

(Re)Made in Japan: Directions for Research on the Identity, Economics, and Education of the *Nikkeijin* in Japan

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Abstract

The story of the *Nikkeijin* community in Japan has always been intriguing to scholars, as evidenced by the scores of theses, dissertations, articles, and books the subject has inspired. This paper offers a review of the relevant literature and directions for further research to address some of the holes remaining in this literature in light of economic changes following the global financial crisis. I argue that the community's rejection of the Japanese government's 2009 financial offer in exchange for returning to their country of origin merits the continued attention of scholars. The review concludes with recommendations for large-N survey research to supplement the body of largely qualitative research that has developed thus far.

Keywords: Migration, Japanese identity, *Nikkeijin*, local citizenship, literature review

Introduction

In the first half of the twentieth century, nearly a quarter of a million individuals migrated from Japan to Brazil¹ (De Carvalho 2002). Most migrated as families with the encouragement and support of first the Brazilian government and later the Japanese government. Even as Australia, the United States, and Canada began to severely limit or cut off Japanese immigration, Brazilian agricultural interests lobbied for increased inflows of Japanese migrants. With the abolition of slavery and a boom in the coffee industry, large farmers and business owners needed cheap labor willing to endure (or at least less able to escape) the poor conditions of the plantations. At the same time, modernizing Meiji era Japan sought to ease social and economic pressures by encouraging emigration (De Carvalho 2002). As the Brazilian government eased immigration procedures for Japanese nationals, the Japanese government developed a prefecture-level support network to recruit, educate, and support migrants bound for Brazil (Lone 2001).

¹ The largest population of Latin American *Nikkeijin* resides or previously resided in Brazil. For this reason, I often reference Brazil and Brazilian *Nikkeijin* as reasonably representative of all Latin American *Nikkeijin*. However, there is considerable diversity in the *Nikkei* population; the *Nikkei* community in Japan hails from many Latin American countries.

This brief alignment of the interests of two governments created migration patterns and pressures that lasted beyond their original purposes (Lone 2001). The coffee boom soon busted and by the 1920s Brazil no longer required Japanese indentured labor. However, Japan's emigration network and bureaucratic inertia continued to support the flow of migrants. In time, the seeds were sown for a new immigrant ethnic community in both countries: first Brazil, but later also Japan, as the descendants of the original migrants sought to return to Japan for work in the late twentieth century. The community that grew from these first Brazil-bound immigrants, the *Nikkei*, became one of Brazil's most visible and successful ethnic minorities. The *Nikkeijin* in Brazil today are over a million strong, primarily urban, and disproportionately middle class. They are overrepresented in the nation's universities and professional classes, and enjoy incomes that exceed all other racial groups on average (De Carvalho 2002).²

As more than two decades of scholarly literature have enthusiastically explored, the Brazilian *Nikkei* eventually became one of the largest documented minorities in Japan as well (Lesser 2003, Tsuda 1999b). In the last two decades, the descendants of the original Brazil-bound immigrants returned to Japan in huge numbers for the same reason their parents and grandparents once entered Brazil. They came as economic migrants, able to enter thanks to an unprecedented relaxation of immigration rules for foreign workers of Japanese descent. They fit the classic profile of such immigrants, entering Japan with short-term economic goals firmly rooted to their lives in Brazil. By the beginning of the 21st century, 10% of Brazil's sizable *Nikkei* community was working back in Japan (De Carvalho 2002) and approximately 15% of all Latin Americans of Japanese descent lived in Japan (Roth 2002).

Many scholars have noted that Japanese citizenship is defined *jus sanguinis* (Tsuda 2003). That is, Japanese citizenship is conceptualized as largely a blood right, a place in a purportedly homogenous ethnic community. This conceptualization of membership actually facilitated the flow of *Nikkeijin* into the lower branches of the Japanese economy by giving *Nikkeijin* privileged access to legal work in Japan compared to other economic migrants. While other unskilled workers are largely excluded from legal economic opportunities, an amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act effective in 1990 extended residence and work rights to the *Nikkeijin* through indefinitely renewable short-term work visas.

The events that followed are now a familiar story in Japan studies. Once in Japan, the *Nikkeijin* discovered that blood was not enough—that cultural and economic obstacles lay between them and assimilation or acceptance into the Japanese community. The Japanese were surprised as well. Because membership in the Japanese ethnic community is so often constructed as a relationship of blood, the difficulties that arose for the *Nikkeijin* were at least partly unexpected. In the early 1990s, when *Nikkeijin* migration was imagined to be temporary, this was not a major concern for either group. But as the *Nikkei* community appears more and more permanently settled in Japan, and as the combination of Japan's shrinking population and troubled economy place new pressures on the community, many policymakers and scholars began to wonder if the *Nikkeijin* were on their way to forming a permanent underclass in a society that values its myth of classlessness.

