



Title	Japanese Studies in Brazil: History, Present, and Prospects
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Citation	越境文化研究イニシアティブ論集. 2021, 4, p. 17-32
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/11094/85135">https://hdl.handle.net/11094/85135</a>
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# Japanese Studies in Brazil: History, Present, and Prospects

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## 1 Introduction: The Forerunners of Japanese Studies in Brazil

Despite the geographical distance between them, Brazil and Japan share many historical, economical, and social bonds. Since the ship *Kasato Maru* brought the first Japanese immigrants to Brazil in 1908, over 280,000 Japanese have migrated to Brazil over the course of the prewar and postwar periods. With a current estimated population of almost two million people,<sup>1</sup> Japanese Brazilians constitute the largest Nikkei<sup>2</sup> population in the world. Since the 1990s, Brazilians have also represented an important minority living in Japan, especially around industrial zones in the Kantō and Kansai regions, sparking discussions on the meaning of ethnicity, nationality, and “Japaneseness”. Members of the Japanese Imperial family frequently visit Brazil, a nod toward the purportedly special relationship between the two countries. Brazil and Japan have strong political and economic ties, with a diplomatic relationship that spans almost 130 years, and a trade volume that has increased considerably in recent decades. Both the Japan Foundation and JICA (the Japan International Cooperation Agency) are active in Brazil, and it is emblematic of the strong relationship between the countries that the first of the three current Japan Houses was established in São Paulo in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

The path traced by the field of Japanese Studies in Brazil has been shaped by this historical background. While we can trace the birth of Japanese Studies in the United States to the

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<sup>1</sup> Brazil conducts population censuses decennially. Because the 2020 census was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most recent data available is from 2010. Several sources cite the “almost two million” estimate, including the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan–Brazil Relations Basic Data”, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/latin/brazil/data.html> (accessed 10 March 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Here I am using the term “Nikkei” in the broadest possible sense, to identify both Japanese immigrants and their descendants. A more refined definition becomes necessary when we think about Japanese expatriates in the 21st century, family members of Japanese business personnel working overseas for extended periods of time but with the intent of going back to Japan, or descendants of former Japanese immigrants who currently live and work in Japan under special visas but without holding Japanese nationality (sometimes referred to as *dekasegi* 出稼ぎ/デカセギ). Further, an argument can be made that designating oneself Nikkei is a form of self-identification and, thus, not rigidly definable by objective parameters. Although I am aware of this problematic, for this article the broad definition will suffice.

<sup>3</sup> The other two are in London and in Los Angeles. For further information on the Japan Houses, see <https://www.japanhouse.jp>.

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production of knowledge on Japan that began during World War II, Japanese Studies in Brazil was influenced topically and methodologically by not only the United States but also Europe and Japan. At the same time, the preexisting Nikkei community in Brazil contributed significantly to the establishment of the discipline. It is crucial to recognize that the study of Japan in Brazil (a Latin American country that itself has been taken as a subject of Area Studies) presents unique idiosyncrasies that must be taken into consideration when looking back at the trajectory it has taken. I will address some of these particularities in this essay.

We can identify three main precursors for contemporary Japanese Studies in Brazil. The first can be described as a simple interest in Japan, which was originally seen as a foreign, distant, and exotic land; the second originates in debates on Japanese immigration to Brazil; and the third has its roots in the intellectual activities of the Japanese immigrants themselves after arriving in the country. Let us briefly consider each of these in a bit more detail.

First, as was the case in the United States and Europe, intellectual discussions on Japan were already taking place in Brazil during the prewar period, although we certainly cannot call these endeavors Japanese Studies. These works can be described as multifaceted investigations on Japan or Japanese culture prompted by Japan's alleged difference from the Western world, by the supposed exoticism of the Japanese culture (a belated form of *Japonisme*), or by interest in the roots of the Japanese Empire's successful economic and territorial expansion after the Meiji Restoration. Such investigations were not conducted within a structured framework for the study of Japan, nor were their authors specialists trained in the subject matter. These works are, however, important to the extent that they represented the first time Japan was taken up as an object of investigation in Brazil.

