Becoming Brazilian to Be Japanese: Emigrant Assimilation, Cultural Anthropology, and National Identity

MIRIAM KINGSBERG

University of Colorado, Boulder

INTRODUCTION

Assimilation makes members of a group out of those who are not.[1] In the age of the modern nation-state, gaining the qualities for inclusion in one polity necessitates relinquishing some or all of the characteristics that confer acceptance in another.[2] Scholars have long studied assimilation-as-gain in delineating national identity in immigrant-receiving countries such as the United States, Brazil, South Africa, and Israel.[3] Yet they have barely addressed the role of assimilation-as-loss in defining population-exporting nations, despite a growing literature on the political, economic, and cultural shadows cast by emigrants and their descendants.[4] In part, this gap derives from the tendency of contemporary historians and social scientists to privilege the perspective of the diaspora, a project that often ends in deconstructing the nation

[1] I use the word "member" rather than citizen to suggest a sense of belonging that transcends legal definition. Citizenship is part of membership, but does not necessarily include the full range of characteristics demanded of members. Christian Joppke, *Citizenship and Immigration* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2010), vii, 3.

[2] Although recent work on the transnational migrant has revealed a tendency to self-identify as a member of multiple political communities, the nation of origin does not necessarily share this view. See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

[3] The classic study of assimilation and national identity in the United States is Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963). On the historiography of assimilation, see Russell A. Kazal, "Reinventing Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *American Historical Review* 100, 2 (1995): 437–71.

[4] See, for example, Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin, eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); and Susan Eckstein and Adil Najam, eds., *How Immigrants Impact Their Homelands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

altogether.[5] Exporters of human capital, moreover, generally downplay the importance of migration to collective identity. Unlike immigrant-receiving states, which enjoy an image of abundance generously shared with the world, nations left behind often suffer the stigma of being unable to provide for their citizens. "Emigrants" vanish from the imagined community at the moment of embarkation, reappearing as "immigrants" in a new, more uplifting narrative.[6]

The history of modern Japan offers an ideal case to explore how thinking about the forfeiture of national membership by out-migrants reflects, challenges, and changes the bases of belonging for those who remain. Starting in the late 1860s, the Meiji government promoted settlement in foreign countries as a solution to long-standing anxieties regarding domestic overcrowding and resource scarcity. In contrast to other major emigrant populations such as the Chinese, Germans, Indians, Italians, and Poles, Japanese began departing the home country after it had become a modern nation. As veterans of a comprehensive and intensive state-building campaign, Japanese emigrants were particularly attuned to issues of national identity. Meanwhile, Japanese policymakers closely monitored foreign public and political responses to the diaspora as an index of the state's progress in achieving parity with the great powers of the West. Thus, although the emigration of Japanese did not compare numerically to simultaneous population flows such as the European exodus to the Americas, the Japanese government invested relatively heavily in an ongoing relationship with overseas communities.[7] Under these circumstances, observations regarding assimilation and "Japaneseness" often converged.

The significance of assimilation as both ideology and policy to "Japan" and the "Japanese" has scarcely escaped scholars of modern history. Yet the secondary literature on this topic has developed piecemeal, impeding attempts to understand how changing "rules" for transforming the Self into the Other have constructed and reconstructed that very Self. Historians of Japanese imperialism in Asia prior to 1945 have analyzed ambitious but ambivalent

---

[5] The term "diaspora" has traditionally connoted a people in exile who did not assimilate and viewed themselves as sojourners rather than settlers. Today, scholars use the term more broadly to characterize groups with a strong collective ethno-national identity tied to a foreign state. Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), ix. Nobuko Adachi applies this more inclusive definition to frame Japanese emigrants and their descendants as a diaspora. See Nobuko Adachi, "Theorizing Japanese Diaspora," in Nobuko Adachi, ed., *Japanese Diaspora: Unsung Pasts, Conflicting Presents, Uncertain Future*s (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1–22.

[6] On the representation of the nation as an imagined community, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[7] Saitō Hiroshi, *Gaikokujin ni natta Nihonjin* (Tokyo: Saimuru shuppankai, 1978), 7; Paul Spickard, *Japanese Americans: The Formation and Transformation of an Ethnic Group*, 2d ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 58; Toake Endoh, *Exporting Japan: Politics of Emigration Toward Latin America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 163.

attempts to assimilate colonial subjects.[8] Students of the Japanese diaspora in the Americas both before and after World War II track the generational progression from "abandoned people" to "marginal men" to "model minority."[9] Social scientists call attention to integrative and exclusionary responses to newcomers and other "outsiders" in contemporary Japan.[10] Weaving these literatures into a single study shows how assimilation-as-loss produces collective identity in population-exporting nations in much the same way that assimilation-as-gain has been shown to build the bases of belonging in immigrant-receiving states.

As numerous scholars have pointed out, Japaneseness has historically encompassed a notion of common culture (language, religion, traditions, etc.) and descent (blood, biology, or race). Throughout the twentieth century, assimilation generally entailed some metamorphosis of these conveniently vague qualities.[11] Prior to 1945, Japan's foreign policy, undergirding the national identity as an imperial power, largely shaped expectations regarding the assimilation of out-migrants to host societies. Blood, however diluted, emerged as a necessary and sufficient condition of belonging. The desirability of cultural adaptation depended on Japan's relationship with the host country. Within the Japanese empire in Asia, the state deployed emigrants as a vanguard of subjugation, encouraging them to disseminate their own traditions and lifestyles among colonial subjects. Migrants in the Americas, by contrast, faced

---

[8] See, for example, Komagome Takeshi, *Shokuminchi teikoku Nihon no bunka tōgō* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996); Oguma Eiji, *"Nihonjin" no kyōkai: Okinawa, Ainu, Taiwan, Chōsen, shokuminchi shihai kara fukki undō made* (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1998); Ishida Takeshi, *Kioku to bōkyaku no seijigaku: Dōka seisaku, sensō sekinin, shūgōteki kioku* (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2000); Leo T. S. Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Mark E. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

[9] On the assimilation of Japanese in the Americas, see Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Stewart Lone, *The Japanese Community in Brazil, 1908–1940: Between Samurai and Carnival* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Daniel Masterson, with Sayaka Funada-Classen, *The Japanese in Latin America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Yuji Ichioka, *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Spickard, *Japanese Americans*; and Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[10] See, for example, Michael A. Weiner, ed., *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity* (New York: Routledge, 1997); John Lie, *Multiethnic Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Maeyama Takashi, *Ibunka sesshoku to aidenteitei-* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobō, 2001).

[11] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998); Oguma Eiji, *A Genealogy of "Japanese" Self-Images*, David Askew, trans. (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2002); Kevin M. Doak, *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan: Placing the People* (Boston: Brill, 2007).

pressure to present a positive image of a modern, enlightened Japan by adopting Western customs.

It was in Brazil, home of the largest Japanese diaspora in the Western Hemisphere, that the criteria of national membership were most contested. In Brazil, Japanese emigrants and their descendants sought to reconcile the interests of their native country and their attachment to "home" with well-developed local ideologies of assimilation. The effects of these competing demands became apparent in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when tens of thousands of diaspora were unable to come to terms with Japan's surrender. Extremist attacks against those who dared to acknowledge the defeat of the empire brought the schism of the community to international attention. The analysis of this phenomenon by a young cultural anthropologist from Japan, Izumi Seiichi (1915–1970), established new norms for assimilation-as-loss and gave social scientists a role in formulating the foundations of membership in the postwar nation. Following Izumi, subsequent generations of scholars continued to study emigrants and their descendants throughout the Americas, categorized as "Nikkei," as a foil for Japaneseness. Today, although social scientists no longer exercise the same influence over national identity, the Nikkei remain central to understandings of collective belonging. In fact, their importance is expanding as Japan transitions from a population-exporting state to a land of in-migrants, including several hundred thousand Nikkei from South America.

FOREIGN POLICY AND EMIGRANT ASSIMILATION IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE

During the mid-nineteenth century, Japan sought to forestall colonization by the great powers by remodeling itself as a Western-style nation. Although the state had historically discouraged or outright banned movement beyond the home islands, beginning in 1868 leaders adopted the new solution of publicly sponsored emigration to address old fears of rural overcrowding and pressure on scarce resources. Over the next seventy years, Japanese settled throughout North and South America, as well as in the various Asian states that came under imperial control. Many emigrants, driven out by poverty rather than enticed by a new destination, viewed themselves as "abandoned people" (*kimin*) and ardently hoped to "return home wearing brocade" (*kokioe nishiki*). By 1941, when war with the Allies effectively sealed Japan's borders, the Japanese diaspora numbered about four million, with over six hundred thousand in the Americas and 3.4 million in the empire, including Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, China, and various islands in the South Pacific.[12]

---

[12] Harumi Befu, "Japanese Transnational Migration in Time and Space," in Nobuko Adachi, ed., *Japanese and Nikkei at Home and Abroad: Negotiating Identities in a Global World* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2010), 31–49.

A comparison of expectations for emigrant assimilation in and beyond the realm exposes the weight of foreign policy in delineating the bases of Japanese identity. Prior to 1945, descent and culture represented mutually constitutive elements of belonging in the Japanese "race-nation" (*minzoku*), a concept heavily influenced by nineteenth-century German notions of the *Volk*. But whereas ideologies of the Volk evolved under the Nazis to uphold the "purity" of the Aryan race, Japanese scholars increasingly viewed the national lineage as heterogeneous, blending the blood of diverse archaic migrants to the home islands. Foreign policymakers promoted this pluralist history to justify imperial rule and encourage marriages between the Japanese and their colonial subjects as a means of "improving" inferior racial stock and binding indigenes more tightly to the empire. "Mixed" blood tended to signify progress in "becoming the same" as Japanese (*dōka*), although actual instances of exogamy remained few. In the realm of culture, by contrast, the state strongly discouraged adaptation by Japanese emigrants. Rather, leaders expected the diaspora to preserve and disseminate "pure" and "superior" metropolitan lifestyles and traditions.[13] Japanese social scientists in the colonies acknowledged and researched diverse indigenous customs to facilitate the assimilation of Taiwanese, Koreans, and others, but took for granted the exemplary and eternal Japaneseness of emigrant culture. The reality of local accommodation notwithstanding, Japanese invariably functioned as agents rather than objects within imperial discourses of *dōka*.[14]

In the Americas, by contrast, Japan's foreign policy objectives produced a different vision of assimilation, encouraging both biological and cultural change in emigrants. Japan sought an outlet for "excess" population rather than political domination in the New World. Many early emigrants settled in the American West, which was viewed as the most economically promising destination. U.S. citizens, however, increasingly came to oppose Japanese newcomers as competitors for land and jobs. Nativist journalists and policymakers cited the alleged unwillingness and incapacity of the "yellow races" to assimilate as justification for excluding immigrants. Ignoring the obstacles of discrimination, they faulted settlers for creating enclave societies and failing to take up local customs, values, and language. In response, many Japanese

---

[13] Oguma, *Genealogy of Japanese Self-Images*; Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies*; Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 76–84.