By 2009, when a government offer to provide struggling *Nikkeijin* with a one-time payment to return "home" to their Latin American country of origin was met with resentment, it was clear that *Nikkeijin* ties to Japan had grown to be more than economic. Many in the *Nikkei* community were affronted by the offer, particularly because accepting it meant indefinitely relinquishing the right to return to Japan. Time Magazine quoted Francisco Freitas, the director of the Japan Metal and Information Machinery Workers, as saying, "When *Nikkei* go back and can't return, for us that's discrimination." (Masters 2009) Although an offer of financial aid might be tempting in the face of

² Brazil, of course, operates under a different racial paradigm than the United States or Japan. More attention to this fact will be given in the historical overview.

rising unemployment, the fact that it would come at the cost of indefinitely leaving Japan was unacceptable to many. The sense of affront at the financial offer and the use of the language of discrimination both demonstrate that many parts of the *Nikkei* community see themselves as part of Japan, fellow—if distinct—members in a shared society.

The case of *Nikkeijin* migration to Japan and their mixed feelings regarding return to their countries of origin raises a number of questions for social scientists. There is an opportunity here to observe some of the inner workings of identity formation and its relationship to economic participation and socioeconomic mobility. Is there an evolving *Nikkei* identity in Japan, as suggested by the community's reticence to leave Japan even when economic opportunities disappear? If so, what are its foundations?

The story of the *Nikkeijin* community in Japan has always been intriguing to scholars, as evidenced by the scores of theses, dissertations, articles, and books the subject has inspired. This paper offers a review of the relevant literature and directions for further research to address some of the holes remaining in this literature in light of the economic changes since 2008.

Ethnic Legacies: The Historical Context of Nikkei Immigration Flows

A brief look at the *Nikkeijin*'s short but eventful history in Brazil both highlights the extraordinary nature of the community's experience and helps to frame the questions we must ask in light of changing economic circumstances. As mentioned previously, most of the Japan-Brazil migration took place during the pre-war period, beginning in 1908 and stretching uninterrupted until 1941. The period of heaviest migration was between 1924 and 1935, when 141,732 Japanese entered Brazil (Lesser 2003b).

During this time the *Nikkei* community in Brazil began to form as an ethnic enclave, with its expectations, social mores, and national pride rooted firmly back in Japan. The immigrant support network organized by the Japanese government facilitated this insular group identity, and perhaps maintained it more fervently and for longer than equivalent groups in the United States during the same period (De Carvalho 2002).³ Indeed, most children of the *issei*⁴ (first-generation immigrants) attended Japanese schools standardized to the Japanese curriculum, supplied with Japanese government textbooks, and staffed by similarly supplied teachers. The language of instruction was Japanese; Portuguese classes were offered but considered less important (Lone 2001).

Like many first generation immigrants it was important to the *issei* that their children be raised with Japanese manners, values, and sensibilities. The *issei* made every effort to transmit their "Japaneseness" to the *nisei* (second generation.) This included the ultra-nationalism propagated by the Japanese government during that period, a trend that further grounded the *Nikkeijin* in their home country rather than their host country.

The *Nikkeijin* experienced increased discrimination because of their higher visibility than European immigrants. The combination of this heightened discrimination with the close organizational and educational ties to Japan likely contributed to the high degree of insularity and nationalism of the *Nikkei* community. Inter-marriage with "native" Brazilians was rare, and the Japanese immigrants were generally considered to be unassimilated, "a 'cyst' in the social body" (De Carvalho 2002).

The immediate pre-war and war periods were fraught with conflict. Conflict came from within as well as without the *Nikkei* community. Within the community, ultra-nationalist *Nikkeijin* formed secret societies and even small-scale terrorist groups. Their primary targets were not Brazilians, but other members of the *Nikkei* community perceived to be helping the U.S. in the war against Japan by

³ The period here coinciding approximately with the period of the Great Migration in the United States, the first decades of the 20th century.

⁴ Because the emphasis of this review is on the *Nikkei* community's experience in Japan, my treatment of previous generations' experience in Brazil is limited.

producing commodities such as silk (Lesser 2003b).⁵ After Japan's defeat, as much as 85% of *Nikkeijin* in southern Brazil refused to believe that Japan had surrendered (Izumi and Saito 1953; De Carvalho 2002). Radio broadcasts of Emperor Hirohito's speech, copies of the Imperial Edict declaring surrender, and even visual media of the scenes at Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not convince most of the community, many of whom perceived the evidence as anti-Japanese propaganda spread by partisan Brazilian media. Ultra-nationalists attacked the homes and businesses of *Nikkeijin* who publicly accepted Japan's defeat. It was not until the early 1950's that some of these groups finally acknowledged that World War II was over (Lesser 2003b; De Carvalho 2002).