A second precursor to Japanese Studies in Brazil, sharing some characteristics of the first but with its own sociopolitical concerns, involves the discourse initiated by the influx of Japanese immigrants into the country. As in North America, in Brazil too immigration kindled debates on whether acceptance of members of the "yellow race" (in the period's terminology) was an appropriate choice for the country, or whether assimilation of Japanese immigrants was even possible. Such discussions took place not only on the Brazilian side, but also in Japan: overseas migration was a Japanese government project, and the implications of emigration to the Americas were discussed in great detail. Intellectuals were co-opted as standard bearers for each side, and politicians and bureaucrats joined the debate. (It is important to note that, in most regards, the debates in Japanese and in Portuguese occurred nearly independently of one another.

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The bibliography on each side is vast.<sup>4)</sup>

Though undoubtedly important in order to understand how Japan was thought of in Brazil (and how Brazil was thought of in Japan) in the first half of the twentieth century, in most regards the precursors described above are not directly connected with the postwar development of Japanese Studies in Brazil. A third precursor, however, is—and its intricate association with what was to come later compels us to take a moment to analyze it. I refer here to the intellectual activities undertaken by Japanese immigrants within the Nikkei community in Brazil. Their activities and the topics they focused upon foreshadowed the later institutional development of the field.

A comprehensive overview of the activities undertaken by those “immigrant intellectuals”<sup>5</sup> is not feasible in this essay, but we should note that intellectual life within the Nikkei community was not stale. Like other places settled by Japanese immigrants both within and outside the Japanese empire, prewar Brazil was home to an active Japanese-language press. By 1941, when the Vargas administration dealt a decisive blow to publications written in foreign languages, the Nikkei community had at least four large daily newspapers that covered not only developments in Brazil, but throughout the Japanese Empire and the rest of the world. Magazines, pamphlets, and books were also published or imported from Japan; literary and artistic circles were formed; and an active exchange of ideas existed among intellectuals within and outside the immigrant community, including some non-Nikkei and some people in Japan.

One example of this phenomenon is the Doyōkai (土曜会).<sup>6</sup> We can trace the roots of the Doyōkai to the prewar, when a group of intellectuals centered around Andō Zempachi [Zempachi] (安藤全八, pseudonym of Andō Kiyoshi 安藤潔, a Marxist intellectual who graduated from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) published the literary magazine *Bunka* (文化) from November 1938 to July 1939. Some of the members involved in the production of *Bunka* would go on to form the Doyōkai in 1947. The group, which published sixteen issues of the magazine

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive English-language description of the Brazilian side of discussions, see Jeffrey Lesser, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Brazil, 1808 to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, 2013. Regarding the Japanese side, see Toake Endoh, *Exporting Japan: Politics of Emigration to Latin America*, University of Illinois Press, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> “Immigrant intellectual” is a translation of the Japanese term *iminchishikijin* (移民知識人). The term designates a heterogeneous group including journalists, writers, painters, critics, educators, and other people actively engaged in the production and consumption of knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on the Doyōkai, see Sasaki Kōji 佐々木剛二, *Imin to toku: Nikkei Burajiru chishikijin no rekishi minzokushi* 移民と徳—日系ブラジル知識人の歴史民族誌, Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai 名古屋大学出版会, 2020.

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*Jidai* 時代 between January 1947 and March 1953, became the backbone of the intellectual movement within the community. Members included Handa Tomoo (半田知雄, a painter and immigration historian), Furuno Kikuo (古野菊生, a journalist and poet), Kawai Takeo (河合武夫, an engineer), Saitō Hiroshi (斎藤広志, a sociologist who later became a professor at the University of São Paulo), and Suzuki Teiiti [Teiichi] (鈴木悌一, a lawyer who later became the first professor of Japanese Studies in Brazil).<sup>7</sup> In 1965 the Doyōkai was reconstituted as the Center for Japanese-Brazilian Studies (*San Paulo Jinmonkagaku Kenkyūjo* サンパウロ人文科学研究所, hereafter referred to as “Jinmonken”), which was still active as of March 2021.<sup>8</sup>

Even though the Doyōkai/Jinmonken was more interested in the Nikkei community than in Japan *per se*, its activities and members became entangled with the development of Japanese Studies in Brazil. For instance, in the early 1950s when Izumi Seiichi (泉靖一, at this time an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Tokyo) came to Brazil and began research on the Nikkei community, Saitō Hiroshi became one of his assistants. A young and promising member of the Doyōkai, Saitō went on to receive his doctorate from Kobe University and to become a professor of sociology at the University of São Paulo. Though not officially a faculty member of the Japanese Studies department, Saitō contributed to the development of a second generation of scholars.