[14] On the history of Japanese ethnology, see Jan van Bremen and Akitoshi Shimizu, eds., *Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia and Oceania* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999); Akitoshi Shimizu and Jan van Bremen, eds., *Wartime Anthropology in Asia and the Pacific* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2003); Jennifer Robertson, ed., *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Sakano Tōru, *Nihon to jinruigakusha: 1884–1952-nen* (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 2005); and Yamaji Katsuhiko, ed., *Nihon no jinruigaku: Shokuminchi shugi, ibunka kenkyū, gakujutsu chōsa no rekishi* (Nishinomiya: Kansai Gakuin Daigaku, 2011).

defended their desire and ability to adapt. To the Japanese state of the late nine-teenth and early twentieth centuries, the assimilation of its members as Amer-icans affirmed the Westernization of the homeland and reflected an even longer national tradition of absorbing the "best" elements of foreign culture. Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960), one of the leading Japanese philosophers of his day, argued that an aptitude for assimilation, honed over the course of many centu-ries, in fact distinguished the Japanese as a superior race-nation. In his view, rapid acclimatization to Euro-American civilization had enabled Japan to thrive in the international arena and colonize less adaptable, "inferior" popu-lations. Rather than "abandoned people," emigrants were the "truest patriots," proud proof of a characteristic Japanese skill in "evolving."[15]

Despite strenuous opposition on the part of the Japanese government, set-tlers, and supporters, the United States drastically curtailed immigration in the "Gentleman's Agreement" of 1907 and barred Asians completely under the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Legislation also blocked Japanese settlement in Canada (1907 and 1928) and much of Spanish America, including Uruguay (1890), Costa Rica (1896), Cuba (1902), Paraguay (1903), Guatemala (1909), and Venezuela (1912). However, the former Portuguese colony of Brazil, which sought agricultural workers, offered a New World repository for Japan's "surplus" population. Japanese began arriving in Brazil in 1908, but perceptions of underdevelopment and the greater allure of other desti-nations initially circumscribed the number of newcomers. From 1924, however, settlement boomed with the active support of emigration corporations (*imin gaisha*) affiliated with the Japanese government. Many migrants arrived as contract laborers to replace freed African slaves on coffee plantations. Emi-gration corporations also purchased land for the establishment of new planta-tions, populated entirely by Japanese settlers, in remote frontier locations. By 1940, Brazil was home to about two hundred thousand Japanese diaspora, more than any other nation in the Western Hemisphere.[16]

Brazilian responses to Japanese immigration were complex. In the early twentieth century, many policymakers aspired to "whiten" the population, including multi-national newcomers, indigenous peoples, and the descendants of Iberian colonizers and African slaves. "Whitening" did not simply refer to a transformation of skin color, but also encompassed the assumption of a "modern," Euro-American national identity.[17] Brazil's anti-immigration

---

[15] Watsuji Tetsurō, *Watsuji Tetsurō zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1961), 290; Tanaka Seinosuke, *Nihonjin no shin hatten chi: Nanbei Burajiru* (Tokyo: Kaigai hattensha, 1919), 2.

[16] Iyo Kunimoto, "Japanese Migration to Latin America," in Barbara Stallings and Gabriel Székely, eds., *Japan, the United States, and Latin America: Toward a Trilateral Relationship in the Western Hemisphere* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 99–121.

[17] On "whiteness" in Brazil, see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Nancy Leys Stepan, *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991);

lobby often singled out Japanese migrants as an obstacle to this agenda, deeming them unassimilable "cysts" upon the body of the nation, "yellow and indissoluble like sulphur." In the context of Japan's increasing geopolitical assertiveness, some suspected the diaspora of plotting an imperialist takeover or feared that they would assimilate "white" Brazilians.[18] Proponents of Japanese immigration, meanwhile, inverted this alarm to argue that Brazil had much to learn from Japan and the Japanese. They praised Japan as a model for Brazil's future as a homogenous, "civilized," and economically productive state within the ranks of the great powers. Defenders of the Japanese valorized their alleged loyalty, patriotism, and willingness to work hard. For many Brazilian social scientists and policymakers, as well as Japanese themselves, the Japanese were the "whites of Asia," whose attributed racial characteristics might positively influence the heterogeneous domestic population.[19]

To bolster support for the presence of the Japanese in Brazil, the Japanese Foreign Ministry insisted on the ability of emigrants to assimilate and contribute to their new home. In 1924, the government sponsored the scientist Takaoka Kumao to investigate ways of improving the reputation of the diaspora in South America. Takaoka acknowledged the value of an ongoing human connection to Japan, but warned that Brazil would likely cease to welcome populations that insisted on an enclave existence. Reflecting on the case of the United States, where denying Asian settlers the right to naturalize had laid the legal basis for their exclusion, Takaoka encouraged the diaspora to acquire Brazilian citizenship. In São Paulo, Noda Ryōji of the Japanese consulate promoted assimilation by urging religious conversion to Catholicism, restricting the entry of Buddhist and Shintō priests, and requiring new arrivals to swear to refrain from proselytizing. Both Takaoka and Noda suggested that the Japanese government provide pre-departure training for emigrants in how to "repay Brazilian hospitality by stimulating modernization."[20] The Japanese state also funded institutional commitments to agricultural development, such as the Instituto Kurihara de Ciencia Natural Brasileira (Japanese, Kurihara shizen kagaku kenkyūjo; English, Kurihara institute for the study of natural

---

Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *The Spectacle of the Races: Scientists, Institutions, and the Race Question in Brazil, 1870–1930*, Leland Guyer, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); and Jerry Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[18] Francisco Garcia Calderón, *Latin America: Its Rise and Progress*, Bernard Miall, trans. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 324–31.

[19] Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 81–113, 147–65.

[20] Takaoka Kumao, "Burajiru imin kenkyū," in Nihon tosho senta-, ed., *Nikkei imin shiryō shū Nanbei hen*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Nihon tosho senta-, 1998), 87–89, 281–82; Noda Ryōji, "Nanbei jijō," in Nihon tosho senta-, ed., *Nikkei imin shiryō shū Nanbei hen*, vol. 21 (Tokyo: Nihon tosho senta-, 1998), 261–303.

resources).[21] Japan viewed Brazil, like its Asian colonies, as less socially, culturally, and economically advanced than itself. Even in the absence of ambitions to dominate South America politically, "progress" rationalized the presence of the Japanese.

Many diaspora leaders in Brazil, blending the interests of their communities and the Japanese nation-state, also encouraged cultural adaptation to the host country. In a five-month survey in 1938, Wako Shungorō found that nearly 90 percent of the approximately ninety thousand Japanese emigrants and their descendants in Bauru province aspired to "return" to Japan. Wako, who had lived in the region for twenty-six years, himself still longed for the land of his ancestors. Nonetheless, four visits "home" had convinced him of the impossibility of repatriation: in addition to feeling a surprising discomfort in Japan, he refused to commit his four Brazil-born children to a "prison" of hunger and poverty. While admitting, "assimilation is difficult to hope for," Wako nonetheless urged his community to fulfill their mission as Japanese by applying the traditional "Japanese spirit" to cultivating a new homeland.[22]

To Wako, assimilation did not undermine ultimate identification as "Japanese." In contrast to the empire, where Japanese belonging stipulated both blood and cultural commonality, in the Americas descent alone came to suffice as a condition of national membership. This compromise enabled the diaspora to instrumentally adopt local customs and even take on foreign citizenship, while satisfying a longing to remain "Japanese." "No matter where in the world the Japanese settle, the blood pounding through our race-nation does not change," affirmed one emigration officer. In Wako's words, "ineradicable love for Japan flows through our veins."[23] For many diaspora in Brazil, the promise of permanent inclusion in the national community mitigated feelings of abandonment and provided a sense of self-worth and even superiority in the face of discrimination at the hands of "white" neighbors.[24] The ideology of blood also provided a means of extending Japaneseness to populations whose identity was contested. These included over seventy thousand emigrants from the recently annexed Ryūkyū Islands (Okinawa), who made up about 10 percent of all "Japanese" diaspora in the Americas but whose belonging in the nation remained disputed at home; as well as most emigrant children, who were legal citizens of their country of birth rather than Japan.[25]

---

[21]   Aoyagi Ikutarō, *Burajiru ni okeru Nihonjin hatten shi* (Tokyo: Burajiru ni okeru Nihonjin hattenshi kankō iinkai, 1941), 170–71, 270.

[22]   Wako Shungorō, *Bauru kannai no hōjin* (San Pauro: Wako Shungorō, 1939), 1–11.

[23]   Aoyagi, *Burajiru ni okeru Nihonjin*, 331; Wako, *Bauru kannai no hōjin*, 4.

[24]   Saitō Hiroshi, "Kokusaijin no senku to shite Nikkei imin," in Saitō Hiroshi, Komai Hiroshi, and Nakagawa Fumio, eds., *Burajiru shakai to Nihon* (Tokyo: Nihon kokusai mondai kenkyūsho, 1978), 20–52, here 24.