Conflict from without the *Nikkei* community came in the form of repression. While Brazil never interned its Japanese population during World War II, it did engage in repressive and racist policies during and immediately after the war. Japanese language publications, speaking Japanese in public, and gatherings of more than a handful of *Nikkeijin* at one time were all banned after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. According to one source, Brazilian police regularly required the *Nikkeijin* they rounded up to wipe their feet on the Japanese flag or a photograph of Emperor Hirohito—the national version of apostatizing. Individuals unwilling to do either of these things were considered potential enemies of the state (De Carvalho 2002).

After the crisis point of the war, the *Nikkeijin* experienced remarkable social mobility. Despite continued discrimination, their children pursued education at high rates and by the end of the century this group was among the most successful in Brazil. More than 50% of *Nikkeijin* surveyed in 1988 identified as middle class, and the average wage of a *Nikkeijin* in Brazil by the 1980s was 50% higher than the average salary of the white population (De Carvalho 2002; Jirimutu 1994).

Still, the Japanese identity remained salient for many, and an industry of Japanese cultural artifacts and media continues to thrive in Brazil. For one thing, *Nikkeijin* continue to exist largely outside of the Brazilian racial regime, with relatively low rates of intermarriage with other Brazilians. Further, as Japan grew to the economic giant it is today this Japanese identity became potentially lucrative. By the 1990's, Latin Americans of Japanese descent had special access to work visas for Japan, giving them preferential access to an enormous economy hungry for unskilled workers and willing to pay considerably more than professional jobs in Brazil. The *Nikkeijin* identity became so lucrative, in fact, that a trade in *fake Nikkeijin* identities developed in some parts of Latin America (De Carvalho 2002).

Ninety years after they first arrived in Brazil, Brazilian *Nikkeijin* migrated back to Japan in droves with the intention of working and saving money. Having arrived in Japan, they experienced many of the difficulties that all first generation immigrants face: a foreign culture, downward social mobility, and poor working conditions. They worked the jobs that native-born Japanese will not take. And, surprising themselves as well as their Japanese hosts, the Japanese part of their identity ceased to be as salient as it once was in Brazil. As Tsuda (2000) argues, when the *Nikkeijin* "returned" to Japan they become more Brazilian than ever before.

The *issei* and early *nisei* (second generation) were caught up in the ultra-nationalism of their period; for them, ultra-nationalism was a confirmation of their identities as Japanese. A generation later, their children have returned to the land to which they believed they were bound by blood. Yet once in Japan the *Nikkeijin* cease to identify as Japanese in the same way as they did in Brazil. Upon returning to Japan, they seem to emphasize their *Brazilianness* (Tsuda 2000; Linger 2001; de Carvalho 2002). This fascinating example of the slipperiness of ethnic identity, its social and economic underpinnings, and its relevance to the next generation of *Nikkeijin* has been the topic of much scholarship. However, I will argue that the community's rejection of the 2009 financial offer in exchange for returning to their

⁵ During World War II as much as 90% of Brazil's silk industry was controlled by *Nikkeijin*. Brazil in turn supplied the United States with silk used to produce parachutes.

country of origin merits the continued attention of scholars.

Relevant Literature

The literature relevant to this topic can be divided into the specific scholarship focusing on *Nikkeijin* experience and identity and the more general literature on immigrant identity. I will first address the literature specific to the *Nikkeijin* experience, evaluating a few potential theoretical frameworks from the wider literature in response to what has already been written specific to the *Nikkeijin*. The review of what has been written about the *Nikkeijin* and potentially useful ways to frame it will begin with the economic and social forces that gave birth to their return migration and move from there gradually into cultural perspectives. This is meant to highlight the relationship between the formation of an oppositional subculture and economic motivations, classifications, and conditions.

Despite their ties to Japan, the *Nikkeijin* bound for Japan are almost entirely economic immigrants (Mori 2002). The Japanese word for this is *dekasegi*, the same term by which the ancestors of this population identified when they set out from Japan early in the twentieth century. *Dekasegi* refers specifically to those who emigrate for economic purposes with plans to return home as soon as the money is made. One hundred years ago, the home referred to was Japan. Today it is in Brazil.