It is interesting to note that even prior to the institutionalization of Japanese Studies in Brazil, the Nikkei community was already an object of study. Izumi’s work is representative of the kind of academic interest in this ethnic community that arose in the postwar, not only in Japan, but also in Brazil and in the United States. The Doyōkai group was part of this movement, with most of the articles in *Jidai* focusing on matters particular to the Nikkei community, a stark departure from the more Japan-oriented *Bunka* of the prewar. It was also in the 1950s that Teiiti Suzuki’s group, on Izumi’s suggestion, undertook a remarkable census of the Nikkei community in Brazil. In Suzuki and the group he assembled at the University of São Paulo we can see the institutional birth of Japanese Studies in Brazil in the 1960s. It is to the towering figure of Teiiti Suzuki and the University of São Paulo group that we now turn.

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<sup>7</sup> This is a very eclectic group, and *Jidai* was not the only venue in which they published. Most Doyōkai members were also involved in other groups and published in other magazines or newspapers.

<sup>8</sup> Jinmonken is located in the Bunkyo (Burajiru Nihonbunka Fukushi Kyōkai ブラジル日本文化福祉協会) building in São Paulo. The same building also houses the Museum of Japanese Immigration in Brazil (Museu Histórico da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil) and other entities related to the Nikkei community.

### 2 The University of São Paulo Group

The first university in Brazil to offer a bachelor's degree in Japanese Language and Culture was the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1963. Located in the state of São Paulo, home to the largest Nikkei community in Brazil, USP is often regarded as the leading university in the country. Although other universities in Brazil have subsequently established their own graduate courses in Japanese or Japanese Studies, as of March 2021 USP remained the only institution in Brazil to offer a master's program in the field. USP also publishes the premier Japanese Studies journal in Brazil, *Estudos Japoneses*, discussed in further detail below.

The creation of the degree in Japanese Studies at the University of São Paulo was largely due to the efforts of Teiiti Suzuki. Born in 1911 in Nishinomiya, Suzuki migrated to Brazil in 1927, settling in the famously intellectual community of Aliança in the state of São Paulo. In 1934 Suzuki enrolled simultaneously in the law and sociology programs at the University of São Paulo. In the postwar Suzuki first practiced law, and later became the first professor of Japanese Studies in Brazil. When Suzuki died in 1996, he was one of the foremost figures in the Nikkei community in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Despite Suzuki's prominence, surprisingly little research has focused upon him.<sup>9</sup> A biography<sup>10</sup> was published in 2007 by Jinmonken member Suzuki Masatake (鈴木正威; to avoid confusion, I will hereafter refer to him as Masatake), and this the most complete account on Suzuki's life currently available.<sup>11</sup> According to Masatake, Suzuki undertook three great projects during his life: first, lobbying for unfreezing of the assets of Japanese immigrants after World War II; second, the census of the Nikkei community; and third, the creation of the Center of Japanese Studies and the program in Japanese Studies at the University of São Paulo.

I will not address the unfreezing of assets in this essay; suffice it to say that this required a laborious lobbying process undertaken mainly by representatives of Japanese business, especially the community's foremost business leader Yamamoto Kiyoshi (山本喜誉司), and that Suzuki played a large role on it. The second of Suzuki's major projects, the census of the

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<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, this is true of most of the immigrant intellectuals of the Brazilian Nikkei community.

<sup>10</sup> Suzuki Masatake 鈴木正威, *Suzuki Teiiti: Burajiru Nikkei shakai ni ikita kisai no shōgai* 鈴木悌一 ブラジル日系社会に生きた鬼才の生涯, San Paulo Jinmonkagaku Kenkyūjo サンパウロ人文科学研究所, 2007. Though Masatake and Teiiti share the same last name they are not related.

<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding Masatake's utilization of previously unknown documents and his privileged access to informants who offered important firsthand testimony, Masatake's book should be taken with a pinch of salt. The author is not a trained scholar, and the tone of the book is clearly eulogistic.