[25]   For recent scholarship on emigrants from Okinawa, see Ronald Y. Nakasone, *Okinawan Diaspora* (Honolulu: University of Hawaìi Press, 2002). During the Meiji period, Japanese citizenship followed the principle of *jus sanguinis*, whereby all children born to Japanese parents, irrespective

Reflecting the importance of blood, the diaspora in the Americas created unprecedented modes of self-reference: the categories of *Issei*, *Nisei*, and *Sansei* (first, second, and third generation). More general terms such as *dōhō* (literally, "born from the same womb") also invoked biological commonality. Other popular means of denoting emigrants included "Japanese" (*Nihonjin*), "Japanese nationals" (Nihon *kokumin*), "Japanese subjects" (*Nihon shinmin*), and "sojourners abroad" (*zairyū hōjin*). Settlers in Brazil wrote of themselves as *zai-Haku Nihonjin*—"Japanese in Brazil"—never "Brazilian." *Imin* (migrant) also remained a common collective label, even as the proportion of *Issei* diminished among the diaspora. Signifying both "emigrant" and "immigrant," "*imin*" linguistically obfuscated any shift in identification from one nation to another.[26]

The ideology of biological belonging also gave rise to complex views regarding exogamy. Transplanted to the Americas, Japanese debates over mixed marriage encountered various local perspectives and legal structures governing interethnic relations. The United States and Canada deplored and even criminalized "miscegenation" as a source of racial pollution and degeneration. Japanese proponents of intermarriage in North America generally sounded a defensive note, denying common presumptions regarding the cultural incompatibility of partners and the genetic inferiority of offspring.[27]

By contrast, many early-twentieth-century Brazilian scholars and political leaders, like their Japanese counterparts, viewed the ability to absorb and fuse diverse races as a source of national distinctiveness. Idealizing exogamy as a tool of state-building, they argued that marriages among the descendants of indigenous people, African slaves, and European colonizers and immigrants might whiten and thus improve the population with each generation. In the early 1930s, Brazilian social scientist Gilberto Freyre proposed the idea of "racial democracy" to model pluralism in the nation. Freyre contrasted the societies of North America, in which the oppression of "black" by "white" castes produced mutual antagonism, to Brazil, where racial mixing engendered harmony, equality, and the biological strengthening of the population. Brazil,

---

of place, were regarded as Japanese citizens. In 1924, in response to pressure from emigrants, the Japanese Diet made Japanese citizenship for foreign-born children of Japanese parents electable rather than automatic. According to the *jus soli* principle that governed citizenship in the nations of North America and South America, second-generation Japanese diaspora were citizens of the land of their birth.

[26] On the politics of terminology, see Tomoko Sakuma, "Language, Culture and Ethnicity: Interplay of Ideologies within a Japanese Community in Brazil," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2011.

[27] Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

Freyre argued, was a class society in which wealth rather than physiology deter-mined individual status.[28]

Paying tribute to Freyre's influential hypothesis, Wako Shungorō "sentimentally" deplored the dilution of the Japanese bloodline, but "ration-ally" counseled the diaspora to intermarry with white Brazilians to facilitate collective upward mobility. Emigrant journalist Ando Zenpati likewise pro-moted marriage to Brazilians of European descent as a strategy for assimi-lating and winning acceptance by whites. Reflecting the limits of racial democracy, however, both authors discouraged unions with indigenous people or Afro-Brazilians. Such marriages, they alleged, would yield "little black savages" (*katara kokujinbō*) and retard the progress of the Japanese in becoming white.[29]

The encouragement of assimilation notwithstanding, adjustment to Brazil proceeded unevenly among Japanese emigrants and their descendants. Endo-gamy remained the rule, with only 3 percent of prewar diaspora identified as "mixed blood."[30] Even as many came to consider South America "home" in some sense, the predominant pattern of isolated settlement on coffee and jute plantations gave rise to an identity as "Japanese in Brazil" rather than "Brazi-lian." Various institutions emerged to build a sense of commonality among set-tlers of diverse backgrounds and origins. Newspapers and periodicals, voluntary associations (*Nihonjinkai*), baseball teams, martial arts studios, and traditional poetry clubs helped draw together diaspora linked by little save location. Most importantly, several hundred primary schools provided young emigrants and Brazil-born children with a Japanese-style education, including inculcation in State Shintō, the dominant political ideology in the home islands since the 1880s. For many diaspora, State Shintō, the veneration of the emperor and nation, provided a more powerful sense of cohesion than traditional reli-gious practices associated with the worship of an increasingly distant lineage and native place. In Japan, only students typically practiced the daily morning ritual of bowing to the emperor's portrait, singing the Japanese national anthem, and reciting the Imperial Rescript on Education, an 1898 "sutra to Japaneseness" that affirmed loyalty unto death to a divine imperial ruler. By contrast, entire communities in Brazil participated in these

---

[28] Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civi-lization*, Samuel Putnam, trans. (New York: Knopf, 1946); Gilberto Freyre, *The Mansions and the Shanties: The Making of Modern Brazil*, Harriet de Onis, ed. and trans. (New York: Knopf, 1968); Gilberto Freyre, *Order and Progress: Brazil from Monarchy to Republic*, Rod W. Horton, ed. and trans. (New York: Knopf, 1970).

[29] Wako, *Bauru kannai no hōjin*, 7–11; Ando Zenpati, "Dōka no konponteki na mondai," *Bunka: Revista Cultural Liberaria* 1, 1 (1938): 5–8.

[30] Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, *Burajiru Nikkeijin no ishiki chōsa* (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1992), 13.

ceremonies, which fostered a collective identity as "children of the emperor" and members of the Japanese nation.[31]

After the Brazilian government, which aligned itself with the Allies, declared war on Axis Japan in 1942, state persecution further fortified diaspora cohesiveness. Among Japanese emigrants and their descendants in the Americas, only those in Brazil, protected largely by the isolated nature of settlements, escaped mass imprisonment as enemy aliens.[32] Nonetheless, communities suffered various checks on their freedom, including bans on schooling their children and publishing in their native tongue. Despite the promotion of biological and cultural adaptation by both the Brazilian and Japanese governments, at the end of the war the Japanese diaspora constituted one of the least socially integrated settler populations in the Western Hemisphere. Questioned by anthropologists many years later, elderly emigrants could not even remember hearing the word "assimilation" prior to 1945.[33]

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND POSTWAR NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE WORK OF IZUMI SEIICHI

Ironically, it was after rather than during World War II that Japanese emigrants and their descendants in Brazil experienced the greatest upheaval. The suppression of Japanese-language publishing after 1942 forced many emigrants, who could not use Portuguese comfortably, to rely on clandestine radio broadcasts from Japan for battle news. Primed by positive propaganda and unable to observe the situation firsthand, most initially dismissed Emperor Hirohito's surrender broadcast on 15 August 1945 as an Allied hoax. Although a majority shortly came to accept Japan's loss, public acknowledgment of this reality remained difficult. To many emigrants and their descendants, defeat signified the failure of their existence in Brazil, which was grounded in the dream of return—however impractical and undesirable in actuality. Mere months later, Hirohito's Declaration of Imperial Humanity exacerbated the crisis of collective identity by depriving the diaspora of the status they had claimed as children of a divine emperor.

In response to this calamity, several ultra-nationalist groups founded in the late stages of the war came together to form the Way of the Subject League

---

[31] Takashi Maeyama, "Ethnicity, Secret Societies, and Associations: The Japanese in Brazil," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, 4 (1979): 589–610; Christopher A. Reichl, "Stages in the Historical Process of Ethnicity: The Japanese in Brazil, 1908–1988," *Ethnohistory* 42, 1 (1995): 31–62, here 42.

[32] Approximately six thousand Japanese emigrants and their descendants in Brazil (less than 3 percent of all Japanese diaspora in the nation) were imprisoned during World War II. Endoh, *Exporting Japan*, 34. On the internment of Japanese diaspora in the Americas, see C. Harvey Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate: The Peruvian Japanese and the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981); and Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[33] Fujisaki Yasuo, *Dekasegi Nikkei gaikokujin rōdōsha* (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 1991), 208.

(Shindō Renmei), which proffered the more palatable fiction that Japan had vanquished the Allies. According to Brazilian police, as many as one hundred thousand diaspora contributed financially to Shindō Renmei, while another sixty thousand sympathized. Extremists within this so-called "victory faction" (*kachigumi*) forged images and other documents to nurture public belief in a Japanese triumph. About fifty were arrested for selling false tickets for passage on ships bound for "home," and counterfeit deeds to land in Japan and its colonies. Most dramatically, in the ten months from March 1946 to January 1947, Shindō Renmei militants carried out more than forty attacks, including over a dozen assassinations, against the opposing "loss faction" (*makegumi*), which openly accepted the fact of defeat and consequent impossibility of repatriation to the ancestral land. In response to the disorder, Brazilian law enforcement interrogated nearly thirty thousand diaspora, imprisoning and deporting several hundred. Fearing a mass exodus by one of the most economically productive sectors of the population, the government also held a summit meeting with about four hundred Shindō Renmei leaders, many released from jail for the occasion. Hoping to defuse internecine tension, Brazil's leaders pledged to restrain the national press from publishing news of Japan's defeat and unconditional surrender.[34]

Meanwhile, social scientists in Brazil reported the conflict to the newly founded United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which arranged a fellowship for a Japanese scholar to investigate further. The organization's Japan headquarters appointed Izumi Seiichi, an assistant professor at the University of Tokyo Institute of Oriental Culture. As the first Japan-based social scientist to study the Japanese diaspora in Brazil or any nation, Izumi exerted immeasurable influence over postwar scholarly approaches to emigration and assimilation, as well as the larger field of cultural anthropology.[35] Despite the importance of his work, he has not received much critical attention. Izumi was born in Tokyo in 1915, but grew up in colonial Seoul, where his father taught law at the imperial university. As a college student in the mid-1930s, Izumi studied sociology and religion, graduating with a thesis on the causes and consequences of the mass emigration of Korean tenant farmers under Japanese occupation. Over the next decade, he

---

[34] Jeffrey Lesser, "From Japanese to Nikkei and Back: Integration Strategies of Japanese Immigrants and Their Descendants in Brazil," in Wanni Anderson and Robert G. Lee, eds., *Displacements and Diasporas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 112–21; Rafael Shoji, "The Failed Prophecy of Shinto Nationalism and the Rise of Japanese Brazilian Catholicism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 35, 1 (2008): 13–38.