Edson Mori, a World Bank affiliate, uncritically observes that the *Nikkei* migration flows of the late 1980's and 1990's seem rational and fit with neoclassical or new economics perspectives on migration (Mori 2002). On a macroeconomic scale, everybody wins: Japan meets its labor demand and Brazil is rewarded with foreign remittances. In addition to this cost-benefit analysis, Mori also predicts that the flow will slow with Japan's economic downturn and the relative strengthening of the Brazilian *real* as potential and current migrants calculate the costs and benefits of life in Japan. Thus, for Mori macroeconomic phenomenon explain *Nikkei* migration, but also predict its end.

There are a number of problems with this analysis, most notably that there have been many well documented situations in which economic slowdown has not led to significant changes in such immigration flows (Massey et al. 1987; Martin 1994; Yamanaka 2003). Indeed, the resistance to compensated return in 2009 presents an empirical challenge to Mori's evaluation. Further, this kind of analysis fails to explain the origin of this immigration pattern, which has clear historical and cultural dimensions. This type of analysis cannot answer the questions, "Why Brazilian migrants and not Southeast Asian migrants? And why now?" By not taking into account *who* the immigrants are, neoclassical analysis misses many of the forces driving immigration and loses its predictive power.

Tsuda (1999) also addresses how the migrant flow from Brazil to Japan is constituted, but with more sociological sophistication. A conventional economic "push-pull" model, he argues, is inadequate because of the enormous distance migrants must traverse. After attempting to apply various migration models from the sociology and economics literatures on the subject and finding each unsatisfactory, Tsuda argues we must also examine ethnic and "sociocultural" variables. "Transnational economic, sociopolitical, and ethnocultural linkages" provide the gravitational pull driving migration between Brazil and Japan. This is a far more satisfactory explanation than the one Mori offers because it helps explain the provenance of *Nikkeijin* (return) migration to Japan, itself a sociocultural event because it was based on cultural ideas about membership in the community. Japanese constructions of citizenship, based on the idea of ethnonationality, are what opened the *Nikkeijin* migration flow wide. Similarly, these linkages can explain the continued presence and even further migration of *Nikkeijin* to Japan despite the recession that has plagued the Japanese economy for more than a decade.

Sociocultural variables also explain other aspects of *Nikkeijin* migration flows. For example, why is it that women comprise a significant percentage of the immigrant population, and why do so few of

them work in the domestic sector that many female migrants to other countries are consigned to? By 1996, 40% of *Nikkeijin* in Japan were women, but very few were employed as domestics (Yamanaka 2003). Keiko Yamanaka (2003) examines the feminization of *Nikkei* labor flows to Japan and how this process is shaped by historical and social as well as economic variables. Yamanaka combines economic analysis with field interviews to construct a portrait of the role that gender, nationality and legal status play in Japan's economy. She finds that the most significant axis is actually gender—"illegal status is penalized less than gender, as a result of which female Japanese citizens earn wages 15 percent lower than illegal foreign males" (Yamanaka 2003:186). *Nikkeijin* females, however, make approximately the same wages as Japanese females. Thus, as Japanese women increasingly reject certain kinds of work *Nikkeijin* women have strong incentives to take their place.

And why is there no market for domestics in Japan? Just as Japanese women experience a significant wage gap, making about 64% of what Japanese men earn, they have experienced very little economic and organizational mobility in the last several decades. Thus, while there is high labor participation on the part of Japanese women, there is not a corps of new female middle class professionals likely to hire domestics. These social variables have contributed to a female migrant labor force that looks little like the female migrant labor force in other countries highly developed countries (Yamanaka 2003).

How many women choose to emigrate and what sort of work they do has important consequences for the migrant community. The *Nikkei* community in Japan has a fair percentage of women, and rather than being isolated from one another and the community by domestic work that renders them invisible, they work manufacturing and service jobs similar to those that men work. This allows them to form comparable social networks and to participate in the development of a Brazilian community in Japan. Scholars have noted that immigrant women play important roles in consolidating immigrant and ethnic communities by holding together families and participating in social networks (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Gabaccia 1992). For the *Nikkei* community, this means more prospects for long term settlement as a cultural scene is developed, families coalesce, and more and more *Nikkei* children are born in Japan.⁶

Anthropologist Joshua Hotaka Roth (2002) sees *Nikkei* resettlement in Japan as a step toward a multicultural society; *Nikkeijin* can remain a distinct minority rather than assimilate, even as they gain political and social rights through increasing integration in Japanese society. Roth argues that mediating institutions are what determine the quality of *Nikkeijin* relationships with the various Japanese communities with which they interact. These mediating institutions, then, and the policies that shape them, will determine how and how well *Nikkeijin* find a place in Japanese society in the long term.

