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A Historiographic Review of the Japanese Immigration to Brazil (1908-2000)



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A Historiographic Review of the Japanese Immigration to Brazil (1908-2000)

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University of California, San Diego

Resumen

En este trabajo exploro la historiografía existente acerca de la inmigración japonesa a Brasil a lo largo del siglo veinte. Los principales temas de análisis son: raza, identidad, cultura, integración, y resistencia. Esta investigación aborda su objetivo de estudio a partir de tres períodos bien delimitados en la historiografía. El primer período comprende de 1908 a 1945, caracterizado por la llegada de trabajadores japoneses a Brasil. En esta fase se suceden una miríada de debates entre intelectuales y autoridades políticas brasileñas acerca de la idoneidad de este tipo de inmigración, y su integración en la sociedad. La segunda etapa abarca los años de la Segunda Guerra Mundial de 1939 a 1945, marcada por el temor a los inmigrantes japoneses, a los que se considera una amenaza para Brasil. El tercer período se extiende desde 1945 hasta el final del siglo veinte, en el que se observan distintos fenómenos de adaptación de los trabajadores japoneses a la cultura brasileña. En este trabajo argumento que pese a la gran variedad temática estudiada por la historiografía hay una ausencia de estudios que expliquen la constante visión negativa que los inmigrantes japoneses tenían de la población brasileña desde principios del siglo veinte hasta la actualidad.

Palabras clave: Inmigración, Brasil, Japón, raza, identidad.

Abstract

In this paper I explore the existing historiography on Japanese immigration to Brazil throughout the twentieth century. The main topics of analysis are: race, identity, culture, integration, and resistance. This research is divided into three periods as defined by the

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current historiography. The first period comprises from 1908 to 1945, characterized by the arrival of Japanese workers in Brazil, that triggered a myriad of debates between intellectuals and Brazilian political authorities about the suitability of this type of immigration, and its integration into society. The second stage covers the years of World War II from 1939 to 1945, marked by a fear of the Japanese immigrants, who were considered a threat to Brazil. The third phase extends from 1945 to the end of the twentieth century, when the Japanese workers adopted several strategies of integration to the Brazilian culture. In this paper I argue that despite the great variety of topics examined by the historiography, there is an absence of studies that explain the constant negative view of the Brazilian population by the Japanese immigrants from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day.

Keywords: Immigration, Brazil, Japan, race, identity.

1. Introduction

The Meiji period (1868-1912), characterized by its programs of modernization ended the historical isolation of Japan. In order to compete with Western Countries, the Japanese government sent students abroad to Europe and the United States to learn the skills for the development of the industrial system in their home country. During this historical stage of progress, Japanese migration flowed first toward Korea, China and the Americas, foreshadowing the imperial expansion of the early twentieth century². These migratory movements were not only political, but they were also boosted by an intense crisis in agriculture and scarcity of land by the end of the nineteenth century. In order to solve this social and economic problem, the Japanese government promoted emigration with the intention of starting foreign agricultural colonies able to supply Japan³. Nevertheless, this program of economic expansion was hindered by the anti-Japanese sentiment of nations such as Canada and the United States, that considered that these immigrants were subversive agents that sought to undermine their countries and stole their knowledge. Shielding themselves from any Japanese aggression, and under the pretext of reducing hostilities in the Pacific, the United States banned Japanese immigration in Hawaii and the continent in 1907 with the "Gentlemen's Agreement", which forced Japan to look for new places to send their impoverished population⁴.

In Brazil, since the interruption of slave traffic and the liberation of slaves in 1888, the economy required workers to replace the old-fashion slave workforce with new immigrants. During the second half of the twentieth century, the Brazilian government promoted European immigration into Brazil. As such, waves of Portuguese, German, and Italian migrants arrived in the country to work in the coffee plantations and other employments in cities such as **São Paulo**. However, in 1900, the Italian government prohibited immigration to Brazil, suggesting that their citizens were treated like slaves⁵. This measure decreased the arrival of the European population in Brazil

² Donald Hastings, "Japanese Emigration and Assimilation in Brazil", in *The International Migration Review*, Vol 3. Number 2 (Spring, 1969): 33.

³ Jeffrey Lesser, *A negociado da identidade nacional: Imigrantes, minorias e a luta pela etnicidade no Brasil* (Editora da Unesp, 2000), 155.

⁴ Hajim Masuda, "Rumors of War: Immigration Disputes and the Social Construct of American-Japanese Relations, 1905-1913", in *Diplomatic History*, 33 (2009): 1.