[35] Ishikawa Tomomi, Miyao Susumu, Motoyama Shōzō, Mori Kōichi, Yagishita Hiroko, Mita Chiyoko, and Maruyama Hiroaki, "Burajiru Nihon imin kenkyū ni okeru 'kūhaku' to 'danzetsu,'" in Maruyama Hiroaki, ed., *Burajiru no Nihon imin: Hyaku-nen no kiseki* (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2010), 67–80, 68.

conducted fieldwork on behalf of the military among various ethnic groups in Manchuria and New Guinea.[36]

In late 1945, Izumi repatriated to Japan, joining nearly six million civilians and demobilized soldiers scattered throughout the former empire in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. The homeland in which they disembarked was no longer an imperial power, but rather a defeated nation occupied by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). Under the leadership of the United States, SCAP aspired to replace a Japanese identity grounded in blood and culture and seen as responsible for emperor-centered militarism and war, with an American-style concept of the nation as a civic community.[37] To analyze and advance this transformation, SCAP's Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) hired dozens of cultural anthropologists and other social scientists. Among their many duties, these scholars trained Japanese colleagues, including Izumi, in American theory and methodology.

Although the ideas of Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and other U.S.-based cultural anthropologists had circulated through Japanese academia during the imperial age, the Occupation greatly expanded the audience for American scholarship.[38] Prior to 1945, Izumi and other ethnologists (*minzokugakusha*) supplied data to fix imperial subjects into positions of inferiority, thus legitimizing their political subordination to Japan. World War II exposed the fallacies and dangers of the predominantly German theories of race upon which ethnology was predicated. Under the influence of Occupation scholars, in the late 1940s and early 1950s Japanese social scientists redefined the study of human diversity and development as cultural anthropology (*bunka jinruigaku*). Izumi's research under the auspices of the CIE, including analyses of the Korean minority in Tokyo and agricultural settlements on the nation's northern frontier, represented some of the first cultural anthropology studies undertaken by a Japanese scholar.[39]

Izumi's Occupation-era projects also included a UNESCO-sponsored collaboration with the French sociologist Jean Stoetzel examining psychological responses of Japanese youth to defeat. Denouncing "the facility, and sometimes the complacence, with which the Japanese accept stereotypes of themselves suggested by foreigners," Izumi aspired to reclaim domestic initiative in

---

[36] Fujimoto Hideo, *Izumi Seiichi den: Andesu kara Saishūtō e* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1994).

[37] Kevin M. Doak, "What Is a Nation and Who Belongs? National Narratives and the Ethnic Imagination in Twentieth-Century Japan," *American Historical Review* 102, 2 (1997): 283–309.

[38] For a review of American cultural anthropology dating from the prewar period, see Mishima Shōei, "Beikoku bunka jinruigaku annai ki," *Minzokugaku kenkyū* 4, 4 (1938): 719–46.

[39] Izumi Seiichi, "Tokyo shi shimin no iminzoku ni taisuru taido," in Nihon jinbun kagakukai, ed., *Shakaiteki kinchō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yuikaku, 1953), 423–44; and Izumi Seiichi, "Aru bunka hen'yō no monogurafu," in *Izumi Seiichi chosakushū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1972), 258–388.

creating a new national identity.[40] With foreign policy, the dominant former influence on Japanesenesss, discredited by the loss of the empire, social scientists invested their work with "an almost magical power" in assembling positive bases of collective belonging.[41] The very act of research was, as the president of Izumi's university noted, a performance of the progressive, democratic spirit that SCAP sought to nurture, and the fulfillment of nothing less than "the duty of the Japanese … to world peace and human welfare."[42] The postwar birth of cultural anthropology, which spared its practitioners the stigma of an imperialist legacy, invested them with particular credibility among scholars as architects of national identity. As one of Izumi's contemporaries remarked, "To those intelligent minds of Japan, war-stricken and disillusioned with any totalitarianism, anthropology … was able to offer a firm footing from which they could launch out toward becoming 'citizens of the world.'"[43] Viewing social science as universal, impartial, and inherently democratic and democratizing, UNESCO especially encouraged research abroad as a contribution to peace at home. As Izumi recalled, "In prewar times, research fields of the Japanese … were limited almost to North-east or East Asia and Micronesia [areas under imperial sovereignty], and consequently the worldwide viewpoint was lacking in their studies. After the war, the Japanese threw away the weapons to replace them by peaceful intellectual pursuits, and the eyes of cultural anthropologists were led to be opened to the studies covering the areas over the world…."[44]

Infused with a sense of political mission, Izumi set out for South America immediately following the April 1952 restoration of Japan's sovereignty and the removal of some travel restrictions on citizens. After spending several weeks in Brazil's then-capital of Rio de Janeiro, where UNESCO maintained its headquarters, he proceeded to São Paulo by bus. A young newspaper reporter, Saitō Hiroshi, greeted him at the station. Saitō had emigrated with his parents in 1934 at the age of fifteen. He had recently completed an undergraduate degree in sociology at the University of São Paulo and joined the Doyōkai (Saturday Club), a weekly meeting of influential diaspora intelligentsia in the city. The preceding year, the Doyōkai, which had lost one member to Shindō Renmei violence, had hosted a roundtable to discuss the origins of *kachigumi* terrorism and the future of Japanese emigrants and their descendants in Brazil.

[40] Jean Stoetzel, *Without the Chrysanthemum and the Sword: A Study of the Attitudes of Youth in Post-War Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 15.

[41] Andrew E. Barshay, *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan: The Marxian and Modernist Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), ix.

[42] Tadao Yanaihara, *Introduction to the Short History of Modern Japan*, Tadashi Kawata, trans. (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1963), 10.

[43] E. Ishida, "Japanese Anthropology," Speech delivered at the Harvard Peabody Museum, 10 Feb. 1953, 8. Draft copy held in Tozzer Library, Harvard University.

[44] Izumi Seiichi, *Cultural Anthropology in Japan* (Tokyo: Tokyo Electrical Engineering College Press, 1967), i.

Chaired by Ando Zenpati, the forum brought together ten professionals from the fields of journalism, science and technology, law, and the arts. These elites deemed the idea that Japan had won the war "nonsense" and welcomed Izumi's "scientific" investigation into the causes of the "delusion."[45]

In early 1953, Izumi and Saitō, who had agreed to serve as a translator and research assistant, departed for field sites in rural Brazil. Carrying their notes in trunks, the pair distributed written surveys, administered personality tests, and interviewed several hundred emigrants and their descendants. As they discovered, less than a quarter of the diaspora had immediately accepted the news of Japan's defeat in August 1945. Seven years later nearly ten percent remained convinced that the empire had won the war. Some *kachigumi* even interpreted Izumi's presence as evidence of victory. Izumi reported to colleagues at home that he had never felt so much in danger, even while working on an ethnography of indigenous people in New Guinea at the time of Japan's naval invasion in 1944.[46]

Izumi's analysis of the diaspora through anthropology, the study of the Other, presumed an a priori difference between emigrants and their descendants on the one hand, and Japanese in the home islands on the other. His report to UNESCO contended that both *kachigumi* and *makegumi* were "wholly Brazilian [with] respect to their education, language, religion, etc."[47] Neither biocultural characteristics of Japaneseness nor differing degrees of assimilation seemed to account for the rift of the community. Instead, Izumi turned his attention to psycho-social tensions. In the wake of World War II, even diaspora who accepted Japan's defeat reported feelings of powerlessness, oppression, introversion, anger, aimlessness, passivity, and self-doubt. Deprived of the "symbolic refuge" of the ideal of return, many emigrants and their descendants gravitated towards Shindō Renmei as a new source of identity. *Makegumi* attempts to force the community to come to terms with surrender seemed to constitute a direct attack on this last, desperate basis for a meaningful collective existence in Brazil. Izumi also noted the relative poverty of the diaspora in regions where Shindō Renmei was most active. In his analysis, the conflict between *makegumi* and *kachigumi* was to some extent a class war, pitting a prosperous and enlightened urban elite that mingled easily with non-diaspora society against a struggling majority distributed among isolated rural enclaves.[48]

Though Izumi repeatedly proclaimed the neutrality of his study, his use of the term "fanatics" or "wild ones" (*kyōgensha*) to denote the *kachigumi* betrayed his distaste for the faction. The assistance and friendship of the

---

[45] Andō Zenpachi, "Zaihaku hōjin shakai to imin mondai," *Chūō kōron* 66, 6 (1951): 86–99.
[46] Ishida, "Japanese Anthropology," 13.
[47] Seiichi Izumi, "Acculturation Among the Japanese Agricultural Immigrants in Brazil," in United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ed., *Proceedings of the World Population Conference, 1954*, vol. II (New York: United Nations, 1955), 467–76, here 475.
[48] Izumi Seiichi and Saitō Hiroshi, *Amazon: Sono fudo to Nihonjin* (Tokyo: Kokon shoin, 1954).

makegumi Saitō—the pair immediately bonded over their mutual love of *sake*—undoubtedly influenced the anthropologist's conclusions regarding the Shindō Renmei incident.[49] Moreover, to a survivor of the tumult and tragedy of Japan's defeat and occupation, loyalty to the political system of the past could not have seemed a commendable or even comprehensible expression of the national identity. On the contrary, adherence to prewar ideologies was simply "farcical" to a social scientist attempting to disseminate and perform the postwar values of democracy and cosmopolitanism. For Izumi and his nation, committed to moving beyond the guilt and shame of militarism and fascism, terrorism among the diaspora appeared to reinforce precisely the image of the Japanese that they sought to overcome: that of suicidal, brainwashed, and uncivilized enemies of world peace.[50]

Two years after his initial fieldwork among the diaspora, Izumi returned to Brazil with a team of six social scientists, including Saitō, who had enrolled as a graduate student at Kobe University; and two anthropologists, two sociologists, and an economist from Japanese academia. Emigration from Japan had resumed a year earlier, and the group crossed the Pacific on a ship carrying 561 of the approximately sixty thousand Japanese who joined the prewar diaspora in Brazil in the two decades following the Occupation. Funding for the investigation was provided by the Japanese Foreign Ministry, which had been forced to stand aside in determining the bases of national belonging but recognized research abroad as a potential mouthpiece for domestic interests.[51]

The result of Izumi's second venture to Brazil was *Imin* [Migrants], a collection of nine studies of recent and long-standing Japanese communities in sixteen urban, rural, and rainforest locations throughout Brazil.[52] Published in 1957, *Imin* was the first work by a Japanese social scientist to take assimilation as its subject of analysis.[53] Izumi's background in American cultural anthropology both enabled him to conceive of tackling the topic and influenced his approach. By the 1950s, scholars in the United States had been observing acculturation and assimilation among African-Americans ("Negroes," in their parlance) and various immigrant groups, including the Japanese, for over half a century. University of Chicago sociologist Robert E. Park's influential textbook, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, guided the research

---

[49] Izumi Seiichi, "Atogaki," in Saitō Hiroshi, *Burajiru no Nihonjin* (Tokyo: Maruzen kabushiki kaisha, 1960), 330–35.

