

Beyond Boundaries
Selected Papers on Refugees and Immigrants, Volume V

Edited by Diane Baxter and Ruth Krulfeld



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***Return Migration of Japanese Brazilian Women:
Household Strategies and Search for the "Homeland"***

Keiko Yamanaka

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RETURN MIGRATION OF JAPANESE BRAZILIAN WOMEN: Household Strategies And Search For The "Homeland"

Keiko Yamanaka

By tracing the immigration history of Nikkeijin (Japanese descendants) in Brazil, this study identifies three categories of Japanese Brazilian migrant women who have left Brazil since the late 1980s to work temporarily in Japan. These women of contrasting generations, ethnicities and experience--categorized here as "Seniors," "Juniors" and "Brazilian Wives" (of Nikkeijin men)--constitute more than 40 percent of the 200,000 Japanese Brazilian migrant population in Japan. An examination of data obtained from interviews in 100 households in Japan and Brazil reveals distinctive ways in which women of each category approach and maximize economic opportunities encountered in Japan. Senior Nikkeijin, speaking good Japanese, characteristically work in hospitals as caretakers of elderly patients, while Junior Nikkeijin and Brazilian Wives, with little linguistic and cultural familiarity, toil on manufacturing assembly lines. As a result of their experience of social marginality in Japan, the ethnic identity of Nikkeijin women has been redefined, reflecting their history in Brazil. Transnational migration has also entailed a reworking of household strategies for upward mobility in the context of continuing economic uncertainty in Brazil. Return migration of Nikkeijin women to their ancestral country has thus opened a new chapter in their individual biographies and in their community's history in Brazil.

Since 1990, some 200,000 descendants (*Nikkeijin*, "Japanese descendants") of Japanese emigrants to Latin America, primarily Brazil, have returned to their ancestral homelands as unskilled laborers in response to an increased demand for labor in jobs shunned by Japanese. Encouraged by the 1990 Japanese immigration reform law which granted second (*Nisei*) and third (*Sansei*) generation *Nikkeijin* a renewable stay of up to three years with unlimited access to labor markets, they looked forward to finding well paying jobs as sojourners in Japan, and to being welcomed as compatriots. The enabling law was intended to attract *Nikkeijin* as culturally familiar substitutes for what was perceived as an alarming influx of non-Japanese Asian labor migrants. But these expectations and intentions were ill-fated. The *Nikkeijin* found themselves to be regarded as aliens and treated as secondary citizens by the Japanese, while the Japanese found the *Nikkeijin* to be disturbingly foreign (Brazilian).

From the beginning of this migration boom, the *Nikkeijin* population in Japan included a high proportion of women. In 1990, 39 percent of the total annual admissions from Brazil were females, increasing to 43 percent in 1994. Similarly, the proportion of children went up from 5 percent in 1990 to 8 percent in 1991. These statistics clearly indicate that Japanese Brazilian migration is family oriented, rather than dominated by unaccompanied males. Despite the fact that family demography is crucial to understanding patterns of migration, settlement and subsequent behavior in the adopted country, literature on recent immigrant labor in Japan pays

little attention to this feature of what has become the country's third largest immigrant population, following 700,000 Koreans and 220,000 Chinese.

Based on more than 100 household interviews and 50 survey questionnaires conducted in both Japan and Brazil in 1994 and 1995, this study will discuss *Nikkeijin* women's experiences as migrant workers in Japan, their resettlement process upon returning to Brazil after several years' sojourn and the impact of labor migration on their self-perceptions. A close examination of the interview data reveals extraordinary complexity and diversity in the migration experiences of *Nikkeijin* women by generation, language and ethnicity, thus highlighting the importance of incorporating in the analysis the historical and cultural contexts of their return migration from Brazil to Japan.

Japanese Women in Transnational Migration

"Birds of passage are also women..." (Morokvasic 1984:886); this comment emphasizes the neglected attention paid to migrant women in the international migration literature. Migrant women make significant financial contributions, as producers and earners, to their families and communities and therefore to the economy of the receiving country. By remitting a portion of their meager wages to the families remaining in their home country, migrant women also contribute to the household and national economies there. As reproducers and nurturers, women play central roles in uniting families, developing social networks and thus solidifying ethnic communities and occupational niches. By raising and socializing children, they also transmit cultural traditions to succeeding generations, thus strengthening emotional and social ties with the host population (Morokvasic 1984; Gabaccia 1992).

Japanese women, together with their husbands, were "birds of passage" from the earliest stages of emigration following the opening of the country in 1868 (see the first column of Chart 1). In North America, between 1885 and 1990, 20 to 25 percent of the 89,000 Japanese immigrants to Hawaii were women (Nomura 1989). The 1907-08 Gentlemen's Agreement between the United States and Japan, while halting new immigration to the United States, permitted family members to enter the country as legal immigrants. Consequently, between 1910 and 1920, sizable numbers (about 17,000) arrived, most of them as "picture brides" for immigrant Japanese men (Ichioka, 1980).

In South America, after the U.S. gate was closed in 1908, Japanese emigrants headed for Brazil.¹ At this time, Brazil was experiencing a labor shortage which had begun with the abolition of slavery in 1888 and was exacerbated by the expanding demand for coffee in Europe. Large coffee plantation owners (fazendeiros) first recruited farm hands as contract workers (colonos) from Italy, Portugal and Spain, and later from Germany and Japan. Unlike those Japanese who first emigrated to the United States, most of those arriving in Brazil were accompanied by their families. In an effort to secure the stability of their labor force, employers' contracts required that a family unit comprise 3 to 10 laborers, aged between 12 and 45 (Suzuki 1992:141). Frequently unable to meet this family requirement, the emigrants often created "paper families" (kosei kazoku, "constituted families") of unrelated people. Typically, a married couple incorporated relatives, friends or neighbors into their family unit and traveled together. Upon their arrival, many paper families were dissolved whereupon members reverted to their original relationships (Maeyama 1996:43).