⁵ Rafael Shoji, "The Failed Prophecy of Shinto Nationalism and the Rise of Japanese Brazilian Catholicism", in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2008): 17.



and forced the Brazilian government to find new sources of workers in Japan, which were also looking for new spaces to send their migrants.

Since Brazilian authorities (policy makers, presidents, dictators) enforced different measures to restrict immigration and to create a national imaginary through the twentieth century, I pay attention to three historical periods defined by the historiography, that are marked by distinct approaches to the Japanese immigration. Respectively, the first period goes from 1908 to 1945, characterized by the early arrival of Japanese workers in Brazil, that triggered a myriad of debates on the desirability of this type of population, and the possibility of its integration into the mainstream society. The second period encompasses the Second World War, 1939-1945, and stands out for the conceptualization of Japanese immigrants as a threat to Brazil. During these years, Getulio Vargas' campaign of *Brasilidade* (Brazilianness), a state-driven homogenization program to cement Brazilian identity, banned and eliminated those distinctive elements of immigrant culture, such as foreign language, religion, ethnic organizations, and so forth. This program provoked the widespread resistance by the *Nikkei* (people of Japanese descent), and the appearance of Secret Societies such as the Shindo Renmei that remained loyal to the Empire of Japan, even after its defeat in 1945.

Finally, the third period dates from 1945 to the beginning of the twenty first century. This last stage experienced more integration of Japanese workers into Brazilian society, and the arrival of a new wave of immigrants. At the same time, this period is marked by the success of the *Nikkei* population in reaching high levels of education, prosperity and wealth in Brazil. By this time, the Japanese were no longer considered a "yellow peril", but they were seen as a respected minority that took advantage of the growing economy of Japan to embrace a stereotypical image of the Japanese people as being intelligent, efficient, and hard-working.

In this paper, I argue that although the historiography has paid attention to a plethora of themes such as ethnicity, culture, adaptation, and resistance, there is a shortage of works that study why some Japanese immigrants had a negative vision of their Brazilian neighbors from the early twentieth century until today. In this respect, I pose that there is a necessity to understand which are the historical phenomena and social and cultural factors that may explain that vision.



2. Pre-war period (1908-1939)

The Japanese emigration to Brazil began in 1908 and continued in significant numbers until the early 1960s. During the pre-war period, from 1908 to 1941, approximately 190,000 Japanese entered Brazil. Some of the pull factors that explain the emigration of Japanese people have to do with the Meiji Restoration's modernization project, which led to the mechanization of agriculture, forcing rural workers to flee to the cities. This urbanization facilitated the appearance of masses of poor and unemployed individuals that increased social tensions in Japan⁶. As a form to solve this problem, the Japanese government set up the Overseas Development Co. (KOKKAI) in 1918 to oversee and promote immigration to Brazil. In addition to such factors that "pushed" the Japanese out of Japan, the labor-deficient Brazilian coffee plantation economy served as the necessary "pull" factor which drew them to Brazil. As a result, a new wave of immigrants was needed in Brazil because of the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the decline of immigration from Europe (especially from Italy)⁷.

Toake Endoh argues that the Japanese state supported migration as an instrument to decompress internal social protest and radicalism and assure stability and national unity by physically removing abroad the seeds of social havoc. On the other hand, the government supported an agenda of emigration-colonization under the pretension of expanding their imperial influences and obtaining new sources of wealth in the Pacific and the Americas⁸. Daniela de Carvalho converges with this argument by stating that the political authorities in Japan were actively involved in the early Japanese immigration to Brazil, and that promoted the creation of colonies in this country, as an opportunity for overseas expansion. As such, the Japanese state financed various settlement projects, promoted land ownership and provided financial and technical assistance that allowed the immigrants to become small proprietors. Furthermore, the Japanese government encouraged the maintenance of Japanese culture through Japanese language schools, newspapers and other institutions where the number of immigrants

⁶ Leonard Mosley, *Hirohito, Emperor of Japan* (Prentice Hall International Inc., 1966), 97.

⁷ Takeyuki Tsuda, "The Benefits of Being Minority: The Ethnic Status of the Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil", in *The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies* (University of California, San Diego, 2000), 2.

⁸ Toake Endoh, *Exporting Japan: Politics of Emigration to Latin America* (University of Illinois Press, 2009), 11. See also Nobuko Adachi (ed.), *Japanese and Nikkei at Home and Abroad: Negotiating Identities in a Global World* (New York: Cambria Press, 2010), 31-50.



was significant⁹. Carvalho argues that this plan operated more to promote Japan's international prestige than out of concern for the well being of the immigrants. For this reason, Marius Jansen has posited that since 1880s, the Japanese authorities understood emigration as important part in the role of territorial expansionism, labeling the immigrants as some form of the vanguard of the expanding nation¹⁰.

