BYD case develops this argument by placing the corporate worker at the center of the analysis.

The distinction between entrepreneur and corporate worker should not be treated as a rigid boundary. Migrants may change occupations, establish companies, or move between different positions over the course of their stay. Operationally, however, the cases are interpreted according to the criteria established in Section 2.1: entrepreneurial migration is migrant- or household-led and oriented toward ownership or management of an independent activity, whereas corporate mobility is employer-organized and tied to a defined assignment within a cross-border productive project. The distinction is therefore analytical rather than an assertion of mutually exclusive identities.

This reversal also affects the geography of migration. Chinese commercial activity became concentrated in metropolitan areas with distribution networks and consumer markets. Corporate workers, by contrast, follow the location of a factory, mine, transmission line, or energy project. The recent presence of Chinese workers in Bahia shows how foreign investment can redirect mobility toward regions that did not previously have large Chinese communities.

Temporality also changes. Family and entrepreneurial migration tends to involve long-term residence and the creation of local ties. Corporate assignments may last only as long as the installation of equipment, the launch of a production line, or the training of Brazilian workers. BYD representatives reported that many employees assigned to Camaçari remain for 90 to 120 days, a period devoted to training and technology transfer (Passos et al., 2026). This is therefore a form of circulation linked to a productive project, rather than necessarily a migration process oriented toward permanent settlement.

Corporate migration also changes the principal network through which integration occurs. *Guanxi*, family, and the ethnic community remain relevant, but the corporation becomes the central institutional network. It provides employment, legal support, organizational hierarchy, workplace interaction, and often the first bridge to local institutions. This creates an embedded form of transna-

tionalism in which migrants are simultaneously connected to corporate headquarters, the Brazilian subsidiary, local workers, suppliers, and government agencies.

4. Chinese Investment in Brazil and the Industrial Significance of BYD

4.1. A New Cycle of Chinese Productive Investment

The changes observed in migration accompany the transformation of Chinese investment itself. Brazil has become one of the leading destinations for Chinese capital in Latin America. This capital was initially concentrated in energy, oil, infrastructure, and natural resources. In recent years, manufacturing, electric mobility, renewable energy, digital technologies, and strategic minerals have gained greater weight. This diversification is important because industrial implementation mobilizes forms of knowledge and professional profiles that differ from those required by asset acquisitions or portfolio investment.

Data from the Brazil-China Business Council (CEBC) illustrate this acceleration. Chinese investment in Brazil totaled US\$1.73 billion in 2023, when 72% of confirmed projects were directed toward green energy and related sectors. In 2024, investment increased to US\$4.18 billion across 39 projects, at that point a historical record. Manufacturing projects also reached a record number, reinforcing the connection between Chinese investment and Brazilian reindustrialization. In 2025, according to the most recent CEBC survey, Brazil became the world's leading destination for Chinese investment, receiving US\$6.1 billion, 45% more than in 2024. Electric mobility was among the sectors highlighted, with the inauguration of the GWM and BYD plants (CEBC, 2024, 2025, 2026).

BYD's investment should not be viewed as an isolated initiative. It forms part of a broader effort by Chinese companies to establish a productive presence in the Brazilian market. The shift from vehicle exports to local manufacturing is related to market size, industrial incentives, trade conditions, and Latin America's position in the international competition over electric mobility. A greenfield investment of this scale can produce effects beyond the factory by creating demand for logistics, services, technical training, suppliers, and technological capabilities.

4.2. BYD in Camaçari: Scale, Location, and Supplier Development

BYD's project in Camaçari occupies the former Ford industrial site in Bahia and has become one of the most important Chinese industrial investments in Brazil. An investment initially announced at approximately R\$3 billion later increased to an estimated R\$5.5 billion. The complex covers 4.65 million square meters and, according to the Government of Bahia, is BYD's largest industrial complex outside China. The production figures reported by state sources refer to different stages of expansion rather than to a single capacity estimate: the initial phase was announced at 150,000 vehicles per year; a subsequent scale of approximately 300,000 vehicles per year was associated with the next stage of operation; and 600,000 vehicles per year appears as a possible capacity in future expansion scenarios

(Government of Bahia, 2026a, 2026b).