CHART 1. CHRONOLOGY OF JAPANESE MIGRATION TO BRAZIL AND RETURN TO JAPAN, 1908 TO 1990

Year	Historical Events in Brazil, Japan and U.S.	Pre-W.W.II Japanese Immigrants in Brazil	Post-W.W.II Japanese Immigrant
1905			
1910	U.S. Gentlemen's Agreement (1908)	Period I "Short-term Migrant Workers" (1908-1924)	
1915	W.W.I (1914-1918)	[1st immigrants (<i>Issei</i>) arrival, 1908]: <i>Colonos</i> (contract laborers) in coffee plantations	
1920			ts in Brazil
1925	U.S. Immigration Act (1924)	Period II "Long-term Migrant Workers" (1925-1941)	
1930	Great Depression (1929)	[Arrival of the largest number of immigrants, 1925-1934]: <i>Sitiantes</i> (independent farmers) in Japanese colonies	
1935	Brazil's <i>Estado Novo</i> (1930-45) Japan's Occupation of Manchuria (1931-45) Brazil's New Constitution (1934)		
1940			
1945	W.W.II (1941-45) Japan's Surrender (1945)	Period III "Permanent Settlers" Period (1945 to Present)	
1950		[Coming of age of the 2nd generation (<i>Nisei</i>)]: Urban migration and occupational differentiation	
1955	U.S.-Japan Peace Treaty (1951)		1st Post-War Immigrants (<i>Issei</i>) Arrival, 1953: Permanent settlers in agriculture, Families of pre-W.W.II immigrants
1960			
1965	Japan's Economic Miracle (1960-73)	Coming of age of the 3rd generation (<i>Sansei</i>)	
1970			
1975	OPEC Oil Embargo (1973)		Coming of age of the 2nd generation (<i>Nisei</i>)
1980	Brazil's Economic Crisis (1981-1991)		
1985	G7 Plaza Agreement (1985)	Coming of age of the 4th generation (<i>Yonsei</i>)	
		Labor migration to Japan limited to those having Japanese citizenship (most of whom are <i>Nisei</i>)	Labor migration to Japan limited to those having Japanese citizenship (most of whom are <i>Issei</i>)
1990	Japan's Immigration Reform (1990)	Massive migration to Japan by <i>Nisei</i> and <i>Sansei</i> without Japanese citizenship	Migration to Japan by <i>Nisei</i> without Japanese citizenship

Such practices resulted in a high degree of participation of women in labor migration from the onset. In 1908, the first Japanese ship carrying immigrants to Brazil, the *Kasatomaru*, arrived at the port of Santos with 797 Japanese, of whom 180 were women (CCEYH 1991:86). As is shown in the third and fourth columns of Table 1, there were 571 women (34 percent) among the total of 1,703 immigrants during the first three years. This figure rose quickly to 10,421, 29,839 and 34,414 during the decade of 1911-20, 1921-30 and 1931-42, respectively, accounting for nearly forty and more percent of the total numbers of immigrants during each of these decades.

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF JAPANESE EMIGRANTS FROM JAPAN TO BRAZIL, 1908-1989, AND PROPORTION OF WOMEN, 1908-1942

Year	Total (1)	Total (2)	Women	% Women
1908-1910	1,714	1,703	571	33.5
1911-1920	26,947	26,914	10,421	38.7
1921-1930	70,914	64,480	29,839	46.3
1931-1942	89,411	87,780	34,414	39.2
1945-1950	10	-	-	-
1951-1960	44,655	-	-	-
1961-1970	14,938	-	-	-
1971-1980	8,333	-	-	-
1981-1989	3,436	-	-	-
Total	260,358	-	-	-

Sources: Watanabe 1994; CCEYH 1991.

Notes: Total (1) is derived from emigration records (Watanabe 1994: 126), whereas Total (2) is derived from immigrant lists by immigration companies (CCEYH 1991: 86). The statistics on women are derived from Total (2).

Japanese Immigrants in Brazil, 1908-1973

Based on immigrants' plans, occupations and community leadership, the nearly 90 years of Japanese immigration to Brazil may be divided into three periods—1908-1924, 1925-1941 and 1945 to present (see the second column of Chart 1).²

Period I, 1908-1924, "Short-Term Migrant Workers"

During the first period, 1908-1924, a total of about 35,000 Japanese entered Brazil (see Table 1). The immigrants worked on contract as farm hands in large coffee plantations (*fazendas*) scattered in Southern Brazil, primarily in the state of São Paulo. These immigrants, farmers and their families mostly from southwestern Japan, intended to labor for a few years and return home with substantial savings. However, employer-employee relations on the *fazendas* reflected the fact that slavery had been abolished only two decades before. Working conditions were brutal, wages extremely low and employers autocratic. The immigrants resisted, often refusing to work, to which many employers responded with threats, and sometimes acts, of violence. As a result, immigrants' dreams of getting rich quickly and returning home were shattered.

Period II, 1925-1941, "Long-Term Migrant Workers"

During the second period, 1925-1941, most immigrants left the plantations upon the completion of their contracts and became independent farmers (*situantes*), first by leasing, then

by purchasing, land in more remote and undeveloped areas. Cultivation of rice, coffee, cotton and other crops brought relative success and stability, but the immigrants' plans to return home were indefinitely delayed because of slow returns on agricultural investment. Away from cities and "civilization," these immigrants lived in their own ethnic settlements (*colonias Japonesas*), where Japanese language and community ethos were maintained. In 1925 the Japanese government made it a national policy to promote emigration to Brazil, as a result of which the decade from 1925 to 1934 witnessed the peak of Japanese immigration to Brazil with more than 120,000 immigrants, among whom women accounted for 41 percent (see Table 1). This large influx of non-European immigrants, however, inevitably led to the anti-immigration policy of Brazil's nationalist government (Skidmore, 1990; Lesser, 1995). Passage of the 1934 Constitution drastically cut admission of Japanese immigrants, and Japan's subsequent participation in World War II completely halted emigration from Japan to Brazil.

Period III, 1945 to Present, "Permanent Settlers"

Japan's surrender in 1945 caused severe shock and much confusion among Japanese Brazilians, most of whom had been convinced that victory for Japan was inevitable. As they came to realize that the Japan to which they had hoped to return no longer existed, most immigrants made the decision to settle permanently in Brazil. After the war, declining agriculture in Brazil pushed many immigrants to cities so that by the end of the 1950s almost half of all Japanese immigrants lived in cities of Southern Brazil, mostly in the State of São Paulo. During the same period, Japan reentered the international community, giving rise in 1953 to a new flow of Japanese migrants to Brazil (see the third column of Chart 1). Economic hardship from the devastation of war lingered with the result that some Japanese chose to emigrate to Brazil permanently. The economic prosperity of Japan in the 1960s quickly eliminated economic needs of emigration until, in 1973, the Japanese government officially announced discontinuation of its emigration program.³ A total of nearly 60,000 Japanese had emigrated to Brazil during two decades (1953-73), of which an estimated 30 to 40 percent were women (see Table 1).⁴

Social Differentiation and Labor Migration

During the prosperous 1960s—the "economic miracle of Brazil"—the *Nikkeijin* population underwent rapid internal changes. Based on a census of Japanese Brazilians in 1958, Maeyama (1990:213) reports that a sample of some 66,000 non-agricultural people 10 years of age and over (extracted from a total population of 430,000) revealed the formation of three social classes: "old middle class," "new middle class," and "working class." The old middle class, comprising primarily the self-employed engaged in family business, accounted for 63 percent of the sample. These were mostly Issei (first generation) and older *Nisei* (second generation) who lacked formal Brazilian education. As latecomers to urban commercial occupations, their entrepreneurship survived by relying heavily on unpaid labor provided by wives and children. The new middle class, comprising primarily the children of members of the old middle class, and made up of salaried employees in occupations requiring professional and technical skills, accounted for 20 percent of the sample. Japanese parents, while persevering in family businesses, sought a brighter future for their sons by sending them to universities for professional training. As a result of traditional gender roles, daughters received less education, most remaining at home to assist their parents until they married. Thus, members of the new middle class comprised younger Brazilian-born, Portuguese speaking *Nisei* and *Sansei* (third generation) men

and their families. The working class, made up of wage laborers (including students holding such jobs), constituted the remaining seventeen percent of the sample.⁵