[50] Izumi and Saitō, *Amazon*, 119.

[51] Izumi Seiichi, "Joron," in Izumi Seiichi, ed., *Imin* (Tokyo: Kokon shoten, 1957), 1–4.

[52] *Imin* also included a comparative study of a Polish emigrant community in Brazil: Saitō Hiroshi, "Po-rando imin no buraku: Parana-shū Kontenda no jirei," in Izumi Seiichi, ed., *Imin* (Tokyo: Kokon shoten, 1957), 657–728.

[53] Ōno Morio, "Imin to bunka," in Ōno Morio, ed., *Ratenteki Nihonjin Burajirujin Nisei no hatsugen* (Tokyo: Nihon hōsō shuppan kyōkai, 1969), 9–38, here 17.

agenda for much of this period.[54] In Park's framing, assimilation was "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life."[55]

Notably, Park defined human groups in terms of culture rather than race. In the early twentieth century, most American social scientists, led by the distinguished anthropologist Franz Boas, came to understand "race" as a social construct rather than biological fact. In the wake of World War II, which demonstrated the humanitarian costs of using race as a basis for policy, UNESCO, representing scholars worldwide, declared the concept a "social myth." The organization also sponsored academics from Europe, the United States, and South America to investigate Freyre's so-called racial democracy with the goal of extracting lessons for building a harmonious global society.[56]

A UNESCO fellow himself, Izumi was ideally positioned to facilitate the transition of Japanese social science from its prewar emphasis on race, studied through ethnology, to a postwar focus on culture, the key concern of cultural anthropology. *Imin* drew on emerging work by UNESCO scholars in Brazil such as Donald Pierson, Roger Bastide, Arthur Ramos, and Charles Wagley, as well as the immigrant studies classics of Park, Emory Bogardus, and W. I. Thomas. Izumi and his co-authors analyzed Japanese emigrants and their descendants in Brazil in terms of religious affiliation, education, community organization, marriage and family life, socioeconomic status, language, urban and rural settlement patterns, food and clothing consumption, leisure activities, historical and political views, and collective mentality. In all survey locations, they found evidence of social and occupational diversification, migration from plantations to cities, and rising educational achievement, political participation, and internationalism. These signs of assimilation allowed the team, from the perspective of hindsight, to dismiss the Shindō Renmei incident as nothing more than a temporary interruption of the metamorphosis of "good Japanese" into "good Brazilians." Izumi applauded this

[54] Fred Matthews, *Quest for an American Sociology: Robert E. Park and the Chicago School* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 131.

[55] Robert E. Park, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921), 735.

[56] Rather than upholding Freyre's vision of Brazil, most scholars associated with the project came to dispute the existence of "racial democracy." Marcos Chor Maio, "Florestan Fernandes, Oracy Nogueira, and the UNESCO Project on Race Relations in São Paulo," Rosemary Galli, trans., *Latin American Perspectives* 38, 3 (2011): 136–49. For a recent re-visitation of the racial democracy hypothesis and contemporary perspectives on race in Brazil, see Brian Owensby, "Toward a History of Brazil's 'Cordial Racism': Race beyond Liberalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, 2 (2005): 318–47.

transformation, although the relative prosperity of the diaspora caused him a pang of pity for his still-struggling countrymen at home.[57]

In fact, the Japanese in Japan remained at the forefront of the anthropologist's consciousness throughout his time in Brazil. Park, his model, had studied assimilation from the perspective of an immigrant nation: the United States. Assimilation was a process of gain, whereby newcomers acquired the characteristics of Americans. For his part, Izumi dutifully recorded diaspora accommodations to local society. As the representative of an emigrant-producing country, however, he was also attuned to assimilation-as-loss— that is, how the process of relinquishing Japaneseness in Brazil defined national belonging in Japan. Like the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict, author of an influential work on interned Japanese "enemy aliens" in the United States during the war, Izumi deployed the study of the diaspora as a means of establishing "national character."[58] But whereas Benedict had pursued the psychological origins of militarism and fascism, Izumi sought to highlight the "humanism" of Japaneseness and to reinvent a defeated empire shamed by recent atrocities as a "peace state" (*heiwa no kuni*). Izumi's co-authors even referred to postwar settlers in Brazil as "peace migrants," whose assimilation would ultimately demonstrate the cooperativeness of the mother country. "They do not merely object to war, but arrive with the determination to develop the resources of their new home, rectify global population imbalances, and live in a better world," wrote one observer of the diaspora.[59] Building on this vision, Japanese policymakers proposed training emigrants as "national ambassadors" cultivating foreign respect for their native land.[60]

In Izumi's hands, therefore, cultural anthropology provided scientific credibility for a new vision of Japaneseness defined by cosmopolitanism and the ability to become "Western." His scholarship also contributed to an equally useful collective forgetting of Japan's recent past. Izumi translated "assimilation" as "*dōka*," a term associated primarily with imperial-era campaigns to remodel Korean and Taiwanese colonial subjects as Japanese. *Imin* thus re-conceptualized a disgraced political ideology as a natural and inevitable scientific process driven by the environment. Once actively promoted by policymakers and ethnologists, assimilation was now passively observed by cultural anthropologists, whose claims to "objectivity" undergirded their

---

[57] Izumi, "Acculturation," 475; Izumi Seiichi, "Burajiru no rokkagetsu," in Izumi Seiichi, *Izumi Seiichi chosakushū*, vol. 3, 226.

[58] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

[59] Shima Kiyoshi, "Imin fune no chōsa," in Izumi, ed., *Imin*, 535–86, here 571; Kishimoto Kyūyō, *Hiroi tenchi e: Burajiru ni katsuyaku suru Nihonjin monogatari* (Tokyo: Amazonkai shuppanbu, 1960), 384.

[60] Nakamura Kaju, *Nanbei wa maneku: Hirakeyuku shintenchi no dōhō* (Tokyo: Shōheidō, 1953), 206.

postwar influence. The description of assimilation among the diaspora in Brazil therefore eclipsed the very language of the imperial experience, depriving the postwar nation of its ability to discuss or regret *dōka*. Moreover, by framing assimilation as a form of loss experienced by Japanese emigrants and their descendants abroad, postwar social science (perhaps unintentionally) obscured the difficulties faced by minorities in Japan, including nearly one million subjects of the former empire.

Late in life, Izumi repudiated the ethnology he had produced on behalf of the Japanese military during the 1930s and early 1940s.[61] Yet the repatriated emigrant from colonial Korea and purported former instrument of *dōka* never questioned his position as a researcher of assimilation in Brazil. His apparent failure to recognize the consequences of his postwar work was characteristic of his generation, which came to maturity at the height of empire and confronted the simultaneous challenges of understanding the past and moving beyond it after 1945. Like their counterparts in postwar Germany, most Japanese academics were purged from public life only briefly or not at all during the Occupation, and lacked the time or privacy to probe their personal and institutional responsibility for the war. Instead, they generally accepted and elaborated on the geopolitically convenient apology supplied by colleagues in the United States: that a vague set of "cultural factors" had led the nation down a "deviant path" in its modernization, allowing a fascist leadership to "enslave" the civilian population, including intellectuals.[62] As an American and a Japanese scholar agreed, "Most [Japanese] social scientists, even though holding their peace during the war, had endured a long and chilly period as semi-outcasts during the prewar and war years. They had virtually no news of activities and trends in their fields abroad, outside of Axis nations, and constraints on their own freedom of research and expression had deepened continuously from 1937 to 1945."[63]

However self-serving and inadequate, this narrative of victimhood excused the collective failure to resist militarism and allowed society to avoid or at least defer reflection on the past.

THE NIKKEI ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE RISE OF THE HOMOGENOUS NATION

Based on his fieldwork in the mid-1950s, Izumi predicted the complete absorption of Japanese emigrants and their descendants in Brazil by "the society of the

---

[61] Izumi Seiichi, "Imin no jinruigakuteki kenkyū hōhō ni kansuru ichi shiron," in Izumi, *Izumi Seiichi chosakushū*, vol. 2, 242.

[62] For a comparison of the responses of German and Japanese intellectuals to the wartime past, see Sebastian Conrad, *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the American Century*, Alan Nothnagle, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[63] Richard K. Beardsley and Nakano Takashi, *Japanese Sociology and Social Anthropology: A Guide to Japanese Reference and Research Materials* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), iv.

majority."[64] However, the scholarly cohort that succeeded him, including Japanese, Brazilians, Americans, and many diaspora themselves, continued to find evidence of a distinctive community. Influenced by the rise of ethnic studies, social scientists of the 1960s increasingly constructed the Japanese diaspora as an independent ethnic group: an arrangement of people who viewed themselves, and were accepted as, biologically and culturally connected. For scholars who objected to the notion of race but did not altogether discount the importance of common descent, "ethnicity" offered a more palatable framing of human difference.[65] Reflecting the ambiguous relationship between race and ethnicity, Japanese scholars used the word *minzoku*, connoting "race-nation" in the prewar era, to translate "ethnic group."[66]

The term "Nikkei" or "Nikkeijin" came to denote Japanese emigrants and their descendants in the Americas as an ethnic category. Within a contemporary historiography dominated by studies of Japanese immigration to the United States, the importance of Brazil to the imagination of a Nikkei identity remains almost entirely unacknowledged. In fact, although the word "Nikkei" is ubiquitous today in both scholarship and the public forum, scholars have not yet traced its genealogy.[67] The term appeared occasionally in early-twentieth-century writings to describe Japanese diasporas in North and South America (though never in the empire). In the mid-1950s, Izumi's team used the word "Nikkei" to refer to Nisei and Sansei. With the passing of the emigrant generation and the coming of age of Brazil-born grand- and great-grandchildren in the 1960s and 1970s, "Nikkei" finally emerged as the dominant mode of reference for the Japanese diaspora.[68]

The acknowledgment of an independent Nikkei identity fundamentally altered cultural anthropology research in the Americas, prompting social

---

[64] Izumi, "Acculturation," 475.