The first industrial phase was officially inaugurated in October 2025. By March 2026, the plant had produced more than 35,000 vehicles, and BYD announced 3000 additional hires. Employment figures likewise refer to different categories and projection scenarios. By March 2026, approximately 3200 people were directly employed at the complex, while around 3500 outsourced workers were still engaged in construction. Government sources published at that time reported projections ranging from approximately 10,000 jobs to as many as 20,000 direct and indirect jobs at full scale. These figures should therefore not be interpreted as current employment levels or as directly comparable estimates, since they reflect different scopes and stages of project development (Government of Bahia, 2026a, 2026b).

The project's contribution to Brazilian development will depend to a considerable extent on the localization of production. In its initial stage, the plant used complete and semi-knocked-down systems (CKD and SKD) based on sets of parts imported from China, while a local supplier base was being organized. The Government of Bahia negotiated the establishment of Chinese companies such as Sinomac, Minth, and ACG, discussing incentives, land, labor rules, and visas. The stated intention was to increase component production in the state and create a more integrated industrial system rather than maintain a simple assembly operation (Government of Bahia, 2025).

This supplier strategy expands the potential migratory effect of the investment. BYD is not the only actor capable of generating mobility. Each Chinese supplier that establishes a Brazilian operation may temporarily require managers, technicians, and specialists familiar with its production processes. The result may be a clustering effect in which investment and migration reinforce one another. A corporate network previously organized in China is partially reproduced in the destination country, but with increasing participation by Brazilian workers and companies.

Camaçari makes it possible to observe three interdependent movements: the inflow of capital through direct investment; the transfer of equipment, techniques, and forms of organization; and the temporary circulation of workers. Although analytically distinguishable, these movements interact during the establishment of a new productive unit. Through this connection, migration ceases to appear as a secondary consequence of investment and becomes part of the operation of corporate internationalization itself.

5. The BYD Case and the New Chinese Corporate Migrant

5.1. The Acceleration of Chinese Labor Mobility

Work authorization data show a rapid change in the scale of Chinese mobility. In the first half of 2025, Chinese citizens were already the leading nationality among foreign workers authorized to work in Brazil, accounting for 19.5% of the total compared with 9.2% during the same period in 2021 (OBMigra, 2025). The

monthly average rose from approximately 270 authorizations in 2023 to 625 in 2024 and 844 in 2025. From June 2025 onward, the monthly figure exceeded 1000 (Passos et al., 2026).

Geographical concentration in Bahia is a second important finding. Until recently, Chinese migration to Brazil was strongly associated with São Paulo and other major metropolitan centers. The recent concentration of Chinese work authorizations in Bahia is consistent with the emergence of a new pole of corporate mobility in the Northeast associated with the implementation of BYD and related industrial activities. In this instance, the destination is linked less to the presence of a historical ethnic enclave than to the location of a major industrial project; however, the descriptive data do not by themselves establish that BYD caused the entire increase.

In the first quarter of 2026, 3193 work authorizations were granted to Chinese citizens, corresponding to 38% of all authorizations issued to foreign workers. Bahia accounted for 55% of the Chinese authorizations in the period. Passos et al. (2026), using Ministry of Justice data and company-linked information, report that BYD represented roughly one-third of the Chinese labor records and that approximately 2700 Chinese BYD employees obtained work authorization between early 2025 and May 2026. The latter figure is therefore a company-specific estimate reported by the cited source, not a result generated here by matching the general authorization dataset to individual employers. The temporal and territorial correspondence between the authorization data and the implementation of the Camaçari project indicates a documented association between this mobility and the new stage of Chinese productive investment, but the descriptive evidence does not establish a causal relationship.

These figures nevertheless require qualification. In the administrative data used here, a work authorization or registration is the unit counted; it is not equivalent to a unique migrant, a border entry, permanent residence, or a distinct assignment, nor does it mean that all authorized workers were present in Brazil at the same time. Passos et al. (2026) report that many BYD-linked assignments are temporary and rotational. This pattern is associated in company statements with plant implementation, team training, and the transfer of technical and organizational knowledge, but the aggregate authorization data alone cannot verify the content of each worker's assignment.

5.2. Skills, Training, and Technology Transfer

The activities performed by expatriates are crucial to the characterization of this new profile, but public sources do not yet provide a complete occupational breakdown of the approximately 2700 authorized workers. It would therefore be inappropriate to treat all of them as highly skilled professionals. Nevertheless, the available information and the requirements of industrial implementation indicate a substantial presence of technicians, supervisors, managers, installers, trainers, and specialized support staff.