The economic crises that hit Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s caused serious financial trouble for most Brazilians; hyperinflation and unemployment threatened the urban employed class most. By the mid-1980s, many Brazilians came to view emigration as a route to economic survival (Goza 1994; Margolis 1994). A small but unknown number of Japanese Brazilians joined the exodus from Brazil in the mid-1980s. Typically, these were men and women of middle age and older—*Nisei* and post-war Issei—who engaged in traditional small business, but spoke fluent Japanese and, more importantly, retained Japanese citizenship. As Brazil's economic crisis continued to worsen into the late 1980s, stable middle class *Nisei* and *Sansei*—mostly men—who held professional and managerial positions began to migrate to Japan. A legal barrier, however, confronted those—a majority—who lacked Japanese citizenship. Japan follows the principle of *jus sanguinis* (law of blood) in determining Japanese citizenship and had required that a child's birth be registered with Japanese authorities within fourteen days after its birth in order for the child to be granted citizenship.⁶ For immigrant parents living in remote areas in Brazil, this registration was a hardship, as a result of which many second generation Japanese children (*Nisei*) were not registered as Japanese citizens, with the result that under the Japanese Nationality Law they were defined as foreigners despite their Japanese ancestry.

Japan's New Immigration Policy and the *Nikkeijin* Influx

The rising tide of arrivals in Japan of *Nisei* and *Sansei* of Brazilian citizenship in the late 1980s brought to the surface a number of inconsistencies and inadequacies in Japanese immigration laws and policies (Yamanaka 1996a). Prior to their arrival, illegal employment of Asians in unskilled sectors had attracted national attention (Morita and Sassen 1994). Facing an increasing number of illegal workers in 1989, the Japanese government revised its 1951 Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law. The new law, which took effect in June 1, 1990, maintained the old principle of limiting imported labor to skilled occupations, but implemented two important new measures. First, in order to eliminate illegal labor, it instituted criminal penalties for the recruitment and hiring of unskilled foreign workers.⁷ Second, the law created a new "long-term" visa exclusively for descendants (up to the third generation) of Japanese emigrants. This visa, designed to attract cheap "Japanese" labor, granted up to three years' residence without restriction on socioeconomic activities (Yamanaka 1993, 1996a; Cornelius 1994).⁸

An influx of *Nikkeijin* followed immediately upon implementation of the Revised Immigration Law on June 1, 1990. Legitimized as residents and workers by the new policy, young *Nisei* and *Sansei* men and women and their families constituted the overwhelming majority of *Nikkeijin* immigrants. In 1991 the annual influx of Brazilian and Peruvian nationals of Japanese ancestry reached a peak of 120,000 (96,000 and 24,000, respectively). The following year the Japanese economy plunged into a serious recession whereupon the number of annual arrivals dropped by approximately 15 percent in 1992 and 1993. Nevertheless, by 1994 more than 200,000 *Nikkeijin* (160,000 Brazilians, 35,000 Peruvians and 6,800 other South American nationalities) remained as alien residents in the major Japanese manufacturing towns (Yamanaka and Koga 1996). According to admission statistics provided by the Japanese Ministry of Justice, the age structure and sex ratio of the Japanese Brazilian population in Japan changed significantly between 1988 and 1994, from a pattern of working age male predominance to one of a more balanced age and sex

composition (see Table 2). In 1988, males 15-44 years of age comprised two thirds of all male arrivals and outnumbered female arrivals by 23 percent. This pattern changed as the sojourning boom intensified in 1990. Male arrivals increased in nearly all age categories, resulting in a sharp rise in sex ratio (from 134 to 159) accompanied by an equally sharp drop in the average age (from 37 to 32). By 1994 females increased in all but two age categories, lowering the sex ratio to 132. Finally, the proportion of children of less than 14 years among the migrants increased from 4.5 to 6.8 percent between 1988 and 1994 (Yamanaka 1996a, b).

Research Methods and Data

The research for the following findings was conducted in both Japan and Brazil between 1994 and 1995. In March and November 1994, I conducted personal interviews with members of 63 *Nikkeijin* households in Hamamatsu (Shizuoka Prefecture) and Toyohashi (Aichi Prefecture) of the Tokai Region, Central Japan. In July 1995, I carried out a similar study with members of 33 households of *Nikkeijin* who had returned from Japan to three major cities in Southern Brazil—São Paulo, Londrina and Porto Alegre. These interviews were conducted in either Portuguese or Japanese and questions were answered in an open conversational style. Altogether these field studies yielded data (referred to as *Nikkeijin* Data below) containing information on a total of 171 individuals 15 years of age and over—81 women and 90 men (Yamanaka and Koga 1996). In addition, a written survey questionnaire was administered in Portuguese, of which 53 (out of 100) were returned. Finally, a total of about 50 shorter, supplementary interviews were conducted in Japan and Brazil.

Three Categories of *Nikkeijin* Women Migrants

Preliminary analysis (Yamanaka 1996b) of these interviews and surveys led me to group these 81 *Nikkeijin* migrant women into three distinct categories mentioned above: (1) "Senior *Nikkeijin* Women," (2) "Junior *Nikkeijin* Women" and (3) "Brazilian Wives." Five criteria are used for classifying the sample: (1) informant's historical position represented by her generation and age; (2) her cultural affiliation with the ancestral homeland measured by her fluency in Japanese; (3) her socioeconomic position in Brazil as indicated by education and occupation; (4) her occupation as a migrant worker in Japan; and (5) her ethnic origin, identifying her as a person of either *Nikkeijin* or non-*Nikkeijin* descent. Table 3 illustrates this classification scheme.

Senior Nikkeijin Women

Among the 81 women in the *Nikkeijin* data, eight belong to the first group, designated "Senior *Nikkeijin* Women," consisting of two sub-groups representing the two migrant streams to Brazil, one before, and the other after, World War II. The first sub-group consists of five daughters (*Nisei*) of pre-World War II immigrants who grew up in *colonias Japonesas* as Japanese.⁹ The second sub-group comprises three post-war immigrant (Issei) women who were born in Japan during or immediately after the war. Because of their having grown up as Japanese in *colonias Japonesas* or in Japan, all eight of these Senior *Nikkeijin* Women (average age 56.5 years) are fluent in Japanese and are familiar with Japanese values and customs. Prior to their arrival in Japan all but two, both widows, were married. All but one, an elementary school teacher, had been self-employed in agriculture or small business. With few skills at their age, most of these Senior Women took jobs in which their fluency in Japanese—their only marketable

TABLE 2. AGE STRUCTURE AND SEX RATIO OF BRAZILIAN ARRIVALS IN JAPAN: 1988-1994

Age	1988			1990			1992			1994*		
	Male %	Female %	Sex Ratio	Male %	Female %	Sex Ratio	Male %	Female %	Sex Ratio	Male %	Female %	Sex Ratio
0-14	4.1	5.1	109	4.3	6.9	98	5.9	8.6	100	6.2	7.6	108
15-24	14.5	21.7	89	29.0	30.2	153	26.3	29.0	132	26.3	28.6	121
25-34	25.3	27.7	122	30.5	28.7	169	29.5	28.0	153	29.0	28.3	135
35-44	25.7	18.4	187	18.5	15.1	195	19.8	14.9	193	10.3	8.3	163
45-54	17.0	13.3	170	12.1	12.8	150	13.0	12.9	147	16.8	14.0	158
55-64	8.9	9.8	122	4.3	5.1	135	4.0	5.1	114	8.2	9.4	116
65-70+	1.4	4.1	144	1.3	1.2	171	1.3	1.5	133	3.2	4.0	108
Total	100.0	100.0	134	100.0	100.0	159	100.0	100.0	145	100.0	100.0	132
Mean Age	38.1	35.8	37.2	32.2	31.4	31.9	32.3	31.3	31.9	32.1	31.6	31.9
Number	9,603	7,186		11,316	25,987		48,247	33,248		41,054	31,182	

Source: Japan Immigration Association (1989-1995).