Other, less recent, work has considered the connection between economic specialization and ethnic identity. Bonacich and Modell (1980) used this relationship to analyze the Japanese-American community. They suggest that there is a link between small business concentration and the maintenance of strong ethnic ties. Could this relationship operate within a working class context when all members of an ethnic group participate in similar economic activities regardless of their educations or other possible axis of differentiation? This may be or become an important source of ethnic identification for the *Nikkeijin* in Japan, a population that is heavily concentrated in a few industries and services.

Despite their numbers, role in the Japanese economy, and this trend towards permanent or semi-permanent settlement, anthropologist Takeyuki Tsuda argues that *Nikkeijin* are in a "permanent state of social liminality," alienated from the people they live among as well as those they have left behind. He points out that migration "is not always a liberating, empowering and emancipating experience" (Tsuda 2003:122). This may seem like an obvious point, but it is one Tsuda considers

⁶ Birth on Japanese soil does not grant citizenship. Some minority groups—most notably Koreans—have lived in Japan for generations without gaining citizenship. See McNeill 2005.

important and which he grounds in Marx and Durkheim's classical theories of alienation. The contours of the *Nikkei* experience in Japan are defined by this liminal position, but by its very nature this also means that the *Nikkeijin* exist *within* a community of ethnic outsiders. Thus, their alienation is not total and the ethnic community that results is likely to be remarkably egalitarian, because alienation from the host and home societies tends to level difference.

In his book, however, Tsuda seems to suggest that this state is temporary in at least one sense—that the children of today's *Nikkeijin* may escape it (Tsuda 2003). *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland* is an ambitious portrait of the *Nikkei* experience and identity, addressing how the *Nikkeijin* are perceived by Japanese, why the community seems to have settled in Japan semi-permanently, and how *Nikkeijin* are excluded from membership in the Japanese community despite ethnic ties. Tsuda argues that the *Nikkeijin* are primarily excluded from the Japanese community because of their cultural and linguistic differences. At the same time, however, the shortage of low-skilled labor has assured that the migrants stay. This shortage also assures that there is not a serious backlash against or challenge to *Nikkei* labor presence by threatened Japanese interests.

The author sets the context for this argument with qualitative work, but his main argument that there is a trend towards a society more open to these workers is laid out in demographic terms. Tsuda describes an aging population with low fertility desperate to save its economy. With hundreds of thousands of *Nikkeijin* already filling low-skill jobs, Tsuda suggests that the answer is right in front of them. From this the author builds his claim that the *Nikkeijin* are not trapped in their low status, that there is hope for successful assimilation. The clear need for their economic participation combined with the fact that rejection of *Nikkei* is not based on explicitly racial arguments gives Tsuda this hope. In his analysis, the sociocultural characteristics to which he attributes current Japanese rejection of *Nikkeijin* will prove to be temporary and the group will eventually disappear into the Japanese mainstream.

Unfortunately, phenotypical differences are hardly the only basis for ethnic differentiation. One must only look at the cases of Rwanda or the Balkans to see the power of socially constructed ethnic divisions even when there is a total lack of phenotypical difference. Tsuda gets around this by arguing that the discourse on *Nikkeijin* presence in Japan is not racialized. Unlike the Korean and Chinese populations that have lived in Japan for generations, the rhetoric surrounding the *Nikkeijin* is not explicitly a racial discourse. The Koreans and Chinese, despite being so phenotypically similar to Japanese that many cannot differentiate by sight alone, continue to experience discrimination in Japanese society. This discrimination is indeed racial in tone, as these populations are culturally Japanese (Kajita 1998; Yamanaka 2003). Tsuda seems to think that as the *Nikkeijin* learn to be culturally Japanese, and because they are not currently differentiated on explicitly racial grounds as Koreans are, they will achieve what other Japanese minorities never have: assimilation.

Even if one accepts Tsuda's optimistic prediction for those who look Japanese, what is to become of *mestizo* children? These children, offspring of mixed *Nikkei* and other Brazilian unions, are phenotypically different. *Nikkeijin* with Japanese features may experience playground taunts such as "Why can't you speak Japanese in spite of having a Japanese face?" (Takezawa 2002). But children with more exotic features such as western eyes or darker skin are likely to experience much worse, and the problem will not be solved by mastering the Japanese language⁷ (Ninomiya 2002; Effird 2004).

Another problem with the argument that we can expect to see *rapprochement* between Japan and its latest immigrant group is that the sociocultural differentiation between the *Nikkeijin* and the Japanese mainstream does not in fact appear to be diminishing (Koyama 1998; Kawamura 1999; Tsuda 1999;

⁷ The winner of one of the national English language speech contests a few years ago was a young woman with a Japanese mother and a German father. She recounted routinely hearing the word *gaijin* either directed at her or whispered behind her back during her childhood. The fact that she had the "long nose" of a foreigner caused her to grow up feeling like an outsider in her own culture.