Among the workers that arrived in Brazil there were different reactions about what to do with their national sentiment. Carvalho argues that there were some immigrants that wanted to preserve their ethnic identity as Japanese, while others considered to adapt to the country they had emigrated. Despite the latter position, it seems that the former one was the most embraced by the Japanese immigrants, which still envisioned their presence in Brazil to be temporal. As the result, the Japanese schools in Brazil followed the Japanese educational system¹¹.

In order to offer an explanation on why the Japanese did not give up their culture, Christopher Reichl poses that the role of the Japanese government in establishing links between their country of origin and the new founded colonies was essential. However, he posits that religion and social ties were equally important. For instance, rituals of emperor worship made sacred the norms and sanctions of the ethnic communities and that participation were compulsory, thus cementing and preserving a shared ethnic identity. Nonetheless, we have to note that during the first stage of ethnic process, isolated communities had strong emotional ties to Japan and were motivated by the intention to return home¹². In addition, Robert Smith argues that the preservation of Japanese culture also had to do with the way in which the Japanese immigrants interacted with the native Brazilians in the *fazendas* (plantations) where they worked. There, the Japanese immigrants became shocked when they discovered that their co-workers were not only dark-skinned, but also illiterate. For this reason, they felt the necessity to protect themselves from the dark-skinned 'barbarians'¹³.

In this regard, Christopher Reichl writes that the Japanese rejected intermarriage and maintained a doctrine of Japanese superiority in the *colonias* (colonies).

⁹ Daniela de Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil: The Nikkeijin* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 146.

¹⁰ Marius Jansen, *The Emergency of Meiji Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 325.

¹¹ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 56.

¹² Christopher A. Reichl, "Stages in the Historical Process of Ethnicity: The Japanese in Brazil, 1908-1988", in *Ethnohistory* 42, (1995): 42, and Toake Endoh, *Exporting Japan*.

¹³ Robert Smith, "The ethnic Japanese in Brazil" *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 5, Winter (1979): 56.



Newcomers had the occasion to hear statements from old-timers to the effect that Brazilians do not work hard and are not trustworthy, and were discouraged from contacting with them. On the other hand, the reputation of Japan as a modern Empire also helped to reinforced emotional links between the immigrants and their country of origin¹⁴. For this reason Takashi Maeyama argues that after the immigrants' arrival in multiracial Brazil, having a Japanese identity became far more important than it had been in Japan¹⁵. On the other hand, as a consequence of urbanization during the 1930s, many foreign workers moved to São Paulo and other cities, seeking educational opportunities for their children. Carvalho notes that the Japanese immigrants in the cities engaged in industrial and commercial activities and diversified their economic activities. However, during this period the majority of the immigrants still lived in the colonias and performed agricultural labor¹⁶.

In relation to the debates that triggered the Japanese immigration during the Brazilian Assembly of 1934, the historiography divided the politicians and intellectuals involved in this discussion into two separated positions. Jeffrey Lesser argues that for the ones interested in the economic growth of the nation, the increasing production of capital, and trade, the Japanese were seen as the best possible type of immigrants. This vision has to do with the conceptualization of the Asian worker as efficient, submissive, and laborious¹⁷. In contrast, the literature of the anti-Japanese campaign followed a certain patters that were gathered from Brazilian sources from 1920 to 1950. Robert Smith, Hiroshi Saito, John B. Cornell and Takashi Maeyama argue that for the eugenicists that strove to turn Brazil into a Christian, European country, the Japanese immigration was undesirable¹⁸. These intellectuals considered the Japanese were not only racially inferior to Europeans, but that they were fanatically loyal to Japan, and that they had the tendency to form ethnic enclaves, maintaining a strong degree of self-segregation. In addition, scholars such as Rafael Shoji note that despite their recognition of the importance and economic contribution of the Japanese community many Brazilian politicians were apprehensive and feared the growing influence of Japanese

¹⁴ Reichl, "Stages in the Historical Process of Ethnicity", 51.

¹⁵ Takashi Maeyama, "Ethnicity, secret societies, and associations: the Japanese in Brazil", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21 (1979): 591-592.

¹⁶ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 37.

¹⁷ Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Duke University Press, 1999), 116.

¹⁸ Robert J. Smith et al, *The Japanese and their Descendants in Brazil: An Annotated Bibliography* (Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1967), IV.



imperialism¹⁹. For all these reasons, the anti-Japanese campaign argued that the Nikkei community was virtually unassimilable to the Brazilian mainstream society²⁰.