Note: *The age brackets for 1994 are classified differently from the previous years. They are: 0-14, 15-24, 25-34, 35-39, 40-49, 50-59 and 60+.

TABLE 3. THREE CATEGORIES OF JAPANESE BRAZILIAN MIGRANT WOMEN IN JAPAN AND THEIR CULTURAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Three Categories	Historical Position 1. Generation 2. Age	Cultural Affiliation w/ Japan 1. Japanese language 2. Japanese culture	Socioeconomic Backgrounds in Brazil 1. Education 2. Occupation	Occupation in Japan
Senior Nikkeijin	1. Daughters (<i>Nisei</i>) of Pre-W.W.II immigrants (<i>Issei</i>), born and socialized in Brazil as Japanese in the pre-W.W.II period and <i>Issei</i> women who immigrated to Brazil as young children before W.W.II. 2. 45 years and over.	1. Fluent. 2. Little first hand experience, but knowledgeable.	1. Little formal Brazilian education. 2. Small-scale agriculture or small family business.	Service: primarily convalescent attendants.
	1. Post-W.W.II Japanese immigrants (<i>Issei</i>), born and socialized in Japan as Japanese in the post-W.W.II period. 2. 45 years and over.	1. Native speaker. 2. First hand experience.	1. Mostly Japanese education received in Japan. 2. Small-scale agriculture or small family business.	Service: primarily convalescent attendants.
Junior Nikkeijin	1. Grand daughters (<i>Sansei</i>) and daughters (<i>Nisei</i>) of pre-W.W.II immigrants, born and socialized as Brazilian in the post-W.W.II period. 2. 16 to 44 years.	1. Little exposure. 2. Little knowledge.	1. Brazilian high school education and higher. 2. Student, white collar or professional.	Mostly factory workers.
	1. Daughters (<i>Nisei</i>) of post-W.W.II immigrants, born and socialized in Brazil as Brazilian in the post-W.W.II period. 2. 16 to 44 years.	1. Considerable exposure. 2. Little knowledge.	1. Brazilian high school education and higher. 2. Student, white collar or professional.	Mostly factory workers.
Brazilian Wives	1. Brazilian wives of <i>Nikkeijin</i> men, born and socialized in Brazil as Brazilian in the post-W.W.II period. 2. 16 to 44 years.	1. Little exposure. 2. Little knowledge.	1. Brazilian high school education. 2. White collar.	Mostly factory workers.

skill—would maximize their wages, i.e., convalescent attendants (tsukisoifu) in hospitals taking care around the clock of terminally ill and bed-ridden elderly patients.

Junior Nikkeijin Women

The second group, designated “Junior *Nikkeijin* Women,” comprises fifty-seven younger women (average age 28.5 years). Like the Senior group, the Juniors consist of two generational groups: 29 *Sansei*—granddaughters of pre-World War II Issei immigrants—and 28 *Nisei*—daughters of either pre- or post-World War II Issei immigrants. Both generations grew up in post-war Brazil, speaking Portuguese and absorbing Brazilian cultural values.¹⁰ Forty-two of the 57 women are married, while 11 are single and 4 are divorced. These Junior *Nikkeijin* Women are well educated with 80 percent of them having completed senior high school or beyond. Correspondingly, prior to their migration, three quarters of them were professionals, university students or white collar workers. In Japan, almost all of them work as assemblers in factories manufacturing automobile or electrical appliance parts. Migration thus resulted in downward occupational mobility, but as will be discussed below, few could resist it because of their expectation of large savings in a short period of time.

Brazilian Wives

The third group of *Nikkeijin* women consists of sixteen Brazilian women of European origin (average age 30.3 years), who are married to *Nisei* and *Sansei* men. These women migrated with their husbands as family members and, together with their male counterparts (Brazilian husbands of *Nikkeijin* women), constituted a non-*Nikkeijin* segment of the Brazilian *Nikkeijin* population in Japan. Interracial marriage between *Nikkeijin* and non-*Nikkeijin* in Brazil accounted for 45.9 percent of the total marriages among the *Nikkeijin* population according to the *Nikkeijin* census of 1988 (São Paulo Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyujo 1988:104).¹¹ This relatively high rate of interracial marriage has resulted in the substantial number of non-*Nikkeijin* Brazilian women and men in the recent migration to Japan.¹² My analysis of the *Nikkeijin* data reveals that compared to their *Nikkeijin* sisters-in-law, their educational achievement is lower. Only one has a college degree. As this suggests, the Brazilian wives of *Nikkeijin* men are less aggressive than their *Nikkeijin* counterparts in pursuing economic mobility. Secretarial and sales jobs were the most common occupations among them before they departed for Japan. Their personal histories of relatively low aspiration for economic mobility appears to be associated with the fact that, upon their arrival in Japan, they display little interest in adjusting to Japanese culture and language.

Findings

The three categories of *Nikkeijin* migrant women I have designated show considerable differences in (1) their motivation to go to Japan, (2) their work experience and social adjustment in Japan and (3) changes in their self-perceptions and ethnic identities after migration.

Motivation for Migration

Labor migrants are generally thought to emigrate in search of better economic opportunities than those available to them in their home country. But in the case of women familial responsibilities often intrude to overcome economic motives for migration. This is particularly true of the five Senior *Nisei* Women each of whom, benefiting from two generations

of investment, is already financially secure including their own house or apartment in Brazil. Asked about their primary motives for migration to Japan, these women emphasized personal curiosity and a chance to travel to Japan rather than monetary goals. Historical ties to Japan come to the fore when they speak of their motives for the journey. The following description by Yoko Ikeda (62) illustrates her long cherished dream of going to Japan.¹³

I wanted to go to Japan all my life. It was the homeland where my parents were born and my relatives still live. In Brazil, before the war when the government prohibited teaching foreign languages, we learned to speak Japanese underground. More recently, my eldest daughter received a fellowship to study Japanese in Japan and went there as a student. I myself wished to go...it was a dream. But finally, when I decided to work in Japan, my second daughter did not like the idea. She must have felt embarrassed. I was disheartened. If I had given up my dream then, I would not have been able to do what I wanted to do. One should be given an opportunity to realize one's wish. Telling me not to go did not deter me when I wanted to go at any cost.