Linger 2001). Rather, as Tsuda himself recorded just a few years earlier, *Nikkeijin* create and perform an extreme Brazilian identity in response to pressures for assimilation into the Japanese social order (Tsuda 2000). Few studies have been done on whether this performance is durably passed on to the second generation, but if it is it could serve as the basis for what American migration scholars have called “oppositional identity” (Waters 1999).

There is some evidence that the visible *Nikkei* presence in Japan is actually causing a shift in that society towards a more multicultural or cosmopolitan construction of national identity. Takezawa (2002) argues precisely this, basing his optimistic outlook on a case study of one particularly international Japanese city, the port of Kobe. The author suggests that *Nikkeijin* have contributed to a “blurring” of the boundary between Japanese and foreigners, citing a new discourse on multiculturalism as proof of the supposed fissures in cultural insularity. Some of the efforts to improve the lives of *Nikkeijin* dispersed across Kobe are reminiscent of similar efforts to organize migrant workers in the United States: soccer tournaments, Catholic outreach efforts, and small scale Portuguese language newsletters. The author also cites efforts to hire part-time teaching assistants to help *Nikkei* students understand their coursework. But despite all this, Takezawa’s belief that Japan is on its way to *tabunka kyosei* (multicultural coexistence) seems naïve at best.

Tabunka kyosei is the Japanese equivalent of “multiculturalism” in more ways than one. The phrase is often peppered across materials distributed by prefectural boards of education, high school speech contests, and panels convened to showcase the large number of (mostly English-speaking) foreign assistant language teachers hired by the public school system. As in the United States, however, the fact that this phrase is fashionable is not necessarily an indication of practical commitment to multicultural ideals. The Japanese government, for example, hires thousands of native English speakers to work as assistant teachers in the foreign language curriculum each year (JET Programme 2005). Yet only a handful of Portuguese speakers are hired to serve the more than 40,000 school-age *Nikkei* children (Ninomiya 2002). Clearly, multiculturalism can mean many things in practice.

Another cultural perspective comes from anthropologist Daniel Linger (2001). Linger uses a technique he calls “person-centered” ethnography to organize information collected through interviews and ethnographic methods in workplaces, social gatherings in restaurants, and public schools. “Person-centered” means that the book explores the subjective views, experiences, and emotions of those *Nikkeijin* the author studies. This is similar to Mary Waters’ methods in her influential study of West Indian immigrants in the United States (Waters 1999).

Linger finds that *Nikkei* lives are structured by work and school, ordered and alien environments, and that this drives the immigrants to emphasize their Brazilianness almost to the point of parody. The *Nikkeijin* in Linger’s study define Brazil and Japan in opposition to one another: “‘Human warmth’ and ‘respect’ were for Brazilians contrary modes of human interaction, emblematic of Brazil and Japan respectively... Brazilians in Japan elaborated their national character analyses within a bipolar universe” (Linger 2001: 301).

Linger’s work echoes Waters’ book in more ways than one, and often quite successfully. Like Waters, Linger is addressing the potential emergence of oppositional identity, but trying to do so in such a way that identifies the structural and strategic reasons for such an identity rather than portraying it as some kind of insolence or recalcitrance. Both these authors are careful to avoid “blaming the victim” and instead focus on uncovering the experience of victimization that is one component of identity.

One strength of Waters’ study of West Indian immigrants was its refusal to model identity and assimilation as a zero-sum game. Part of Linger’s contribution to the *Nikkei* literature is his notion of “slippery” identities, which also conceptualizes identity and the assimilation process as something more multidimensional than a mere additive or subtractive process. This approach captures the fact that the

Nikkei community is not homogenous—and neither are individuals. The *Nikkei* community has no single identity, and neither do individual *Nikkeijin*.

Linger concludes that the researcher must sometimes embrace the shiftiness and ambiguity of identity. In another piece, the same author wonders if the *Nikkeijin* are a real category at all (Linger 2003). He points out that the concept of a Japanese diaspora that embraces the *Nikkeijin* is the logic that informed the 1990 immigration law changes that facilitated the large community in Japan. At the same time, Linger finds the idea of *Nikkeijin* as a diasporic group problematic because it embraces the Japanese government's reification of blood. To the Japanese government, he observes, blood is the mechanism of relatedness between two groups. To the anthropologist, however, the definition of diaspora demands something quite different. The fact that many—indeed most—*Nikkeijin* do not identify as diasporic Japanese is telling and problematic. The closer ethnographers look at *Nikkei* identity the more “slippery” it seems to get. Linger's extreme reflexivity, while not necessarily helpful in modeling the *Nikkeijin* experience (if there is one), does serve as an important reminder that the nature of identity is shifting rather than definitive.