[65] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 110.

[66] Ishida Takeshi, *Nihon no shakai kagaku* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku shuppankai, 1984), 125–60; Kevin M. Doak, "Building National Identity through Ethnicity: Ethnology in Wartime Japan and After," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 27, 1 (2001): 1–39.

[67] On the contemporary meanings of "Nikkei," see Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, "Pathways to Power: Comparative Perspectives on the Emergence of Nikkei Ethnic Political Traditions," in Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Akemi Kikumura-Yano, and James A. Hirabayashi, eds., *New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 159–78; Jeffrey Lesser, "Japanese, Brazilians, Nikkei: A Short History of Identity Building and Homemaking," in Jeffrey Lesser, ed., *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 5–19; and Millie Creighton, "Metaphors of Japanese-ness and Negotiations of Nikkei Identity," in Nobuko Adachi, ed., *Japanese and Nikkei at Home and Abroad: Negotiating Identities in a Global World* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2010), 133–62.

[68] Ironically, many so-called Nikkei in Brazil reject the term due to its implication of a split national loyalty, a phenomenon first observed by Maeyama Takashi in "Burajiru no Nikkeijin ni okeru aidenteitei- no hensen: Toku ni sutorateji- to no kanren ni oite," *Raten Amerika kenkyū* 4 (1982): 181–219, here 210.

scientists to assess various factors associated with ethnicity, including language, religious practices, marriage patterns, community structure, organizational and economic behavior, personality, and values. In their evaluation, the Nikkei had not only assimilated but prospered as a disproportionately educated, professional, and wealthy "model minority." Undergirding this progress were thrift, diligence, and managerial aptitude—the very cultural tendencies said to account for the rapid postwar regeneration of Japan. In Brazil, Nikkei and non-Nikkei observers alike often stereotyped the diaspora according to these qualities, arguing that the Japanese were the "best Brazilians," poised to replicate Japan's success in their adopted homeland.[69]

Both in Japan and abroad, therefore, the constitution of the Nikkei as an ethnic group tended to entrench certain understandings of Japaneseness. By the 1960s, however, the image of a peace state, an immediate reaction to the humiliation of defeat and occupation, no longer adequately represented the rising economic superpower of Japan. Although the production of a new identity was a complex process, the strong influence of American social science rendered the paradigm of national exceptionalism particularly attractive. Amid the Cold War, civil rights movement, and other profound and controversial international and domestic developments in the United States, many scholars sought to justify time-honored beliefs in the singularity of their homeland with reference to capitalist democratic values. In Japan, a corresponding belief in collective uniqueness (*Nihonjinron* or *Nihon bunkaron*) found expression through ethnicity, a "contingent and serviceable" basis for a new identity as a "homogenous nation" (*tan'itsu minzoku*).[70]

Scholars played an important but far from exclusive role in developing and disseminating the ideology of Japanese exceptionalism. During the 1960s, critics in and beyond Japan called attention to the persistence of problems that academic researchers had pledged to solve. To many detractors, social science had not only failed to produce a more open society, but had also perpetuated elitism, authoritarianism, and inequality. Under these circumstances, social scientists gradually lost the moral influence over politics that they had enjoyed in the early postwar

---

[69]   Umesao Tadao, "Kaigai ijū no bunmeishiteki ishiki," in Gaimushō [the Foreign Ministry], ed., *Kaigai ijū no igi wo motomete: Burajiru ijū 70-shūnen kinen "Nihonjin no kaigai ijū ni kansuru shinpojiumu"* (Tokyo: Gaimushō kokusai kyokuyoku jigyōdan, 1979), 17–30; Jeffrey Lesser, *A Discontented Diaspora: Japanese Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy, 1960–1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For a recent overview and bibliography of the literature on the Nikkei in Brazil, see Mori Kōichi, "Burajiru no Nihon imin, Nikkei 'kenkyū' no kaiko to tenbō," in Maruyama Hiroaki, ed., *Burajiru no Nihon imin: Hyaku-nen no kiseki* (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2010), 13–66.

[70]   Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*, 136. For a recent historiography of the argument of national uniqueness, see Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

years.[71] Nonetheless, they continued to participate vigorously in debates over the nature of Japaneseness.

It was no accident that the primary academic architects of the idea of national uniqueness were also close collaborators of Izumi Seiichi in the study of South America. Although historians of *Nihonjinron* have emphasized its bilateral comparison of "Japan" and a monolithic "West," the Nikkei were also strongly present as a partial Other and foil for Japaneseness.[72] As *Imin* co-authors Gamō Masao and Ōno Morio later recalled, fieldwork abroad naturally inspired a thorough reconsideration of identity at home. The metamorphosis of Japanese emigrants into Nikkei exposed the mutability of biology and culture, prompting anthropologists to seek more stable pillars of national belonging in space and time.[73]

Izumi himself led the quest for a collective identity grounded in geography. In a 1963 essay, he argued that the "meta plan" of Japanese culture and civilization could be maintained intact only within the home islands. Among the diaspora, he noted, assimilation inevitably eroded the essence of Japaneseness, leading to "instability" (such as the Shindō Renmei crisis) in the second and third generations.[74] *Nihonjinron* authors also turned for inspiration to the work of Watsuji Tetsurō, one of the few Japanese intellectuals whose prewar writings remained influential after 1945. Watsuji's 1935 *A Climate* depicted nature as the defining influence on the Japanese. The uniquely lush and varied environment of the home islands had produced a superior national character "full of emotional vitality and sensitivity, lacking all continental phlegm." Geographic isolation, moreover, had historically protected the archipelago from invasion. Because adaptation always took place by choice and never by force, the Japanese had developed a "temperamental diversity which thrives on change" and an aptitude for absorbing only the best elements of foreign cultures.[75] The transformation of the Japanese diaspora into the ethnically distinct Nikkei was, ironically, the ultimate proof of this collective facility for discerning assimilation.[76]

[71] On the changing significance of social scientists in the postwar period, see Laura Hein, *Reasonable Men, Powerful Words: Political Culture and Expertise in Twentieth-Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[72] See, for example, Peter Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); and Harumi Befu, *The Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001).

[73] Gamō Masao, *Nihonjin no seikatsu kōzō josetsu* (Tokyo: Seishin shobō, 1960), 1; Ōno, "Imin to bunka," 33; Maeyama Takashi, "Nikkeijin to Nihon bunka: Toku ni Nikkei Burajiru bunka to kokkakan ni tsuite," in Gaimushō, ed., *Kaigai ijū no igi wo motomete: Burajiru ijū 70-shūnen kinen "Nihonjin no kaigai ijū ni kansuru shinpojiumu"* (Tokyo: Gaimushō kokusai kyokuyoku jigyōdan, 1979), 202–13.

[74] Izumi Seiichi, "Bunka no hyōshitsusei to ishutsusei," *Shisō* 463 (1963): 7–23.

[75] Watsuji Tetsurō, *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*, Geoffrey Bownas, trans. (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1961), 135, 127.

[76] Ishida Eiichirō, *Japanese Culture: A Study of Origins and Characteristics*, Teruko Kachi, trans. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1974); Masuda Yoshio, *Junsui bunka no jōken* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1967); Gamō, *Nihonjin no seikatsu kōzō josetsu*.

The March 1970 kidnapping of Japanese consul Ōkuchi Nobuo in São Paulo underlined and accelerated the retrenchment of Japaneseness to the home islands. When Brazilian police captured Shizuo Ozawa, a Nikkei member of an underground revolutionary organization, his (non-Nikkei) comrades responded by taking the consul hostage. Within twenty-four hours, the Brazilian dictatorship, swayed by concern for its international reputation and relationship with Japan, agreed to amnesty and exile for Ozawa and several other prisoners in exchange for the release of Ōkuchi. Japan's two major national newspapers, the *Asahi Shinbun* and *Yomiuri Shinbun*, published over one hundred articles altogether on the kidnapping during the week it took place. Following Ozawa's deportation to Mexico, the press stoked public interest by emphasizing his Japanese heritage in headlines and photographs. However, like the Shindō Renmei incident, the abduction evoked unpleasant wartime associations of Japan with violence and fanaticism, prompting Japanese reporters to disavow an ethnic connection with the Nikkei. Despite the fact that Ozawa was born to Japanese emigrants and given a common Japanese first name, journalists identified him using *katakana* (the script typically used for foreign terms) and placed his surname second according to Western rather than Japanese convention. Newspapers also referred to him by his Brazilian code name, Mario. They described Ozawa's parents and their generation as "quiet Brazilians" (*shizuka na Burajirujin*). Though the Issei were believed to retain the "docility" characteristic of the Japanese, long residence abroad was seen as having transformed them into ethnic Others. Meanwhile, their children appeared to have lost all reticence, with dozens said to be active in the Brazilian student movement and guerrilla forces.[77]

In addition to physically positioning Japaneseness in the home islands, 1970s observers of assimilation-as-loss increasingly highlighted a common history as a critical dimension of ethnicity. Although *Nihonjinron* scholars often viewed the national essence as timeless, encounters with the Nikkei exposed an unmistakable chronological component of identity. In the wake of the Ōkuchi kidnapping, the Tokyo writer Tamiya Torahiko traveled to Brazil in a romantic pursuit of an enduring "Japanese spirit" among the Nikkei. Although the diaspora that he encountered in the city of São Paulo physically resembled his compatriots at home, their posture, demeanor, and speech reflected thorough assimilation to South America. The inhabitants of a remote plantation also exhibited cultural tendencies associated with Brazil, as well as a Japaneseness so rooted in the past as to be unrecognizable. Tamiya was shocked to hear wartime slogans and to see prominently displayed

---

[77] "Kōkan seijihan ni Nikkei Nisei: Issei tachi ni jōgeki," *Asahi Shinbun*, 15 Mar. 1970: 14; "Nikkei gerira 20–30 nin," *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 16 Mar. 1970: 2. For a full analysis of this incident, see Lesser, *Discontented Diaspora*, 122–47.

photographs of the emperor, a practice hastily abandoned in Japan after 1945. On the one hand, the Nikkei appeared to the author like ghosts from a pure and beautiful pre-industrial time, "more Japanese than the Japanese themselves." On the other hand, they seemed almost "feudal" by comparison with the inhabitants of the home islands, who had endured defeat, occupation, and three decades of postwar reconstruction. The failure of the Nikkei to evolve along with the Japanese offered incontrovertible evidence that they were, ultimately, "not Japanese at all."[78] In Tamiya's view, high-speed growth, capitalism, and consumerism, rather than emperor worship, formed the essence of Japaneseness.