The cultural factor motivating this woman poses a sharp contrast with the economic motivations of the three post-war immigrant Issei women. Unlike their Brazilian-born *Nisei* contemporaries, the Issei women who immigrated to Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s had been, as a result of the constantly changing agricultural policies of the Brazilian government, unable to establish themselves economically. For these Japan-born women, returning to the home country for labor migration aroused mixed feelings. On the one hand, it was their only opportunity to reconstruct their household economies that had been undermined by Brazil's hyperinflation. On the other hand, it was a humiliating experience for them as Japanese emigrants, to return to work in their home country in jobs that no one else would be willing to take. In a time of economic crisis, economic needs clearly overcame personal hesitation. Thus they, with their husbands, were among the large wave of foreign workers who arrived in Japan in 1988-1989.

Soon thereafter, with the passage of the new immigration law in 1990, daughters of these Senior *Nikkeijin* Women followed in their mothers' footsteps. By that time extensive networks of recruiters in Brazil enabled job applicants to arrange employment prior to departure. When confronted by the option of migration, most of these Junior *Nikkeijin* Women showed little hesitation in choosing it. Unmarried women accompanied their families or joined family members who had already settled in Japan. Some, however, migrated on their own, frequently as members of a group organized by recruiters. Married women typically joined their husbands in Japan a few months to a year after the husbands had established themselves with jobs and housing.

The methods and timing of their migration varied depending on personal circumstances. The motives for migration of all Junior *Nikkeijin* respondents I interviewed, however, were primarily economic. With three quarters of them married, the majority with children of school age, they, their husbands and children went to Japan hoping to get rich quickly and return to Brazil to reestablish themselves there—to buy a house, apartment or land and start a family business with their savings from Japan. As previously discussed, the immigrants' desire to be their “own boss” is deeply rooted in Japanese Brazilian immigration history and must be understood as a manifestation of household strategies employed to climb the socioeconomic ladder of Brazilian society. Faced with economic chaos, young *Nikkeijin* sought a solution by returning to the strategy of establishing a family business, rather than preparing for salaried employment through higher education.

Indeed, in my *Nikkeijin* data, ten Junior Women interrupted their college educations to join the migration stream. Most of these “drop outs” were unmarried and wanted to participate in their families’ businesses. For example, two *Sansei* women, Marisa Saito (21, single) and Edna Kikuchi (46, divorced), were each willing to pool their savings with their family members to set up a new business because “we do everything together in family.” This emphasis on family unity was even more striking in the case of professional women who had secure, high paying jobs before migration. Marlene Tanaka (29, *Sansei*) was a university educated registered nurse in a state-run hospital in São Paulo and was about to be promoted to become a head nurse in her clinic. In 1991 her husband went to Japan, planning to establish a retail shop chain. Three months later Marlene resigned from her position and, together with their young son and her mother-in-law, left to join him in Japan. There she worked in a factory for three years, while her mother-in-law took care of their son during the day.

The motivations for migration among the sixteen Brazilian Wives differed profoundly from those of either the Senior or Junior *Nikkeijin* Women. The Brazilians were in a unique legal and social position as non-*Nikkeijin* wives of *Nikkeijin* men from whom they did not want to be separated. Prior to departure from Brazil few of these wives were personally interested in Japanese culture or spoke Japanese. When the migration boom hit their households, it was in all cases *Nikkeijin* husbands who decided to go to Japan and their wives acceded to their husbands’ decision. Similarly, some unmarried couples married immediately before migration in order to legalize their relationship and thus be permitted to migrate together. Asked why they went to Japan, Brazilian Wives did not refer to economic or cultural motives, but only to their husbands’ interest in migrating and to their own determination to accompany them to keep the family together. This passivity of Brazilian Wives was in sharp contrast to the situation wherein ethnicity and gender were reversed. That is, a non-*Nikkeijin* husband of a *Nikkeijin* wife would not only migrate with his wife, but would willingly work as many hours possible in Japan, and in some cases actively try to absorb Japanese language and culture. This interaction between gender and ethnicity suggests the importance of understanding division of labor by gender in the household economy in Brazil.

Work Experience and Social Adjustment in Japan

The three categories of *Nikkeijin* women arrived in Japan at different times and stayed for different periods. Seven of the eight Senior *Nikkeijin* Women arrived between 1989 and 1992 and stayed in Japan for less than two years. Some of them did so because of the difficulty of maintaining their permanent resident status in Brazil if they were to remain absent for more than two years. Their brief stay is also explained by their advanced age and by non-monetary motives, such as family and cultural ties in Brazil. The majority of Junior *Nikkeijin* and Brazilian Wives, on the other hand, came to Japan between 1990 and 1992, after the new immigration law legalized their entry but before the economic recession had seriously affected their employment opportunities. Firmly committed to their economic goals, these young *Nikkeijin* women and their families had stayed in Japan for three years on an average at the time of interview.

Once in Japan, however, all women, regardless of their backgrounds, worked as temporary contract laborers, filling gaps in the labor supply created by variations in labor demand, which fluctuates with the business cycle and demographic change. In the cities of Hamamatsu and Toyohashi manufacturing, particularly of automobile parts, is a major industry. In Hamamatsu alone over 6,000 small subcontractors—fifty percent of which have less than five employees, and over ninety percent of which have less than 30—supply parts to large

automobile assemblers such as Suzuki, Honda, Yamaha, Toyota and Nissan (Hamamatsu-shi Municipal Office 1992). According to Castles (1984:2), the migrant or guest worker system embodies “institutional discrimination” which is “designed to recruit and control temporary migrant workers” of foreign origin. In *Nikkeijin*’s employment, this institutional discrimination is manifest in the hiring system by which they are employed on short-term contracts by job brokers or job dispatchers (*assen* or *haken gyosha*), who in turn send them to their actual workplaces in subcontractors’ factories. Their work requires physical strength and on-the-job experience, but no complex technical or communication skills. The *Nikkeijin* guest worker system is designed, therefore, to function as a shock absorber (or “adjustment valve” in the Japanese phrase) between peak and slack periods of the economy, in order that Japanese workers’ jobs and their wages may remain secure during recessions. In addition to this dispatching service, most *Nikkeijin* rely heavily on job brokers for every aspect of their lives in Japan, including securing housing, furniture, documentation and children’s education. Job brokers charge substantial fees for many of these services with the result that *Nikkeijin* are unable to save as much money they had originally hoped.

In the Hamamatsu and Toyohashi area, wages of *Nikkeijin* workers decreased by some 20 percent in 1992 when the Japanese economy fell into a deep recession. Likewise, hours of overtime work substantially decreased. At the depth of the recession, hundreds of *Nikkeijin* were discharged and then returned home. Nonetheless, the average monthly earnings of full time Junior *Nikkeijin* and Brazilian Wives, which ranged from less than \$1,900 to 2,100 (\$9 to \$10 per hour) before tax, rent and other fees, far exceeded those they brought home in Brazil while working as professionals, secretaries, sales clerks and self-employed prior to migration. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics calculates Brazilian wage standards by minimum monthly living wages. In April 1990 it was set at the equivalent of \$70 (JETRO São Paulo Center 1992). Results from my written survey conducted in Brazil in July 1995 suggest that *Nikkeijin* migrants had earned on the average three to five times this minimum wage in Brazil prior to their departure for Japan. In Japan at the height of the economic growth between 1988 and 1991, an unskilled male factory worker earned more than \$100 per day including a few hours of overtime. Women, because of gender inequality, usually earned 20 percent less than men for comparable jobs (e.g., Brinton 1993). These daily wages were equivalent to what he or she might earn in one month in Brazil.