Nevertheless, the disparate positions that characterized the debates on the desirability of Japanese immigration were eventually resolved during the promulgation of the Constitution of 1934, which included an immigration amendment modeled on the U.S. National Origins Act of 1924. Jeffrey Lesser poses that the new constitution both promoted the Brazilization of foreigners, and also strained the Japanese government's relations with its colonists. For instance, some of the new amendments mandated all education to be in Portuguese, thus affecting those schools in the Japanese colonias that mirrored the system of their homeland²¹. The reaction of the Japanese immigrants and the *Nikkei* (Brazilians of Japanese descent) was also diverse. Lesser indicates that during these years, the editors of some magazines in Brazil such as *Gakusei*, reproduced some of the discourses of the elite, advocating for a mixture in which the best part of the Japanese and Brazilian cultures would produce a new culture denominated "*dainissei*". However, although some Japanese embraced the mainstream Luso-Brazilian culture, that did not mean that they accepted the nativism that supported it²².

3. Second World War (1939-1945)

By 1937, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry started to elaborate a new discourse regarding the Japanese immigrants. Oswaldo Aranha, the pro-U.S. foreign minister, along with numerous members of the military, believed that Japan was plotting to divide South America into colonies²³. Jeffrey Lesser argues that despite the increasing hostile attitude of the Brazilian intellectuals and politicians towards their ethnic group, the Nikkei community maintained a low profile, and rarely criticized Vargas publicly for his antiforeigner positions. However, the reinforcement of anti-Japanese discourses in Brazil meant that they and their descendants continued to be seen as the least assimilated, and assimilable group. Nevertheless, this kind of conspiracy theories was also applied to the immigrants of German descent. Stefan Rinke poses that due to the

¹⁹ Shoji, "The Failed Prophecy of Shinto Nationalism and the Rise of Japanese Brazilian Catholicism", 19.

²⁰ Robert J. Smith, Hiroshi Saito, John B. Cornell, and Takashi Maeyama, *The Japanese and their Descendants in Brazil: V*.

²¹ Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity*, 121.

²² *Ibidem*, 123.

²³ Frank D. McCann, Jr., *The Brazilian-American Alliance, 1937-1945* (Princeton University Press, 1973), 116



excellent commercial relations between Germany and Brazil, that blossom in the 1930s, combined with the allegedly strong standing of the nazis amongst German-Brazilians, gave rise to the idea of a "Fifth Column" of German-Brazilians which fought the Brazilian state from within. As a result of this suspicion, some Germans were interned, tortured, and German property was sequestered and nationalized²⁴.

In order to put and end to these foreign threats in Brazilian soil, Getulio Vargas (1930-1945, and 1951-1954) initiated a campaign of state-driven homogenization called *Brasilidade*, that sought to preserve Brazilian identity from the encroachment of ethnicity by eliminating several aspects of immigrant culture²⁵. As a consequence, Non-Portuguese-language materials were prohibited, and many schools were closed. According to Lesser, the *Brasilidade* campaign resonated deeply among Japanese immigrants, which considered to come back to Japan due to the sensation that the Brazilians would never accept them as members of their society²⁶. Until the end of 1941, Vargas sought to maintain relations with both the Allied and the Axis powers, but after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December, Brazil moved firmly into the Allied camp. This led to the house arrest of Brazilian diplomats in Japan, intensifying still further wild stories of "fifth column" activity in Japanese colonies²⁷. After the participation of Brazil in the war after 1942, the regime of Vargas ruptured diplomatic relations with Japan and began to attack the Japanese at every opportunity.

Although the Japanese plot to invade Brazil never materialized, these conspiracy theories provoked tensions in the Nikkei community with other Brazilians, that perceived them as a social threat. On the other hand, Jeffrey Lesser poses that this pressure over the Japanese immigrants produced another effect: the increasing Japanization of the Nikkei, to the extreme that those who did not actively show their loyalty to Japan were defined as "enemies"²⁸. In addition, these social tensions also led to the creation of a series of secret societies whose ultra-Japanese nationalism mixed with a desire to reinforce a space for Japanese-Brazilian identity. Some of these societies became active in the last years of the Second World War, and they performed

²⁴ Stefan Rinke, "Germany and Brazil, 1870-1945: A Relationship Between Spaces", in *Hist. cienc. saude-Manguinhos* vol.21 no.1, Jan./Mar (2014).

²⁵ For a deep analysis of the *Brasilidade* campaign see Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime 1930-1945* (Duke University Press, 2001).

²⁶ Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity*, 130.

²⁷ Mario Botelho de Miranda, *Um brasileiro no Japiao em guerra* (Sao Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1944), 266.

²⁸ Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity*, 136.



attacks against farms that provided war resources for the Allies, and destruction of property²⁹.