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Nikkei community in Brazil, was a massive endeavor that took involved the work of more than 6,000 people, most volunteers, over the course of six years. Suzuki was instrumental to completion of the project, which was almost abandoned several times due to a lack of funding. The census report was published in Japanese in 1964, and in English five years later.<sup>12</sup> It appeared at a time when the Nikkei community was becoming more and more reflective, and represents the efforts of an ethnic group to explore its own basic characteristics. Regrettably, the scope and importance of the project have not yet been fully appreciated by most scholars.<sup>13</sup>

Upon the completion of the census, Suzuki turned to what has been called the last of his three great projects: developing the bachelor's course in Japanese Studies and the Center of Japanese Studies (CEJAP) at the University of São Paulo. Although the bachelor's program in Japanese Studies had already started in 1963 as part of the Oriental Languages Department in the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages, Literature, and Human Sciences of the University of São Paulo, until 1968 faculty members were dispatched by the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies on a provisional basis. The results of this program were less successful than expected, prompting university officials to call upon Suzuki to restructure it. In 1968, when the CEJAP was officially



**Figure 1: Casa de Cultura Japonesa** (Image courtesy of Marcos Santos/USP Imagens)

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<sup>12</sup> Comissão de Recenseamento da Colônia (CRCJ), *Burajiru no Nihon imin* ブラジルの日本移民, University of Tokyo Press, 1964. See also CRCJ, *The Japanese Immigrant in Brazil*, University of Tokyo Press, 1969. The 1964 edition also includes a bilingual Japanese/English volume with statistical tables.

<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that the importance of the census is discussed in chapter 3 of Sasaki, op. cit.

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formed, Suzuki became the first full professor of Japanese Studies in Brazil.

The first years of the program saw the department rigidly controlled by Suzuki's ideas about what Japanese Studies education should be. The clear focus of the program was on developing reading abilities and fostering knowledge of grammar—classical texts were used as textbooks and conversation classes were intentionally excluded from the curriculum. Nearly all of the students were from Nikkei backgrounds, and a large percentage were second-generation (二世 *nisei*) women. Importantly, a system was developed for the creation of a second generation of scholars, through which promising students were selected for short-term training in Japan after graduation and then recruited as teaching assistants upon their return to Brazil.<sup>14</sup>

Suzuki's ideals exerted a profound influence on the kind of research and education conducted at the department during its first decade. Suzuki retired in 1981, after the CEJAP had been moved into the Casa de Cultura Japonesa (Japanese Culture Center), an iconic building on the University of São Paulo's campus built by the Nikkei community, in 1976. The library dedicated to Japanese Studies housed in the building is now called the Teiiti Suzuki Library.

Since Suzuki's retirement, a second and third generation of scholars have taught and conducted research at the CEJAP. The focus on classical literature and language, though still



**Figure 2: Teiiti [Teiichi] Suzuki Library** (Image courtesy of Marcos Santos/USP Imagens)

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<sup>14</sup> Suzuki Masatake, op. cit., pp. 431–438. Masatake relied on the testimony of students who later became professors in the department, including Geny Wakisaka, Teiiti's daughter Tae Suzuki, and Junko Ota.



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quite prominent, slowly began to give way to other topics. One way of following this trajectory is by examining the journal published by the center since 1979, *Estudos Japoneses*. *Estudos Japoneses* (“Japanese Studies” in Portuguese) is the foremost venue for the publication of research on Japanese Studies in Brazil. Through 2020, 43 issues of the journal had been produced.<sup>15</sup> Considering that the journal is published mainly in Portuguese, and that when its publication began USP was the only university in Brazil offering training in Japanese Studies, the longevity and quality of the journal is remarkable.<sup>16</sup>

Tables 1 and 2 offer a breakdown of all 43 issues of *Estudos Japoneses*. Before discussing the journal and its contents, a few comments on Table 2 are necessary. The journal does not classify the articles it publishes by specialty, so an original classification is proposed here. To sort the articles, two points were considered: the training or scholarly field of the author, and the topic of the article. This made it possible to divide the articles into seven broad categories: “Language” (for articles dealing specifically with aspects of the Japanese language, mostly from the perspective of linguistics), “Literature” (all matters literary, including prose, poetry, and discussion on specific authors or genres, but excluding theater), “Arts/Theater/ Culture” (visual arts, Japanese theater, and “traditional” Japanese cultural expressions such as the tea ceremony or ikebana), “History” (mainly Japanese, but also including the history of immigration to Brazil), “Sociology/Anthropology”, “Translations” (sometimes including commentaries), and “Others” (all topics not fitting into the previous categories).<sup>17</sup> To clarify the journal’s attention to matters related to Brazil, I have also shown in parentheses the number of articles in each category that are related to Brazil or the Portuguese language.