In 1973, the visit of three *kachigumi* families to Japan boldly dramatized the alleged chronological gap between "Nikkei" and "Japanese" on a national stage. On 17 November, fourteen emigrants and their Brazil-born children and grandchildren landed at Tokyo's Narita Airport with shouts of "*Tennō heika banzai!*" ("Long live the emperor!"). The group paid tearful visits to the Imperial Palace and Yasukuni Shrine, where the spirits of the war dead were believed to repose. Each morning, they recited the Imperial Rescript on Education and sang the wartime national anthem. Most disturbingly of all for the Japanese public, they interpreted the nation's contemporary economic prowess as confirmation of victory in World War II. Surveying the signs of prosperity all around him, eighty-one-year-old Hamahiga Ryōki, who had lived in Brazil since 1910, concluded, "How could this be a defeated country?" Though this inadvertent tribute to Japan's recovery was not without logic, journalists ridiculed Hamahiga as a psychopath. They also emphasized his birth in Okinawa, still regarded as distinct from (and inferior to) "Japan." To the domestic media, "deranged" adherence to the discarded nationalist practices of the prewar period was evidence of Nikkei "backwardness" (even though most Nikkei would have found the behavior of the *kachigumi* equally incomprehensible).[79] Disavowing the Japaneseness of the diaspora was the nation's only possible response to a past better forgotten.[80]

---

[78] Tamiya Torahiko, *Burajiru no Nihonjin* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1975), 208–13.

[79] "Kachigumi kanashii han-seiki: Burajiru no san kazoku kikoku," *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 18 Nov. 1973: 23; "Yume no kōkyo ni sai keirei," *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 19 Nov. 1973: 22; Takagi Toshirō, "*Kyōshin* 'bunko han' no atogaki," in Takenaka Satoko, ed., *Takagi Toshirō no yuigon*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū kikaku shuppanbu, 2006), 248–58. For an analysis of more typical Brazilian Nikkei responses to "returning" to Japan, see Joshua Hotaka Roth, "Adapting to Inequality: Negotiating Japanese Identity in Contexts of Return," in Charles Stewart, ed., *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2007), 201–19.

[80] Around the time of the Hamahiga party's visit, the "last soldiers" Yokoi Shōichi and Onoda Hiroo were repatriated from World War II battlefields in Guam and the Philippines, respectively. Both had lived in alleged ignorance of Japan's defeat for almost thirty years. These men evoked a horror and fascination similar to the *kachigumi*, and yet, perhaps out of respect for their suffering, the Japanese public eventually came to regard them as heroes. Hiroo Onoda, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, Charles S. Terry, trans. (New York: Kodansha International, 1974); Omi Hatashin, *Private Yokoi's War and Life on Guam, 1944–1972* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2009).

Despite the appeal of chronological and spatial definitions of identity, the very concept of "Nikkei" (literally, "of Japanese extraction") returned attention to descent as a signifier of national belonging. Even as cultural anthropologists dismissed race as a strategy of human differentiation, the criterion of blood steadily gained ground in the articulation of Japanese ethnicity. Rejecting prewar views of population mixing as a source of national strength, *Nihonjin-ron* scholars came to uphold blood "purity" as the foundation of collective membership. In this context, rising rates of intermarriage offered further evidence that the Nikkei were no longer "Japanese." Nearly a quarter of Sansei in Brazil had only one Japanese parent; among their offspring, rates of exogamy exceeded 40 percent. Mixed-blood children were "as routine as eating and drinking," wrote one Nikkei.[81]

Though excluded from the Japanese ethnic group, the Nikkei remained important to the identity of the nation. Beginning in the 1960s, Japan sought to foster internationalization (*kokusaika*): increasing competitiveness in the global economy and projecting soft power abroad to build public belief in collective uniqueness at home.[82] Emigrant writers in the Americas had long represented their Nisei children as a bridge between "Japanese" and "white" society. Now, the emphasis on generational continuity inherent in the concept of "Nikkei" naturally gave rise to depictions of the community as a human connection between an internationalist Japan and the West. The ethnically distinct diaspora was no longer an "abandoned people," but a vanguard of the open, globally influential society that Japan sought to become. Nikkei "pioneers of international understanding" might serve as models for the Japanese, "the world's villagers" (*sekai no inakamono*), criticized for their aloofness even when traveling overseas.[83]

The Japanese government also used the language of internationalization to cultivate the Nikkei as economic allies during the boom years of Brazilian development. As the foreign minister declared in 1979, "In today's interdependent society, we must further cooperation by nurturing global friendship. Settlers and their descendants should be good citizens of their home countries and contribute to national development; they should also maintain a proper respect towards our country, and promote our economy, society, and culture."[84]

---

[81] Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, *Burajiru Nikkeijin no ishiki chōsa*, 13; Jōgo Nomura, "Burajiru ijū nana-jū nen ni omou," in Gaimushō, ed., *Kaigai ijū no igi wo motomete: Burajiru ijū 70-shūnen kinen "Nihonjin no kaigai ijū ni kansuru shinpojiumu"* (Tokyo: Gaimushō kokusai kyokuyoku jigyōdan, 1979), 31–44, here 37.

[82] Harumi Befu, "Internationalization of Japan and Nihon bunkaron," in Hiroshi Mannari and Harumi Befu, eds., *The Challenge of Japan's Internationalization: Organization and Culture* (Tokyo: Kwansei Gakuin University, 1983), 232–66.

[83] Saitō Hiroshi, *Atarashii Burajiru* (Tokyo: Saimuru shuppankai, 1974); Saitō, *Gaikokujin ni natta Nihonjin*; Saitō, "Kokusaijin no senku to shite Nikkei imin," 20–52.

[84] Sonoda Sunao, "Hakkan no kotoba," in Gaimushō, ed., *Kaigai ijū no igi wo motomete*, 1–4, here 2.

Despite Nikkei reluctance to serve as a "stalking horse" for Japan in Brazil, the community played an important role in facilitating technology transfer and foreign direct investment.[85] The Japanese government also offered fellowships to diaspora students and dispatched representatives to the Reunion of Overseas Japanese and the Conference of South American Nikkei (*Nanbei Nikkeijin taikai*). Such initiatives displayed the strategic value of assimilation, not as loss but as gain, in augmenting the "glory and prosperity" of Japan.[86]

EPILOGUE: IMMIGRANT ASSIMILATION, CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The effect of assimilation-as-loss on national identity in emigrant-producing states has largely escaped analysis to date. As the case of Japan demonstrates, the process by which out-migrants are understood to forfeit membership in the nation has served to delineate the cultural and biological bases of belonging for those left behind. In the prewar period, foreign policy objectives engendered different expectations regarding the assimilation of settlers in the empire and the Americas. Diasporas in the imperial realm were charged with transforming "backward" native populations into "Japanese," while those in the Americas were encouraged to adopt local customs and so attest to Japan's propensity for Westernization. Intermarriage—with colonial subjects and "whites," respectively—supported both of these aims in an era when Japan instrumentally viewed itself as a pluralist race-nation. Following defeat and the dismantling of the empire, social scientists, particularly cultural anthropologists, assumed a leading role in recreating Japan as a "peace state." To these scholars, the assimilation of emigrants and their descendants, concentrated in Brazil, did not simply expose the fundamentals of collective membership, but positively shaped them at the margins. By the 1960s, the ethnic paradigm of Japaneseness decisively excluded the diaspora, but the "Nikkei" remained important as a foil for constructing a new identity for Japan as a unique, homogenous nation.

The ideology of Japanese exceptionalism gained traction in the context of a booming economy. Thanks to Japan's spectacular postwar growth, the export of "surplus" population ceased in the early 1970s. In 1990, faced with an unprecedented labor shortage, the government set aside its traditional aversion to immigration, offering employment visas to Issei, Nisei, and Sansei on preferential terms. The absence of special consideration for the fourth generation and beyond reflected an ongoing understanding of assimilation-as-loss in which time and space steadily eroded the essence of Japaneseness. Nonetheless, the

---

[85] Riordan Roett, "Brazil and Japan: Potential vs. Reality," in Susan Kaufman Purcell and Robert M. Immerman, eds., *Japan and Latin America in the New Global Order* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 101–20, here 103.
[86] Nihon kaigai ijū kazokukai rengōkai, *Nanbei no Nikkei koronia* (Tokyo: Nihon kaigai ijū kazokukai rengōkai, 1966), 143.

targeting of the Nikkei to supplement the labor supply illustrated a lingering sense of confraternity with the diaspora.

Although Nikkei of any citizenship could claim a visa, Brazilians, constituting nearly half of all Japanese emigrants and their descendants, comprised the overwhelming majority of applicants. Many were attracted by wage differentials between Brazil and Japan, and hoped that a short-term stint of work abroad would furnish the capital for a comfortable life in South America. By the late 2000s, more than three hundred thousand Brazilian Nikkei (of a total population of about 1.28 million) lived in Japan. Although the number of Nikkei in the home islands subsequently declined due to Japan's ongoing recession, *dekassegui* (Japanese, *dekasegi*), or temporary labor migration, remains a significant source of income for many Brazilian diaspora. Most Nikkei in Japan, including those who had held professional employment in their native countries, took blue-collar manufacturing jobs deemed "dirty, dangerous, and difficult" by the domestic population. *Dekassegui* has thus disproportionately removed able-bodied, working-age diaspora from their communities, and reduced incentives for Nikkei to pursue professional training in favor of "easy money" in Japan.[87]

Among Japanese scholars of cultural anthropology and the emerging field of migration studies (*imin kenkyū*), research on the Nikkei began virtually at the moment of their arrival. Having long understood assimilation as a process of loss that took place outside the home islands, social scientists, policymakers, and society at large were suddenly forced to re-conceive the phenomenon as one of gain in the domestic context. The experience of "repatriated" diaspora emerged as unexpectedly fraught in terms of workplace dynamics, intra- and extra-community relations, social and cultural life, language, childrearing, notions of "home," media representation, and responses of the Japanese public.[88] While some *dekassegui* have thrived, even abandoning plans to return to Brazil altogether, many are disheartened by Japanese contempt for their origins as "abandoned people," lack of linguistic and cultural fluency, and alleged "national traits" of laziness, noisiness, disloyalty, and poverty. Perceived rejection by the Japanese has in numerous cases discouraged diaspora from participating in domestic society, and correspondingly strengthened a sense of nostalgia or longing (*saudade*) for Brazil. At the same time, Nikkei

---

[87] Koji Sasaki, "Between Emigration and Immigration: Japanese Emigrants to Brazil and Their Descendants in Japan," *Senri Ethnological Reports* 77 (2008): 53–66; Mieko Nishida, "Why Does a Nikkei Want to Talk to Other Nikkeis?: Japanese Brazilians and Their Identity in São Paulo," *Critique of Anthropology* 29, 4 (2009): 423–45; Eunice Akemi Ishikawa, "The Return of Japanese-Brazilian Next Generations: Their Post-1980 Experiences in Japan," in Dennis Conway and Robert B. Potter, eds., *Return Migration of the Next Generations: Twenty-First Century Transnational Mobility* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 59–78.