BYD's vice-president in Brazil, Alexandre Baldy, stated that many expatriates remain in the country for approximately 90 to 120 days and are assigned to train local employees and transfer technology (Passos et al., 2026). This is a company representative's account of the purpose and duration of these assignments and should not, by itself, be treated as evidence that technology transfer has already occurred across the workforce. Independent documentary evidence does, however, confirm specific training initiatives: an official Bahia government account reported a group of 22 BYD professionals from Brazil participating in training in Shenzhen, including 19 workers from Bahia, with activities focused on production processes, parts, equipment, and quality procedures (Government of Bahia, 2024). These documented training activities support the existence of knowledge-transfer mechanisms, while their broader effects on productivity, technical promotion, and local capabilities remain to be measured longitudinally.

Technology transfer cannot be reduced to the acquisition of machinery. Every production system combines codified and tacit knowledge. Designs and specifications may be documented, but efficient operation depends on accumulated practices involving sequencing, maintenance, quality control, fault diagnosis, and coordination among departments. In the BYD case, the documented training initiatives and the company's statements establish that training channels exist; they do not yet demonstrate the scale or durability of the resulting technological learning. The proposition that temporary corporate workers may transmit tacit knowledge through daily interaction with Brazilian teams is therefore treated here as an analytically plausible mechanism and a potential developmental effect, rather than as a completed outcome already demonstrated by the available evidence.

The presence of Chinese workers is not necessarily opposed to the creation of local employment. During implementation, knowledge brought from abroad and the recruitment of Brazilian workers may perform complementary functions. In March 2026, BYD announced 3000 new positions, which would raise the number of direct employees to more than 6000, while thousands of outsourced workers were still involved in construction. The relevant question is not merely how many foreign and Brazilian workers are present, but whether Brazilian participation also expands in technical and higher-responsibility positions as production becomes consolidated.

A successful localization trajectory would normally involve a change in workforce composition. Expatriates are more necessary during installation and the start of production. As Brazilian employees acquire firm-specific knowledge, reliance on foreign personnel should decline in routine operations, while international mobility remains concentrated in specialized functions, new model launches, process modernization, and coordination with headquarters. This expected transition constitutes a testable hypothesis for future research on BYD.

5.3. The Profile of a Transnational Corporate Migrant

The case makes it possible to outline a form of mobility distinct from that represented by the traditional Chinese entrepreneur. Movement is mediated by the

company, the employment relationship and productive task are defined in advance, and the period of residence generally follows a stage of the project. In addition, the employee's technical or organizational knowledge is the principal reason for the assignment, and in many cases interaction with Brazilian teams is part of the job itself.

The term transnational corporate worker is used here as an operational category for workers who meet the corporate-mobility criteria defined in Section 2.1 and whose assignment forms part of a productive network crossing national borders. The category does not require executive status, an engineering degree, or permanent expatriate residence. It requires that the international move be employer-organized, connected to a defined corporate task or project stage, and embedded in continuing relations among the employee, corporate headquarters or affiliates, the investment project, and the host-country productive system. These criteria distinguish the category analytically from entrepreneurial migration while allowing for occupational heterogeneity and changes in individual trajectories.

This profile also differs culturally from a classic enclave model. The workplace creates daily interaction with Brazilian workers, service providers, and public institutions. Even when linguistic and cultural barriers remain, the production process requires coordination among national groups. This may generate forms of intercultural contact distinct from those historically observed in ethnic commercial enclaves. At the same time, corporate networks may reproduce Chinese-speaking environments and their own social circles, particularly during the initial phase of implementation. The outcome is neither complete integration nor complete isolation, but a negotiated form of transnational coexistence.

6. Implications for Economic Development

6.1. Industrialization, Human Capital, and Local Learning

The Camaçari project brings together themes that are frequently examined separately: foreign investment, industrialization, technological innovation, employment, and human capital formation. Because it involves the production of electric and hybrid vehicles, it is also part of the transition toward lower-emission forms of mobility. The circulation of Chinese workers belongs within this context, as it accompanies equipment installation, factory organization, and the learning process of local teams.

The effects of foreign investment on development are not automatic. An industrial facility may maintain limited connections with the host economy when it depends for an extended period on imported components, foreign specialists, and innovation undertaken abroad. Alternatively, it may foster structural change by developing suppliers, training workers, expanding technological competencies, and increasing domestic content. The localization of components and establishment of suppliers are therefore indicators as important as the initial volume of investment.