The journal has mainly published contents in Portuguese, and occasionally in French, English, Japanese, or Spanish. Most of the authors are academics trained or active in Brazil,

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<sup>15</sup> As of March 2021, all issues are freely available at <https://www.revistas.usp.br/ej>.

<sup>16</sup> We should not forget the multidisciplinary character of the field of Japanese Studies, which, at times, perhaps paradoxically, might contribute to the difficulty in establishing a new journal. Especially in its first editions, when its reputation had not yet been established, *Estudos Japoneses* was just another option for scholars who could publish in already renowned venues in their own fields.

<sup>17</sup> This is just one possible classification, undertaken in order to highlight some of the journal’s particularities. The categories I have chosen are somewhat subjective. For example, I chose to bundle “Literature” in one category, while someone interested in other aspects of the journal might have split these into classic literature and modern literature categories. The same can be said of the other categories shown here. Also, it should be noted that the category to which a specific article belonged was not always clear cut; should an article on the historical origins of the *Kojiki* be put under “history” or under “literature”? I used my own judgment in these cases. (I classified the *Kojiki* article under literature, since its author—a literary scholar—continued publishing literary analyses and translations of the text in subsequent issues.)

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<i>Issue</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Contents*</i>	<i>Other than Portuguese</i>	<i>No. of Pages</i>
1	1979	7	0	125
2	1979	4	0	47
3	1983	8	0	111
4	1984	11	0	140
5	1985	7	0	75
6	1986	7	0	154
7	1987	8	0	146
8	1988	9	0	98
9	1989	6	1 (Fr)	130
10	1990	9	2 (Fr)	138
11	1991	10	1 (Fr)	171
12	1992	9	1 (Fr)	142
13	1993	7	0	132
14	1994	9	1 (Fr)	117
15	1995	7	0	115
16	1996	7	6 (J, E)	114
17	1997	14	3 (Fr, E)	176
18	1998	7	0	113
19	1999	8	3 (Fr, E)	101
20	2000	9	2 (Fr, E)	129
21	2001	9	0	145

  

22	2002	9	0	145
23	2003	6	0	120
24	2004	7	0	124
25	2005	7	0	136
26	2006	8	0	126
27	2007	11	1 (Fr)	178
28	2008	23	0	314
29	2009	9	0	178
30	2010	10	1 (S)	171
31	2011	11	0	219
32	2012	11	1 (J)	220
33	2013	8	0	132
34	2014	8	0	134
35	2015	7	1 (E)	138
36	2016	9	1 (J)	181
37	2017	8	0	139
38	2017	8	2 (Fr, E)	126
39	2018	7	0	136
40	2018	7	1 (J)	115
41	2019	7	2 (E)	131
42	2019	7	1 (J)	152
43	2020	8	0	149

\* Articles only. Key: Fr=French, E=English, J=Japanese, S=Spanish.

**Table 1: *Estudos Japoneses*, 1979–2020 (basic data)**

although there are also contributions from scholars from the United States, Europe, Japan, and other parts of the world. There is a clear inclination toward literature and language over the first ten issues of the journal, and a slight rise in the number of articles on art, theater, and history after that. The 21st century saw an increase in contents on sociology, anthropology, and other specialties. However, throughout its existence *Estudos Japoneses* has published contents related to Japanese immigration to Brazil. Early contributors tended to come from the University of São Paulo group, but the circle progressively expanded to include scholars from other institutions.

Unfortunately, the 1979 first edition does not contain a complete explanation of how the journal came into being. It only states that the journal will be “an annual publication, aimed at showcasing research on language, literature and other aspects of the Japanese culture.”<sup>18</sup> Its contents are representative of the first years of Japanese Studies education at the CEJAP. The emphasis is on classical or “traditional” Japan: one article is on ikebana, one on Yamabe no Akahito (山部赤人), one on the prince regent Shōtoku, and one on the *Fūshikaden* (風姿花伝). The last two papers are on the structure of the Japanese language, and on the development

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<sup>18</sup> All translations from the Portuguese are mine, unless otherwise noted.