Job brokers also played a significant role in employment of Senior *Nikkeijin* Women as convalescent attendants. According to Shinozuka (1991), at the request of the central organization of this industry, the Japanese Ministry of Labor issued administrative directives specifying work conditions and duties for female *Nikkeijin* attendants who would otherwise have been vulnerable to job exploitation. Among these measures were equal wages for Japanese and *Nikkeijin* and the requirement that *Nikkeijin* workers speak fluent Japanese. Japan is a rapidly aging society (Martin 1989). Japanese women’s total fertility rate dropped by 28 percent between 1965 and 1990—from 2.14 to 1.54 (Asahi Shimbun 1994:53). By 2025 it is estimated that 27.3 percent of the total Japanese population will be 65 years and older (Cornelius 1994). Because of this rapid expansion in the elderly population, a demand for convalescent attendant services has risen, sharply pushing up the service fee. In 1990, the job of convalescent attendant paid an average of \$103 per 24 hour work day (Shinozuka 1991). By 1992, the wages had risen to \$140 per day, allowing the attendant to earn more than \$3,500 per month with four days off. It is no surprise, then, to find Senior *Nikkeijin* Women working with few complaints at this

extremely arduous job. They, or even their husbands, had never earned such large sums in their lives.

The monetary rewards of migration, however, scarcely matched the psychological pain and social isolation *Nikkeijin* women and men endured in Japan. In addition to their vulnerability to systematic exploitation by job brokers, *Nikkeijin* factory workers all experienced blatant prejudice and discrimination in the workplace. Because of *Nikkeijin*'s ancestry and appearance, Japanese managers and co-workers tended to expect them to behave and speak like Japanese. It did not take the Japanese long to realize that most *Nikkeijin* are not the Japanese they had expected but "foreigners" who neither speak Japanese nor conform to Japanese practices and customs. When expectations of their "Japanese-ness" were overtly contradicted, the Japanese often verbally abused them calling them "stupid," "secondary Japanese" and "uncivilized people from a backward country." They were regarded as slow and lazy in their work, impolite and rude in personal interactions. In response to such insulting treatment by people they thought of as fellow Japanese, *Nikkeijin* were confused and deeply hurt. Having grown up as "Japonês" in Brazil, the unexpectedly chilly welcome in their ancestral homeland seriously challenged their self-perceived ethnic identity. The only respondents who expressed no form of identity crisis were the sixteen European Brazilian Wives, whose obvious non-Japanese or "otherly" appearance exempted them from the expectations visited upon the *Nikkeijin*, thus enabling them to escape the ethnic clash between Japanese and *Nikkeijin*.

Discriminatory practices which isolated Junior *Nikkeijin* Women, also touched even Senior *Nikkeijin* Women who spoke perfect Japanese. A source of the cultural incongruity they experienced, however, resulted from employers' expectation that domestic care providers be "soft, gentle and polite" in serving their clients. The Japanese human service industry abides by highly codified rules and customs regarding employees'—especially female employees'—manners and speech, conforming to accepted but often subtle cultural standards.¹⁴ It was their unfamiliarity with these culturally ingrained and refined feminine manners and artful choice of honorific words, that confused, discouraged and sometimes tormented these foreign born women who had not experienced such socialization in Brazil. To their Japanese employers and clients, the *Nikkeijin* women appeared unsophisticated in personal appearance, crude in speech and often impolite in manners. An extreme example was that of Yukiko Yamamoto, (*Nisei*, 68), who recalled the shock she experienced when she and four other *Nikkeijin* women were summoned to work shortly after their arrival in Japan:

The company president looked us over as he entered the meeting room where all of us were sitting and waiting. I couldn't believe what he said to his subordinate even before he said anything to us. He said, "What! They all look like aborigines (dojin). They are so dark. Why did you bring them? You must make sure next time to bring whiter ones." This was a shock to me. Later I came to expect behavior like that from job brokers (shusenya). But I could scarcely believe it coming from the president.

Individual experiences of discrimination based on ethnicity varied according to women's language ability, cultural understanding and work environment. Nonetheless, the ubiquity of discriminatory practice by Japanese against *Nikkeijin* suggests that Japanese definitions of cultural righteousness and their notions of ethnic hierarchy deserve close examination in future studies. In addition to ethnic discrimination, the well-established wage discrimination against women in Japan further relegated these immigrants to the status of marginal workers (Yamanaka

1994). Individual reactions of *Nikkeijin* women to such demeaning experiences reflected their varying cultural resources and social structural situations. Speaking fluent Japanese and working individually, Senior *Nikkeijin* Women readily recognized indications of discrimination and therefore experienced Japanese discriminatory practices as personal affronts and persecution. In contrast, Junior *Nikkeijin* Women, not speaking functional Japanese and working in teams on assembly lines, experienced cultural clashes with Japanese, not as individual problems, but as shared conditions of *Nikkeijin* factory employment. Consequently they managed to largely escape feelings of personal persecution based on their "foreign-ness." Brazilian Wives remained relatively untouched by such discrimination because, in addition to their European appearance, their linguistic isolation, cultural distance and social dependency on their *Nikkeijin* husbands, prevented them from developing significant relationships with Japanese, thus remaining less subject to the experience of disparagement and overt social exclusion than their *Nikkeijin* sisters-in-law.

Changes in Identities

How, then, are these three categories of *Nikkeijin* women and their families faring as they resettle in Brazil after having returned from their sojourn in Japan? Have they undergone significant changes in their identification as *Nikkeijin* and as women as a result of migration? In this final section of analysis, I limit my discussion to interviews with 27 women—seven Seniors, eighteen Juniors and two Brazilian Wives—who returned from Japan and resettled in their home environments in São Paulo, Londrina and Porto Alegre. In this resettlement process, I have again found profound differential experiences and responses according to age, generation, social class, ethnicity and timing of return. These women's evaluation of their migration experience is, however, invariably positive despite their experience of frequent incidents of discriminatory treatment in Japan. Their financial satisfaction largely accounts for this positive view, but non-material personal gains play a significant role as well. These range from increased self-confidence as women, to renewed and reinforced ethnic identity as *Nikkeijin* Brazilian. These responses demonstrate the multiplicity of subjective meanings attached to their transnational experience.

Among the seven Senior Women, four are Brazilian-born *Nisei* and three are Japan-born post-war Issei. Both groups went to Japan between 1989 and 1992 and returned to Brazil between 1991 and 1994, therefore allowing one to four years back in Brazil by the time of the interviews. Free from work and family responsibility, the four *Nisei* women appear to have readjusted fully to Brazilian society, devoting much of their energy to taking care of family affairs and socializing with friends. Asked what concerned them upon arrival in Brazil, the four *Nisei* women all indicated their strong attachment to their home country. Toyoko Hayashi (*Nisei*, 60), for example, repeated the word, "relieved" (*suutto-shita*) in describing her return home, because "I am a caboclo (literally, person of white and Indian ancestry; here figuratively, "country bumpkin") of Brazil, and this is my sweet home where I was born." In contrast, the three post-war Issei women occupy themselves with family businesses in which they have invested their savings from their Japanese employment. Their concerns centered on their economic future in Brazil, their adopted country, instead of their emotional ties with it. Yoshiko Akiyama (57), who opened a flower shop but whose excitement quickly evaporated because of rising inflation, raised questions about Brazilian political institutions and pondered the wisdom of having returned from Japan to Brazil.