Other work has tried to find a middle ground between claiming that there is a rosy multicultural future ahead and claiming that oppositional identities are sending the Japanese and the *Nikkeijin* in diametrically opposite directions. Having conducted interviews, ethnographic observation, and a social survey in a handful of working class areas of Japan, De Carvalho (2002) concludes that the *Nikkeijin*'s experience in Japan is characterized by neither conflict nor harmony. Rather, *Nikkeijin* identities are negotiated over time and according to the situations presented. Thus *Nikkeijin* assert their difference in strategic ways, which often means conforming to the definitions applied to them by their Japanese host society.

Other scholarship has documented the difficulty of surmounting these sociocultural differences even in the absence of racialized differentiation. In her study of *kikokushijo*, Ching Lin Pang highlights the role of education in this process. *Kikokushijo* are a different kind of returnee: Japanese children raised by Japanese parents abroad. Many have spent the formative years of life and many of their school-age years abroad. Pang notes the importance of the educational system in “re-assimilating” these children into Japanese society. This is a particularly interesting point because it suggests that one of the most important sites for determining the future of the *Nikkeijin* may also be the educational system.

Masato Ninomiya (2002) draws a portrait of a highly competitive but also remarkably inclusive public education system in Japan. Unfortunately, the participation of *Nikkei* children in this system is abysmal—out of 40,000 *Nikkei* children in 1999, only 7,500 were registered in public schools (Ninomiya 2002). This is particularly horrifying for a group that famously values education in its home country. The lack of laws requiring all children to attend school, problem of bullying of foreign children, lack of information in *Nikkei* social networks to navigate the Japanese educational system, and the age-rather than learning level-based structure of the system all contribute to this low participation.⁸ Ninomiya's study is one of the few addressing these issues, however, and its results can only be considered preliminary. More research must be done into how *Nikkeijin* navigate (or fail to navigate) the education system in Japan, and how *Nikkei* identities are negotiated within its context.

Work on the formation, reproduction, and educational and economic consequences of ethnic enclaves in the United States might shed light on the origins of the *Nikkei* community's overwhelming rejection of Japan's public school system. Ethnic enclaves have often been theorized as transitional sites of shared resources, community-oriented norms, and social capital that provide economic benefits to enclave members and encourage educational attainment in member children in the context of

⁸ Japanese children are required to attend school until high school, but this rule does not apply to foreign residents.

socioeconomic disadvantage (Massey 1985).⁹ However, empirical findings related to the enclave thesis in the U.S. have been mixed. A recent study using data from the 2003 New Immigrant Survey found little support for the thesis that ethnic enclaves provide economic benefits to members. On the contrary, researchers found that for some of the groups included in the survey there was a negative effect on economic outcomes for enclave members compared to immigrants outside the enclave (Xie and Gough 2011). Enclave benefits for educational attainment have been similarly challenged by large-N survey research in recent years: Kroneberg (2008) found that while some ethnic communities seem to support second-generation educational attainment, this support varies dramatically by community characteristics. Is it possible that *Nikkei* enclaves foster oppositional norms that discourage formal education within the Japanese system, despite the older generation's high educational attainment? Both these studies suggest that the effect of ethnic enclaves on members depend very much on the characteristics of those members and that it is difficult to predict these effects without longitudinal data comparing those immigrants who have settled in an enclave to those who have not. Are *Nikkeijin* who settle in areas with high concentrations of other immigrants more or less likely to send their children to formal schooling? To successfully homeschool their children? To experience positive economic outcomes? U.S. scholars are increasingly able to answer these questions about American ethnic immigrant communities with the benefit of nationally representative, large-N, longitudinal data on immigrants' economic and educational achievement, social and demographic variables, migration history, pre-immigration history, remittances, and health.¹⁰ Until similar data is gathered for the *Nikkei* community, we can only speculate.

Recent scholarship on *Nikkei* communities has focused on the idea of "local citizenship," the rights, services, and perhaps even responsibilities conferred by membership in local Japanese communities (Tsuda 2006). Access to public education can be considered one of these local citizenship rights. Prefectural or municipal social integration programs, services made available to immigrants, and everyday local government services available to all residents are also included. The concept of local citizenship makes more evident the degree to which *Nikkeijin* really are embedded in Japanese society, but it also has limits. The rights and services made available to immigrants this way are inconsistent and not always substantive, may be dependent on NGOs that restrict their services to particular geographic areas, and a lack of civic participation leaves *Nikkeijin* with few political options (Tsuda 2006, Ishii 2009).