Among the Japanese secret societies, the most powerful was the Shindo Renmei (Way of the Subjects of the Emperor's League), whose leaders were retired Japanese army officers furious at Brazil for "becoming an enemy country." This society's main goal, which became public in August 1945, following Japan's surrender, was to maintain a permanent Japanized space in Brazil through the preservation of language, culture, and religion among nikkei and the reestablishment of Japanese schools³⁰. The main points of Shindo Renmei ideology can be analyzed in a document that spread quickly inside the colony and was known as "Kikawa Manifesto" or "Idea of Kikawa," probably elaborated in 1944. One of the main affirmations of his manifesto was that Japanese immigrants should remain subjects of the great empire of Japan and that the sacred nature of *kokutai* (Japanese essence) was the main educational value to be transmitted to their descendants³¹.

The members of the Shindo Renmei believed that the news of Japan's defeat was U.S. propaganda. Marco Castro argues that the poor broadcast quality of the Emperor's capitulation made the Japanese doubtful about their authenticity, along with the fact that many Nikkei did not even know how his voice sounded like³². Moreover, the Shindo produced their own documents to convince other Nikkei that Japan was winning the war. In fact, the Shindo group divided the Japanese-Brazilian community in two groups: the *kachigumi*, or "the victorious", that believed that the war was still going on. The majority of the individuals that belonged to this category expected to return to Japan and were of poor extraction. The other group was constituted by the *makegumi*, or "the defeated", who accepted Japan's defeat. They were usually the wealthier members of the community who were more informed and better adapted to Brazilian society³³. One of the most dreaded actions that the Shindo carried out was the assassination of some *makegumi*, such as the president of the Cotia co-operative, members of the KKKK,

²⁹ For a more detailed report of these attacks see Yukio Fujii and T. Lynn Smith, *The Acculturation of the Japanese in Brazil* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1959).

³⁰ Miyao Susumu and Jose Yamashiro, "A comunidade niponica no perfodo da guerra." In *Uma Epopeia Moderna: 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* (Editora Hucitec, 1992), 262.

³¹ Rafael Shoji, "The Failed Prophecy of Shinto Nationalism and the Rise of Japanese Brazilian Catholicism", 21

³² Marco Castro, *Entre o Japão e o Brasil: a construção da nacionalidade na trajetória de vida de Hiroshi Saito* (MA Dissertation, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 1994), 95.

³³ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 60.



traders, retailers and pub owners. Daniela de Carvalho posits that these killings highlight the importance of class divisions in the Japanese-Brazilian community, a fact little explored by the historiography³⁴.

Some of the scholars that shed light on the issue of social fragmentation is Rafael Shoji. He analyzes the division among the Nikkei by exploring the rates of conversion of the Japanese immigrants to Catholicism. He notes that the younger generation had more contact with Catholicism, which was seen as an important element in Brazilian national identity. For instance, he argues that a Catholic baptism would be thus an important strategic factor in creating Brazilian contacts and avoiding social prejudices directed at non-Catholics. Being only a Buddhist was to be classified as a pagan, thus making inclusion in the Brazilian society more difficult³⁵. On the other hand, Shoji poses that Nikkei Catholicism had an essential role in favoring the integration and acculturation of the Japanese immigrants, in promoting clarification campaigns in opposition to Shindo Renmei, and in serving as an intermediary between the Japanese ethnic group and the Brazilian society³⁶.

Jeffrey Lesser states that the terrorist attacks of the Japanese secret societies resonated among native Brazilians, that envisioned Japanese and ethnic solidarity as incompatible with their society. At the same time, for those Nikkei that were struggling to integrate themselves into the Brazilian culture, the activities of the Shindo Renmei proved to be nefarious for their own personal reputations³⁷. In 1945, some of them demanded a consistent police repression for the criminals that were affecting negatively their image as people of Japanese descent. Finally, in 1956, the Brazilian authorities arrested four hundred Shindo Renmei members and scheduled eighty leaders for deportation to Japan in early 1946. In order to appease the tensions that the secret societies created in the society, the new Japanese government was asked to send documents to Brazil that would make clear the Allied Victory³⁸.

For the historiography, the appearance of the Shindo Renmei and other Japanese secret societies in Brazil were a reaction against assimilationist politics. For instance, Maeyama and Shoji claim that the Shindo was an expression of anti-acculturation. Like

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 61.

³⁵ Rafael Shoji, "The Failed Prophecy of Shinto Nationalism and the Rise of Japanese Brazilian Catholicism", 27.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 28-35.

³⁷ Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity*, 143.

³⁸ For a complete review of the dismantlement of the Shindo Renmei see Herculano Neves, *A processo da "Shindo-Renmei" e demais associações secretas japonesas* (Sao Paulo, 1960).