I don't know what to think about this country. In Brazil no one can foresee what will happen next. Why don't people revolt? My shop may not last too long because the rent has become too steep. I have lived in this country since 1964, but the longer I live the more I'm lost. Why did I return here? Maybe, my family. Maybe there is something else I have not yet figured out what it is in Brazil that keeps me coming back.

The eighteen Junior *Nikkeijin* and two Brazilian Wives had returned to Brazil less than one year previous to their interviews, and were still in the midst of transition from the migrant's life in Japan to the resident's life in Brazil. Many of the married women among them, with their husbands, have already bought new houses or apartments with their savings. Their material satisfaction is indicated by their stylishly furnished modern homes and new cars. Despite their satisfaction upon having returned and fully resettled at home, they are seriously concerned about the rapidly deteriorating Brazilian economy. In January 1995, newly elected President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and his government launched a new economic plan to control inflation. By July 1995 this austere policy had brought about a staggering rise in prices and in incidence of bankruptcy (Veja 1995). Although anxious to start new businesses, many *Nikkeijin* returnees are discouraged from investing their hard-won savings acquired in Japan, and choose instead to wait in the hope that the economy will improve. This slow and uncertain process of resettling is manifest in the distribution of the principal activities of the twenty Junior and Non-*Nikkeijin* women since their return: nine are primarily housewives, raising children and participating in family affairs; four are operating new family businesses with their husbands or parents; two have returned to their former jobs or family businesses; four are preparing new family businesses; one has found a new salaried job.

Such profound economic insecurity has pushed many *Nikkeijin* to remigrate to Japan. In my interviews of July 1995, I repeatedly heard stories of *Nikkeijin* returning to Japan after having failed in newly established businesses. My twenty informants, however, are firmly committed to rebuilding their lives in Brazil despite the unfavorable economy. For them and their husbands, migration is defined not as an end itself, but as a temporary journey to make full use of a "given opportunity" in order to obtain the means to improve their lives in Brazil. In their minds there is no doubt that Brazil is their "homeland" where their "real" life develops, while Japan is the "workplace" where they toil during the Brazilian economic crisis to acquire the means to better their lives upon their return. Compared to Brazil, they say, Japan seems to offer little individual freedom to its citizens. Evidence for this is found, for example, in the frequent observation that in Japan work is more valued than family. By contrast, in their view, family is more important than anything else in Brazil: "Brazilians work to live; Japanese live to work." Moreover, Japanese men and women appear to them to be distant with one another and their conjugal relationships inequalitarian, as a result of which Japanese working women bear the brunt of both domestic responsibility and economic activity—a practice they view as epitomizing gender inequality in Japan (Yamanaka 1996b).

Despite such critical views of Japan expressed by returnees, when asked about their changed self-perceptions, almost all women interviewed cited heightened self confidence on the one hand, and renewed ethnic consciousness as *Nikkeijin* in Brazil on the other. Positive effects of employment on immigrant women's self image are widely reported in the international migration literature. Wage work liberates migrant women from traditional subservient positions in the family, allowing them to develop new personal awareness and social status in their domestic environment (Morokvasic 1984).¹⁵ My *Nikkeijin* informants are no exception. For

example, Yoko Ikeda, Senior *Nikkeijin*, referred to her new assertiveness in relationships with her husband who had remained in Brazil. Upon her return, with increased financial power together with a strengthened sense of autonomy, she forthrightly tells her husband to drive her to a bus stop in the car, an act that, out of deference to him, she would never have dared to do before migration. Many returnees cited their increased patience and sympathy for others as the primary personal gain they received from working in strictly disciplined Japanese work organizations.

Transnational migration has also redefined the ethnic and national consciousness of these *Nikkeijin* returnees. In Brazil, racial dynamics have historically revolved around the axis of "white and black/native" relations. As a small ethnic minority, Japonês, are regarded by the general population as constituting a social category racially and culturally distinct from either of these (Maeyama 1984:455).¹⁶ The rapid upward economic mobility of Japanese also distinguished the group from other racial and ethnic minorities. As a result of both of these factors, the Japanese came to define themselves as "Japonês" rather than "Brasileiro," thus exhibiting their own ethnic pride. Upon migration to Japan, however, their ethnic pride plummeted as they found themselves regarded and treated as inferior to "true" Japanese. To escape this stigmatized image, the migrants came to define themselves as foreign—as "Brazilians" rather than "*Nikkeijin*." By intentionally shifting their collective identity from ethnicity to nationality in accord with their emerging minority position, *Nikkeijin* immigrants found psychological support for their long-term stays as "foreigners" in the host community: "outsiders" in their ancestral homeland. This sense of cultural alienation in Japan culminated in the loss of feelings of belongingness to either Japan or Brazil. Many *Nikkeijin* poignantly remarked on their isolation: "In Brazil, we were called Japonês, but in Japan we became Burajirujin (Brazilians). No matter where we go, we *Nikkeijin*, have no home."

Two Brazilian Wives of *Nikkeijin* men, in sharp contrast, exhibited no sign of altered ethnic identity as a result of their migration. Accompanying their husbands in Japan brought a sense of accomplishment and increased self-confidence but no significant change in their ethnic identity as Brazilians.

Upon their return to Brazil, the eighteen Junior *Nikkeijin* informants had to readjust their Brazilian identity in the context of the society that regarded them as a separate racial category. Having searched in vain for their ethnic roots in Japan, these Brazilian-born women resettled in Brazil with new determination. They had finally come to define Brazil as their "true" home and had accepted themselves as "true" Brazilians—Brazilians with Japanese heritage. Eliana Pinto da Silva (*Nisei*, 38) explained her journey, finding her own roots in Brazil after three years' sojourn in Japan.

My family came to Brazil in 1957. I was born in that year in Brazil. All other family members were born in Japan. Growing up in Brazil, I kept wondering why I was the only Brazilian-born member in the family. And yet I was a child of Japanese parents. It was confusing. When I went to Japan, I realized that I am culturally Brazilian, not Japanese. But I became more aware of my Japanese heritage and now understand better why my parents think in the ways they do.

After four years of hard work in Japan, Akemi Barreto (*Sansei*, 38) analyzed what she had come to understand it to mean to be *Nikkeijin* in Brazil. During that period, her marriage with a non-*Nikkeijin* husband was shaken by his cultural maladjustment to Japan. As a result, the couple separated and Akemi took custody of their two young daughters. Having experienced

challenges and changes during her life in Japan, she came to regard her grandparents as the “true” Japanese with whom she could identify:

I learned in Japan that I am different from Japanese. They are badly spoiled by affluence. I am also different from my non-*Nikkeijin* husband who lacked self-discipline. Finally, I have come to conclude that I most respect my grandparents who left Japan with strong determination a long time ago. I identify myself with their strong will and am proud of being a descendant of them. I am determined to carry on their tradition in Brazil and will teach my daughters their ethnic heritage. Having endured many challenges in Japan, I should be able to overcome any problems I may now encounter in Brazil.