[88] For an overview and bibliography of migration studies in Japan, see Nihon imin gakkai, ed., *Imin kenkyū to tabunka kyosei* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobō, 2011).

stereotypes of the Japanese as cold, robotic, and insular, and biases against non-Nikkei and non-Brazilian migrants, also impede coexistence.[89]

In addition to social tension, contemporary scholars highlight the transnationalism of the Nikkei in Japan, who increasingly defy categorization in terms of identity and plans for the future. Even as deteriorating economic conditions have compromised the job security of individual workers, their collective presence has acquired some hallmarks of permanence. South American grocery stores, shopping malls, community centers, and schools cater to a long-term resident population now predominantly comprised of families rather than single migrants. Some sixty-four thousand Nikkei minors, raised and educated in both Brazil and Japan, face particularly daunting challenges in feeling part of, or participating fully in, either society.[90]

Although most research remains focused on the diaspora itself, Japanese social scientists have also begun to explore the new significance of immigration to national identity. Many liberal scholars point to the Nikkei and other newcomers, as well as established minorities such as the Burakumin (Japan's traditional "outcast" population), American military troops, denizen Chinese (including postwar repatriates of Japanese descent), and the long-term resident Korean population (Zainichi), as evidence of a plural rather than homogenous society. "Multiculturalism" (*tabunkasei*) has become an academic and media buzzword. Yet even as authors acknowledge the role of the Nikkei in eroding (perceptions of) Japanese homogeneity, most are "not overly optimistic" that immigration will prompt the retreat of mono-ethnicity as an ideal.[91] Internationalization and national exceptionalism remain intertwined in the public mind. As one scholar observes, "Once foreigners of whatever origin are treated identically to Japanese, granted exactly the same rights, and fully

---

[89] Kawamura Riri, *Nihon shakai to Burajiru imin* (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2000); Daniel Linger, *No One Home: Brazilian Selves Remade in Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Joshua Hotaka Roth, *Brokered Homeland: The Japanese Brazilian Migrants in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Takeyuki Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Ayumi Takenaka, "Paradoxes of Ethnicity-Based Immigration: Peruvian and Japanese Peruvian Migrants in Japan," in Roger Goodman, Ceri Peach, Ayumi Takenaka, and Paul White, eds., *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Immigrants and Overseas Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 222–35.

[90] Lesser, ed., *Searching for Home Abroad*; Junichi Goto, "Latin Americans of Japanese Origin (*Nikkeijin*) Working in Japan—A Survey," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 4203 (2007); Ernani Oda, "Familial Narratives and Transforming Identities: Three Generations of Japanese Brazilians Living Between Brazil, Japan, and Beyond," *Social Identities* 16, 6 (2010): 775–90.

[91] Hiroshi Komai, *Foreign Migrants in Contemporary Japan* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001), 157; Kajita Takamichi, Tanno Kiyoto, and Higuchi Naoto, *Kao no mienai teijūka: Nikkei Burajirujin to kokka shijō, imin nettowa-ku* (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku shuppankai, 2005); Takeyuki "Gaku" Tsuda, "Crossing Ethnic Boundaries: Japanese Brazilian Return Migrants and the Ethnic Challenge of Japan's Newest Immigrant Minority," in Nelson H. H. Graburn, John Ertl, and R. Kenji Tierney, eds., *Multiculturalism in the New Japan: Crossing the Boundaries Within* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 117–38.

assimilated into society, people might start wondering what it really meant to belong to a nation. But then they would start questioning what it was they had worked so hard for, paid their taxes for, educated their children for, and amassed fortunes for … when people who had not shared their history, nor made the same efforts as themselves, could still claim those rights."[92]

Social scientists increasingly denounce this "closed and exclusive" attitude.[93] Over a decade ago, Maeyama Takashi, a Japanese cultural anthropologist and longtime student of the Nikkei in Brazil, published an influential critique of the myth of homogeneity in the leading Japanese-language journal of his field. Maeyama called for Japan to capitalize upon recent immigration to adopt a more realistic and inclusive image of a "polyethnic state" (*esunikku Nihonron*). This oft-quoted exhortation reflects the generally well-meaning, liberal perspective of many scholars, who remain interested in questions of national identity despite the ebbing of their political influence. Yet even their vision of a pluralist society implicitly upholds the legitimacy of ethnicity as the signal characteristic of Japanese belonging.[94] As the evolution of thinking about assimilation-as-loss demonstrates, national identity has historically adapted to political conditions. By contrast, blood and culture, the bases of that identity, have withstood the rise and fall of empire, occupation, and the return to independence and prosperity in the postwar era. In Japan, as in South Korea, Spain, Italy, and other historically emigrant-producing societies that have recently accepted large numbers of laborers of foreign citizenship, homogeneity is the current manifestation of a long-standing tradition of determining membership according to ethno-racial characteristics.[95] These pillars of national identity, rather than "homogeneity," are the real obstacles to multiculturalism.

Today, Japanese social scientists and policymakers point to the cautionary tale of Germany, plagued by tensions arising from a decades-long refusal to confer citizenship and other privileges of membership on non-ethnic return migrants. In both Japan and the Federal Republic, the definition of belonging according to common descent and culture leaves no real means of

---

[92] Haruo Shimoda, *Japan's "Guest Workers": Issues and Public Policies*, Roger Northridge, trans. (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994), 207.

[93] Ibid., 210.

[94] Maeyama Takashi, "Burajiru de Nihonjin wo jinruigaku suru," *Minzokugaku kenkyū* 65, 4 (2001): 376–91. Likewise, sociologist Chikako Kashiwazaki criticizes the absence of a "vision for a multi-ethnic conception of Japanese nationhood," but does not consider the possibility of collective membership based on non-ethnic or civic criteria; in "Internationalism and Transnationalism: Responses to Immigration in Japan," in Gabriele Vogt and Glenda S. Roberts, eds., *Migration and Integration: Japan in Comparative Perspective* (Munich: Iudicium, 2011), 41–57, here 54.

[95] Takeyuki Tsuda, "Localities and the Struggle for Immigrant Rights: The Significance of Local Citizenship in Recent Countries of Immigration," in Takeyuki Tsuda, ed., *Local Citizenship in Recent Countries of Immigration: Japan in Comparative Perspective* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2006), 3–36.

incorporating "foreigners" as members of the national community.[96] What other options do recent immigrant nations have for constructing a more inclusive or "post-ethnic" society—one that creates space for dynamic voluntary affiliations as well as protected communities of descent, and promotes wide-ranging cosmopolitan solidarities transcending ethno-cultural categories?[97] In the historically immigrant-based societies of the Americas, including Brazil, assimilation and its politically correct successors ("absorption," "incorporation," "integration," "insertion," etc.) purportedly target the values of newcomers. The reality of ethnic classification and discrimination notwithstanding, U.S. ideology holds that non-natives of any background may become full members of the nation by espousing a fundamental "American creed" of egalitarianism, individualism, liberty, populism, and pluralism.[98] As Japan transitions from an emigrant society to a net receiver of population, will it follow the example of immigrant nations in determining belonging according to common values? Will social scientists return to the forefront of the debate over identity by suggesting what those values might be?

---

[96] Germany's Nationality Law of 2000 liberalized naturalization procedures, allowing the descendants of non-ethnic German immigrants to acquire full rights as citizens of the Federal Republic. Nonetheless, ethnic discrimination has persisted. On the delineation of national belonging in Germany through citizenship, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Joppke, *Citizenship and Immigration*.
[97] David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 3–4.
[98] Myron Weiner, "Opposing Visions: Migration and Citizenship Policies in Japan and the United States," in Myron Weiner and Tadashi Hanami, eds., *Temporary Workers or Future Citizens? Japan and U.S. Migration Policies* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3–27. On the American creed and its limitations in defining collective belonging in the United States, see Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

Abstract: Assimilation makes new members of a group by changing particular characteristics of non-members to reflect the fundamentals of collective belonging. Gaining the qualities for inclusion in one community typically involves losing at least some features that confer acceptance in another. However, scholars have generally not acknowledged assimilation as a process of loss. In part, this gap bespeaks a larger tendency to overlook the influence of emigration on national identity in population-exporting states (compared to the vast literature on immigration and national identity in population-receiving countries). This article analyzes discourses of assimilation concerning Japanese emigrants as a case study of how the ways in which members are understood to leave the national community delimits the bases of belonging for those who remain. Historically, Japanese ideologies of assimilation have been most contested in Brazil, where the largest Japanese diaspora in the West sought to reconcile patriotism and the expectations of the Japanese government with local nation-building agendas. After World War II, many emigrants and their descendants in Brazil refused to acknowledge Japan's surrender. This crisis inspired the first study of the Japanese diaspora ever conducted by a Japan-based social scientist. Izumi Seiichi's work in cultural anthropology helped to build Japan's new identity as a "peace state." Subsequent generations of Japanese scholars continued to study the assimilation of the diaspora, recategorized as "Nikkei," as a foil for "Japaneseness." Their ethnic conception of national membership remains influential today, even as Japan transitions from a population exporter to a land of immigrants, including the Nikkei.