Jeffrey Lesser, Maeyama argues, that because the pressure they experienced to assimilate into Brazilian society, the Nikkei felt resentful toward the imposition that banned their schools and cultural materials published in their language, and reacted precisely by emphasizing their nationalism³⁹.

4. Post-war period (1945-2000):

After the war, many Japanese realized that their dreams to return to their homeland vanished. Although in the first decade after the war a minority of Nikkei remained attached to their cultural traditions and tried to preserve their purity, the majority of the Japanese and their descendants underwent an ethnic identity crisis. Daniela de Carvalho poses that due to the war and the terrorist acts of the secret societies, the Japanese were determined to improve their negative image and become true Brazilians⁴⁰. In this regard, scholars such as Mieko Nishida poses that Japanese Brazilian identity was never static and immutable, but adaptable. She argues that Japanese immigrants modified its strategies of resistance and integration according to the historical context that they lived⁴¹. As such, in the postwar scenario, many Japanese migrants wanted to advance in society by de-Japanizing themselves and by marrying outside their ethnic group. This was an important change in the Nikkei community, that during the early years of immigration were clearly opposed to mixed marriage⁴². However, due to racial prejudices, it should be noted that people of Portuguese descent were also reluctant to accept a spouse of Japanese descent.

According to Hiroshi Saito, with the move to the cities the incidence of intermarriage increased as the Japanese were exposed to more interaction with other non-Japanese individuals⁴³. On the other hand, authors such as Mello have explored mixed marriages and he has concluded that Nikkei resorted to different strategies to reject race mixing. For instance, some argued that Brazilians were too dark-skinned, or that their behavior was not compatible with that of the Japanese. However, in other circumstances, parental opposition had to do with the candidates' social position,

³⁹ Maeyama, "Ethnicity, secret societies, and associations", 589-610.

⁴⁰ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 59. A recent work by

⁴¹ Mieko Nishida, *Diaspora and Identity: Japanese Brazilians in Brazil and Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2018).

⁴² Francisca Vieira, *O Japonês na Frente de Expansão Paulista: o Processo de Absorção do Japonês em Marília* (São Paulo: USP, 1973) , 315.

⁴³ Hiroshi Saito, *O Japonês no Brasil: Estudo da Mobilidade e Fixação* (São Paulo: Ed. Sociologia e Política, 1961), 218



meaning that the non-Japanese candidate was of lower social extraction than the Nikkei person⁴⁴.

In general, Carvalho states that the issue of ethnic identity remained a matter of concern during the 1970s and the 1980s. The Nikkei were still struggling to be accepted as members of the larger Brazilian society, that envisioned them as alien elements⁴⁵. Regarding the Japanese communities both in urban and rural areas, they managed to preserve the notion of their cultural and ethnic superiority after the Second World War, and did not want to break those barriers⁴⁶. The explanation for this resistance has been offered from different psychologist such as Toshiaki Saito and Júlia Saito, who claimed that the sense of cultural tradition was reinforced after the treatment that the Brazilian society gave to the people of Japanese descent, marked by a sense of fear, suspicion, and insecurity⁴⁷.

However, this is not how all the Nikkei considered their position in society. Despite the existence of a marginalized group, there were individuals fully assimilated into Brazilian society that were regarded as part of a successful immigrant group which had achieved middle class status by virtue of hard work and educational merit. Tayeki Tsuda has studied this issue, and he argues that although the Nikkei were (and still are) a minority in the country, they enjoyed a significantly higher socioeconomic status than the majority populace and their distinctive cultural qualities and social position are respected, if not admired. This economic success encourages the Nikkeijin to identify rather strongly with their Japaneseness and take pride in their ethnic heritage while generally distancing themselves from what they perceive negatively as "Brazilian"⁴⁸. However, Tsuda is aware that the positive minority status of the Brazilian Japanese is not simply a product of their respected socioeconomic position. It is also based on favorable Brazilian perceptions of Japaneseness, which are undoubtedly a product of Japan's prominent and respected position in the global order as an economic superpower⁴⁹. For instance, Brazilians forge this image through the consumption of newspapers, TV series, automobiles, and so forth, which present Japan as a modern first world country.

⁴⁴ Lucia Mello, "Costumes Matrimoniais entre Japoneses e seus Descendents no Brasil", in Schaden (ed), *Homen, Cultura e Sociedade no Brasil* (Vozes, 1972), 374.

⁴⁵ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 64.

⁴⁶ Vieira, *O Japonês na Frente de Expansão Paulista*: 342.

⁴⁷ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 65.

⁴⁸ Tsuda, "The Benefits of Being Minority", 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 9.