The same principle applies to migration. The presence of Chinese specialists

would be more significant for development if it generated learning spillovers. Training Brazilian employees, creating bilingual technical routines, linking local suppliers to Chinese standards, and adapting production processes to Brazilian conditions are possible channels through which temporary mobility could contribute to lasting productive capacity. In the BYD case, specific training activities are documented, but the extent to which they have produced durable local capabilities, technical promotion, or measurable productivity effects remains an empirical question.

Two simplifying interpretations should be avoided. The first treats every foreign worker as a direct substitute for a national worker. The second assumes that the presence of specialists automatically produces technology transfer. Substitution and complementarity may occur simultaneously, while learning depends on the duration of interaction, the absorptive capacity of teams, training policies, and the localization strategy. The challenge for public policy is to create conditions under which temporary mobility expands rather than restricts local capabilities.

6.2. Regional Development and the Changing Geography of Migration

Camaçari also illustrates the regional dimension of development. Chinese migration to Brazil was traditionally concentrated in the Southeast, reflecting the location of established communities and commercial opportunities. The recent concentration of work authorizations in Bahia indicates the emergence of a new geography of Chinese labor mobility associated with industrial investment, although the descriptive evidence does not establish that investment alone caused this redistribution. This generates implications for housing, services, education, translation, transportation, and intercultural relations in the Salvador Metropolitan Region.

The arrival of suppliers may deepen this effect. A localized automotive cluster creates backward and forward linkages and may attract additional companies and workers. Negotiations between the Government of Bahia and Chinese component manufacturers explicitly included issues related to worker visas, demonstrating that migration planning has become part of investment attraction. Migration is therefore not external to regional development policy; it is incorporated into the formation of the industrial ecosystem.

Over time, the relevant indicator will be whether the region captures a growing share of value added. A transition from CKD and SKD assembly to local component production, the growth of Brazilian technical employment, and the development of local suppliers would indicate deeper industrial embeddedness. If these processes advance, the temporary presence of Chinese workers may be interpreted as an initial mechanism of capability formation rather than as permanent dependence on imported labor.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of BYD's industrial complex in Camaçari indicates that Chinese eco-

conomic migration to Brazil has become more diversified. Alongside the family, commercial, and entrepreneurial networks formed over recent decades, a form of mobility organized by corporations and linked to productive investment has gained visibility. Technicians, supervisors, managers, and other workers are assigned abroad to install equipment, coordinate processes, train teams, and transmit firm-specific knowledge.

The recent scale of this movement is significant. In the first quarter of 2026, Chinese citizens received 3193 work authorizations, or 38% of the total issued to foreign nationals, and Bahia accounted for 55% of the Chinese authorizations. [Passos et al. \(2026\)](#) further report that approximately 2700 Chinese BYD employees obtained work authorization between early 2025 and May 2026. Taken together, these data indicate a strong temporal and territorial association between the expansion of Chinese industrial investment and a changing geography of labor mobility; they do not, on their own, prove a causal relationship.

The findings also demonstrate the need for internal differentiation within the category of economic migrant. A trader who establishes a business with support from relatives and co-nationals and a technician assigned by a multinational company both participate in the economy of the destination country, but they arrive through different mechanisms, remain for different lengths of time, and perform distinct functions. The concept of the transnational corporate worker seeks to make this difference visible without turning mobile categories into rigid classifications.

From a development perspective, the decisive issue is not simply the presence of foreign workers, but what remains after they leave. Available evidence documents specific training initiatives and company-reported technology-transfer objectives, but it does not yet establish their long-term effects. If expatriate assignments contribute to training Brazilian professionals, localizing suppliers, and incorporating productive knowledge, temporary mobility may strengthen the local industrial base. If the plant remains dependent on imported components and competencies retained abroad, the effects will be more limited. Such an assessment will only be possible through longitudinal observation of the project.

BYD is thus a particular case of a broader movement. In 2025, Brazil received US\$6.1 billion in Chinese investment and became its leading global destination for that year. The simultaneous growth of industrial investment and work authorizations suggests that Brazil-China relations will increasingly involve not only goods and capital, but also people, techniques, and knowledge. Research on migration and development needs to examine these flows as interconnected processes.

Future studies should monitor the occupational composition of Chinese workers, the duration of assignments, the evolution of local recruitment, the localization of components, and the formation of supplier networks. Interviews with Chinese and Brazilian workers could clarify how training, communication, and learning occur within the plant. Only with such evidence will it be possible to distin-

guish mobility concentrated in the implementation phase from the consolidation of a lasting pattern of Chinese corporate migration to Brazil.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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