A comparative analysis of Japan's immigration policy, however, highlights the possibility of *Nikkeijin* integration into Japanese society. Kaneko (2009) argues that Japan and Taiwan, both aging societies facing labor shortfalls, had similar motivations for their immigration policies. Both nations harbor concerns about their purportedly homogenous ethnic identities and the ability of economic migrants to adapt to their respective cultures. But while Japan's policy preferentially admitted *Nikkeijin* on the basis of potential similarity through historical connection, Taiwan's immigrant policy is designed to attract Southeast Asian economic migrants and discourage potential mainland Chinese migrants who might fit into Taiwanese society all too well. Taiwan unequivocally prefers guest workers; in Japan's case, the *Nikkei* case suggests that the preference is less clear.

Equivocation on the question of whether *Nikkei* workers and their families are guests or part of a shared community is precisely what made the Japanese government's 2009 offer to encourage *Nikkeijin* to return to Latin America so hurtful. Cordova Quero (2009) points out that the very idea of a *Nikkeijin* identity is a sort of fiction, and not one that is necessarily "owned" by *Nikkeijin* themselves. Rather, it may be foisted upon them by others, a reminder of their precarious social position and permanent

⁹ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for asking about parallels to the literature on ethnic enclaves in the United States.

¹⁰ The gold standard for data on American immigrant communities is the longitudinal, multi-cohort New Immigrant Survey (NIS), the data from which is made available for public use at <http://nis.princeton.edu/data.html>.

liminality.

At the very least, the Nikkei community's reaction to the offer evidences a sense of connection and membership in Japan that goes far beyond economic considerations. Whatever their legal citizenship, many Nikkeijin see themselves as nonetheless rooted in a shared Japan. This emotional, if not legal, citizenship informs expectations about how they should be treated by the Japanese government. In a sense, the emotional reaction to the return offer suggests that the cultural analyses of Nikkei identity that dominated the academic discourse on Nikkei economic migration over the last two decades were, indeed, on the right track. Whatever the initial motivations for migration, the motivations for staying may be more emotional than economic.

Further Research Directions

Despite the interest *Nikkei* return migration has attracted, the literature includes few large-N empirical studies. Perhaps this is because the question of identity is so interesting to anthropologists, sociologists, and area specialists that it has biased scholarship towards comparative and historical work. Much of the research mentioned here relies on ethnographic or interview methods for its empirical basis. This makes sense given the complexity, nuance, and even contradiction inherent to discourses on identity. However, even Apichai Shipper's (2008) extraordinary collection of more than 350 interviews cannot offer some of the advantages of large-N research. While qualitative research is critical to research on identity, survey research has much to add. The use of affinity scales to measure attitudes toward Japan, home countries, and third party countries in a large sample, for example, could add dimension to our understanding of Nikkei identity as more than a zero-sum game. Moreover, survey methods offer clear advantages for longitudinal research with a single population—a consideration that must be addressed as we enter the twenty-second year since the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act went into effect in 1990. These methods are standard for social science research on immigrant communities in the United States; longitudinal, multi-cohort studies of documented immigrants sampled from official records of new permanent residents like the New Immigrant Survey (NIS) at Princeton University could serve as models for future research on *Nikkei* and other documented migrant communities in Japan.

Given the size and diversity of the community, a greater use of survey methods could add to the discourse as the population enters its third decade in Japan. The *Nikkei* population actually present a good subject for survey research because they do not present any of the usual problems that surface in surveying migrant populations. First, the *Nikkeijin* in Japan are mostly documented and have less reason to fear or distrust social scientists asking nosy questions than most North American migrant populations. Second, they are highly visible and thus easy to sample. Finally, they are a generally well-educated group with high rates of literacy. All of these characteristics make the *Nikkeijin* better candidates for survey methods than most migrant populations.

Interestingly, while all these points hold true for the first generation of *Nikkeijin* in Japan, they may not continue to hold true for the second generation. Economic restructuring may make the Japanese government less hospitable in the future, the most visible markers of *Nikkei* status may fade, and the fact that only 25% of *Nikkei* children in Japan are in school bodes poorly for second generation literacy rates and education levels. This population may actually become *less* accessible rather than more accessible the longer it resides in Japan.

The themes identified in this paper—the slipperiness of ethnic identity, its social and economic underpinnings, and its relevance to the next generation of *Nikkeijin*—remain as relevant as ever. In the wake of the economic crisis of the late 2000s, our ability to understand this community's complex

relationship with Japan has only increased. We know now, for example, that employment opportunities may play a smaller role in attaching *Nikkeijin* to Japan than previously assumed. By studying *Nikkeijin*'s reaction to and immediately following the economic crisis we may develop a better understanding of what the *Nikkeijin* mean to Japan—and how Japan has changed in meaning to the *Nikkeijin*.

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