On the other hand, John B. Cornell points out that although the Japanese were not the only group entirely in the middle class, they felt little in common with middle-class Brazilians, and perceived themselves to be closer to other Japanese⁵⁰. In this respect, Saito poses that the prestige associated with Japan has provoked that the identification of the Nikkei community with Brazil to be less attractive⁵¹. Tsuda writes that because the positive connotation of Japanese culture, the cultural differences of the Japanese-Brazilians are regarded in an overwhelmingly positive manner in Brazil. He argues that there is notable consensus among Brazilians that the *japonês* are hard-working, honest, intelligent, trustworthy, and responsible, and so forth⁵². For this reason, the Japanese in Brazil at the end of the twentieth century (and today), strive to maintain their ethnic identity and minority status because it is beneficial for them and their overall image. Nevertheless, Tsuda concedes that this close identification with Japan has a negative side.

Some Nikkei are concerned with the dependence that they have with Japan, which may affect them negatively in case their country of origin does something bad, or its status in the world declines. Another negative aspect is that in order to reinforce their Japaneseness, some Nikkei emphasized the negative aspects of the Brazilian people, labeling them as being lazy, unreliable, and dishonest⁵³. As I noted in the introduction, I think these types of studies would be even more helpful if they incorporated why the Japanese people in Brazil had, since the early twentieth century, a negative image of their Brazilian neighbors. In this case, Tsuda mentions that some Nikkei talk negatively about their neighbors, but neither he nor the historiography at large never indicate the reason why that conceptualization persists.

But why were the immigrants of Japanese descent so successful in the Brazil after the Second World War? The thesis most generally offered in the literature to explain their success is that Japanese traditional principles and the structure of the community sustained their aspirations, while maintaining links of solidarity between its members. Scholars such as Makabe have explained that one of the key factors of the Nikkei success is related to the rapid economic growth of Brazil and the lack of

⁵⁰ John B. Cornell, "Ethnic, Class, and Family Relations in Japanese Survivor Colonies in the Noroeste and Alta Paulista Frontier, São Paulo State, Brazil", in Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, (1983): 39.

⁵¹ Toshiaki Saito, "Brasileiros e Japoneses, Confronto de Identidades" in Masao Ohno, *O Nikkei e Sua Americanidade* (COPANI, 1986), 246.

⁵² Tsuda, "The Benefits of Being Minority", 11.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 12.



competition from indigenous workers and other immigrant groups⁵⁴. Another important aspect is the accumulated wealth and resources that the Japanese community had gathered since their arrival during the prewar period. As discussed in the second section, the Japanese government financed the establishment and colonies, that allowed the immigrants to become small proprietors⁵⁵. This trend continued after the war, making people of Japanese descent more favorable to support the education of their children in big cities, where they had a notable presence in institutions of higher learning⁵⁶. In fact, Toake Endoh argues that the Japanese State after the Second World War continued to promote migration to get rid of the population that failed to adjust to the scenario of national reconstruction and changing socioeconomic environment. In this regard, the postwar emigration, shedding its old imperialist garb, became a vehicle to make substantial and tangible contributions to the economic development of Brazil. Emigrants were made the agents of this state idealism, entering into undeveloped hinterlands as frontier colonizers without sufficient material, financial, or even moral support from the Japanese administrators⁵⁷.

One of the issues that the historiography has not explored sufficiently in this regard is the discrimination experienced by the Nikkei in their relation to native Brazilians. Daniela de Carvalho poses that the literature has disregarded the anti-Japanese movements in Brazil of 1930 and 1945. According to her, this omission is confirmed in the debate that took place at the symposium organized to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Japanese immigration in 1978. In this event, most of the participants emphasized the tolerance of Brazilian society as key to the success of the Japanese immigrants⁵⁸. For instance, scholars such as Hiroshi Saito and José Ushiro among others, attributed the "easy adaptation" to the "friendly attitude of the Brazilian population"⁵⁹. In contrast, Carvalho refers to the *Brasilidade* campaign and the obsession of the eugenicists of the early twentieth century to show concrete examples of the type of discrimination that people of Japanese descent had to endure.

⁵⁴ Tomoko Makabe, "The Theory of the Split Labor Market: A Comparison of the Japanese experience in Brazil and Canada" in *Social Forces*, 59, (1981): 786–809.

⁵⁵ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 146.

⁵⁶ Around the 20% of the Japanese had a university degree in 1992, a higher percentage than the national Brazilian average. In Tsuda, "Benefits of Being Minority", 8-9.

⁵⁷ Toake Endoh, *Exporting Japan*, 199.

⁵⁸ Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil*, 46.