Akemi's several years' sojourn in Japan in search of her heritage culminated in the realization that she owes her identity more to her strong-willed grandparents, who helped found colonias Japonesas in the Brazilian rainforest 70 years ago, than to her ancestral homeland. She discovered that, after all, she is irretrievably *Nikkeijin*, and she came to understand profoundly what it means to be *Nikkeijin*. Similarly, a few young *Nikkeijin* I interviewed in Hamamatsu in July 1996 discussed a need to redefine their ethnic identity based on their own understanding of what it is to be *Nikkeijin*. Instead of tolerating the stigmatized image of *Nikkeijin*, they emphasized a need to return to ethnic roots in their birth country and rediscover the ideal image of *Nikkeijin* inherited from their grandparents. In order to withstand ethnic discrimination, they also stressed the importance of “*Nikkeijin* power,” symbolizing ethnic solidarity among 200,000 *Nikkeijin* residents in Japan.

In short, as these examples demonstrate, ethnicity is subjectively defined in the process of social interaction with other groups. Consequently, ethnic identity is constantly renegotiated, reconstructed and redefined as the group's position in society alters over time (Barth 1969). Historical continuity is important in this process because members of the group inevitably turn their attention to their ethnic roots in search of “authentic” cultural symbols representing their “traditional” ideals and beliefs. Return migration of *Nikkeijin* women to their ancestral country has therefore opened a new chapter in their individual biographies and in their community's history in Brazil.

Conclusion

By tracing the immigration history of *Nikkeijin* in Brazil, this study identifies three distinctive categories of Japanese Brazilian women who have left Brazil since the late 1980s to work temporarily in Japan. The women comprising each of these three categories, Seniors, Juniors, and Brazilian Wives, are distinguished by their places in their respective immigration histories, their family life cycles, their socioeconomic statuses and their ethnic backgrounds. While all these are affected by legal barriers, exploitative brokers and the exclusivity of Japanese culture, the three categories exhibit diverse but characteristic approaches to understanding and addressing problems, depending upon resources and opportunities available to them in the host society.

During the economic crisis that gripped Brazil in the late 1980s, and in view of the welcoming climate of Japanese immigration law for *Nikkeijin*, temporary labor migration to Japan became an attractive solution to the problem of maintaining a middle class income. The desirability of a double income in Japan, combined with the undesirability of dividing families

between Brazil and Japan, justified women's unexpected participation in the resultant exodus. Underlying their obvious economic motives, family concerns and cultural ties with Japan surface as the dominant factors shaping women's migration behavior and personal satisfaction from migration. The opportunity of transnational migration also has entailed a reworking of household strategies for upward mobility among young *Nikkeijin*. Instead of the avenue of higher education, they have now opted to seek achievement through self-employment.

Upon their return to Brazil, migrant women cited both material satisfaction and psychological empowerment as results of their migration. Their experience of ethnic marginality in Japan forced them to renegotiate the meaning of their identity. The experience of having been received as strangers in their ancestral homeland detached them from their identification with Japan, and launched them on a new identity search, this time turned toward their birthplace, Brazil, and the *Nikkeijin* experience. Young *Nikkeijin* returnees appear to be focusing primarily on their immediate forebears' experience as immigrants in Brazil as they seek sources for their own ethnic identity. They come finally to define their “home” as the land of their birth rather than as the “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991) of their ancestry. Sojourning in their ancestral country has therefore served to redefine their ethnic identity, national consciousness and strategies for economic survival.

ENDNOTES

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1. Ten years earlier, 790 Japanese immigrated to Peru in 1899, beginning the new page of the Japanese immigration history to South America. Like Japanese Brazilians, descendants of Japanese immigrants also returned to Japan from Peru for wage labor in the early 1990s.
2. Information for the summary history in this and the following section is derived from a variety of sources, including Suzuki (1965), Fujimura (1970), Sims (1972), Saito (1976), Maeyama (1982), Takahashi (1990), the Committee for Compiling Eighty-Year History of Japanese Immigration to Brazil (CCEYH 1991) and Suzuki (1992).
3. In the same period (1953-73), Japanese also emigrated to Argentina (total number 4,600), Paraguay (7,500) and Bolivia (5,200).
4. According to Oshimoto's Chart 11 (1967:13), the proportion of women among the emigrants was 30 to 40 percent between 1946 and 1960. Because numbers are not presented in the bar-graph chart, it is impossible to precisely measure the proportion.
5. This class will almost certainly diminish in the near future as its elderly immigrant members die off and the young Brazilian-born student members graduate into the new middle class.

6. The rule requiring parents to register the birth of a child within fourteen days at the Japanese authority was intended to prevent dual citizenship in the case of Japanese born in a country where the principle of *jus soli* (law of place) prevailed, as in Brazil and the United States (Yamada and Tsuchiya, 1984:68-71). This period was lengthened from 14 days to three months under the revised 1985 Nationality Law.
7. Employers of illegal workers became subject to two years imprisonment or a maximum of two million yen (\$20,000).
8. Renewal of this visa category is easily, and therefore frequently, done, as a result of which Nikkeijin and their families can remain longer than initially permitted.
9. Among the five Nisei sub-groups is one woman who was born in pre-war Japan but moved to Brazil with her family when she was a young child.
10. Among the Junior Women, daughters of the post-war Issei tend to speak good Japanese because of their parents' influence. The majority of Sansei, however, do not.
11. Interracial marriage rates vary considerably by region in Brazil, ranging from 69.2 percent to in Central West to 23.3 in South. This seems to reflect differences in the size of Japanese population by region which is a result of different histories of Japanese community settlement: South being the oldest and largest settlement region, compared to Central West and North which are more recent and therefore constitute smaller settlement regions (São Paulo Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyujo 1988:104-05).
12. In my Nikkeijin data, of 90 men there are 12 non-Nikkeijin married to Nikkeijin wives. The focus of this study is exclusively on women; thus little discussion on non-Nikkeijin husbands is included.
13. Names of informants have been altered and their ages are those at the time of interview.
14. An extreme example of Japanese femininity is found among geisha, as described, for example in Dalby's participatory study (1983:171-73). According to her, geisha's manners with their clients suggest the importance of the nuanced ideas of superiority and inferiority in the rituals of guest and host.
15. Morokvasic (1984:893-5) states that, while incorporation of migrant women into wage work may exacerbate women's exploitation, it also increases women's sense of independence, respect and autonomy. The changes brought by wage work, however, must be interpreted in light of the specific socioeconomic and cultural context of women's lives.
16. The racial category, "people of color" (o homem de cor) includes blacks (negro) and people of mixed heritage (mulato and pardo) as opposed to the white category (branco).

According to Maeyama (1975:240-6; 1984:455), Japanese are the most important group among those who do not belong to either racial category, constituting a category of their own.

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