⁵⁹ Hiroshi Saito, *A Presença dos Japoneses no Brasil* (São Paulo: T.A. Queiroz, 1980) 81–90.



Another important debate in the historiography revolves around the role of ethnicity and integration. In the 1980s, DeSantis and Benkin defined a model of ethnic integration divided into three different stages. They argued that immigrants underwent a first stage of an ethnic community, in which the foreigner is isolated and surrounded by members of their same community (ethnic enclave). The second stage is marked by the slow integration of the immigrant in the society, though they note that some voluntary organizations persist with the ethnic neighborhoods. Finally, in the third stage, the immigrants does not belong to any ethnic community, although they may adhere to the cultural symbols of the homeland by attending or contributing to events, such as exhibitions of traditional dance⁶⁰. According to these authors, the third is the final stage that follows total integration.

Christopher Reichl agrees that the model proposed by DeSantis and Benkin is accurate at describing the early years of isolated Japanese communities (stage one), and the voluntary membership in ethnic organizations after the Second World War (stage two). However, he criticizes some of his aspects. For instance, he argues that Brazil received different waves of Japanese immigrants throughout the twentieth century that had to adapt to the historical circumstances that they encountered differently. For instance, Reichl poses that the third stage may be visible in cities such as Sao Paulo, but not in other rural communities in which the first sages are still present⁶¹. On the other hand, Reichl notes that the he idea of stages does not consider race. As Carvalho emphasized, he shares the idea that the antiassimilation posture of Japanese in Brazil was highest when they faced assimilationist pressure. In Brazil races are cultural categories, not descent groups, but racial terms are common labels for address and reference. As such, he concludes that "many Japanese Brazilians remain within the ethnic group for most of their social interaction, and they will continue to be a visible ethnic group for generations even if many assimilate"⁶².

5. Conclusion

In the study of the Japanese immigration to Brazil during the twentieth century, the historiography has considered ethnicity to be a primordial attachment that stems from being Japanese or of Japanese descent. In relation to the relationship between the

⁶⁰ Grace DeSantis and Richard Benkin, "Ethnicity without Community" in *Ethnicity*, (1980): 137-143.

⁶¹ Reichl, "Stages in the Historical Process of Ethnicity", 43.

⁶² *Ibidem*, 47.



immigrants and their country of origin, Daniela de Carvalho denounces that the historiography has ignored the intervention of Japanese officials and their role in the reinforcement of pre-existing ties with Japan and Japanese culture, as demonstrated in the creation of co-operatives sponsored by imperial agents. Although Japanese immigrants to Brazil have received much attention since the 1980s, an approach which incorporates the policies and the ideologies of the originating and receiving societies is still lacking in her opinion.

On the other hand, the literature has focused on the assimilation of Japanese immigrants into Brazilian society, emphasizing attachments to their country of origin, while underestimating the role played by factors related to the receiving society, like discrimination against the Japanese by Brazilians. Scholars such as Daniela de Carvalho and Jeffrey Lesser, have been filling this gap with their study of the Japanese immigrants during the pre-war and war periods, demonstrating how the Vargas' government tried to crush Japanese ethnic culture in Brazil and why some debates that emerged on the early XX century on immigration envisioned the Japanese workers negatively.

In addition, Takeyuki Tsuda's study has demonstrated that racial stereotypes of Japanese people could have a positive image today, and that the Nikkei are considered hard-working, efficient, and intelligent; a stereotype that is preserved by the own Japanese that prefer to distance themselves from their neighbors. In this respect, my main argument stated in the introduction is that the literature does not give a solid answer on why the Japanese immigrants had a pejorative vision of native Brazilians from the early twentieth century until today. Takeshi Maeyama, Robert Smith and Christopher Reichl emphasize the early interaction of Brazilians and Japanese in the fazendas, and they all argue that the immigrants kept themselves separated from the dark-skinned workers, which they saw as barbarians.

In this respect, the strategy to Japanize themselves in order to avoid contact with the *gaijin* (foreigners or non-Japanese people) facilitated the cultural preservation of the immigrants. However, what I have noted throughout the reading of the historiography is that the Japanese were resorting to the same tactics of self-exclusion during the whole century. During the time of the fazendas they thought themselves better because Japan was an imperial superpower. However, in the post-war period, the Nikkei utilized the same strategy, but by building on the image of modern Japan as being a successful first

world country. What I see in common is that the Nikkei community identified itself with Japan because in those two distinct periods their country of origin had a much more positive image in the world, that permitted them to differentiate themselves from the Brazilians, which were not only "dark-skinned", but also less successful in the international scenario. However, there is a shortage in the historiography that examines this trend during the whole twentieth century.

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