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Issue	L	Lit.	A/T/ C	H	S/ An.	T	O
1	2	3	1	1	0	0	0
2	0	2	0	0	1(1)	0	1
3	2	2	2	0	0	1	1
4	3 (2)	2	3	0	0	2	1
5	2	1	1	1	0	2	0
6	4 (1)	2	0	0	0	1	0
7	3 (1)	2	1	1	0	0	1
8	1	2	2	2	1	1	0
9	1	4	1	0	0	0	0
10	1	3	1	3	0	0	1
11	4	3	2	0	1	0	0
12	1	2	3	2	0	0	1
13	2 (1)	3 (1)	1	1	0	0	0
14	1	3	0	3 (1)	0	1	1 (1)
15	2 (1)	4 (1)	0	0	0	0	1 (1)
16	1	3	1	0	2	0	0
17	2	3	3	3 (1)	1	0	2
18	0	2	3 (1)	0	2 (2)	0	0
19	1 (1)	2	1	1	2	0	1
20	2 (1)	4	0	0	0	2	1
21	1	3	3	1 (1)	0	0	1
22	1	4	2	0	2 (1)	0	0
23	1	2	1	1	1 (1)	0	0

Issue	L	Lit.	A/T/ C	H	S/ An.	T	O
24	1	2	2	0	1	0	1
25	1	1	1	1 (1)	3	0	0
26	4	0	2	1 (1)	1	0	0
27	3 (1)	2	3	1	0	1	1
28	1 (1)	5 (3)	6 (3)	5 (5)	4 (4)	0	2 (2)
29	0	4	1 (1)	0	2 (1)	0	2 (1)
30	1	2	3 (1)	1	1 (1)	0	2
31	1	3	1	3	1	0	2
32	3 (1)	3	1 (1)	1	3 (3)	0	0
33	1 (1)	4	1	0	1 (1)	0	1
34	1 (1)	4 (2)	0	1	1 (1)	0	1
35	1	2	1	1	1	0	1
36	3	1	0	0	5 (3)	0	0
37	1	3	0	2	1	0	1
38	0	3	1	2 (1)	2	0	0
39	1 (1)	2	2	1	1	0	0
40	1	1	1	2 (1)	0	0	2
41	0	4 (2)	0	1 (1)	2 (1)	0	0
42	1	3 (1)	0	2 (1)	1	0	0
43	0	0	2	3 (2)	1 (1)	1	1

Key: L=Language; Lit.=Literature; A/T/ C=Arts, Theater, Culture; H=History; S/An.=Sociology; Anthropology; T=Translation; O=Others

**Table 2: *Estudos Japoneses*, 1979–2020. Articles are arranged by topic area; figures in parentheses show studies related to Brazil**

of haikai from *renga* (連歌).

The second issue, published the same year, contains only four papers. Two of them are in a similar vein to the previous ones: Geny Wakisaka's discussion on *makurakotoba* (枕詞) and Teiiti Suzuki's exploration of Bashō.<sup>19</sup> However, the remaining articles foreshadow another core characteristic of the journal: an interest in topics related to Brazil or Japanese immigration to Brazil. Hiroshi Saitō's paper on the behavior of Japanese businessmen in Brazil and historian Arlinda Rocha Nogueira's article on Brazilian coffee exports to Japan are typical of the kind of discussions the journal would include in the future.

<sup>19</sup> Geny Wakisaka's career exemplifies the entanglements among different spheres of intellectual life within the Japanese community. The daughter of Kōyama Rokurō (香山六郎), an important author in his own right and owner of the widely circulated newspaper *Seishū shinpō* (聖州新報) in the prewar period, Geny was one of the first Japanese Studies graduates at the University of São Paulo. She became a professor at the CEJAP in 1974. Geny went on to translate parts of the *Manyōshū* (万葉集) and to be one of the translators of *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi* 枕草子), among other works. Geny married Wakisaka Katsunori (脇坂勝則), a Doyōkai and Jinmonken member active within the Nikkei community.

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The third issue was not published until 1983. From this edition onward translations start to appear sporadically. Also, this edition sees the first of Sakae Murakami-Giroux's articles on traditional Japanese theater. The topics still tend to be classical, and include the *Kojiki*, Sen no Rikyū, *Uji Shūi Monogatari* (宇治拾遺物語), and *kyōgen* (狂言). Teiiti's daughter Tae Suzuki, a future professor in the department, published in the venue for the first time in this edition. Also typical of the first years of the journal is that of the eight articles included in the issue, five were written by women.

The fourth volume, from 1984, includes two papers on the intercrossing of the Portuguese and Japanese languages. A paper by Elza Taeko Doi analyzes the Portuguese spoken by Japanese immigrants in São Paulo, and an article by Lídia Masumí Fukasawa reflects upon Japanese language teaching for university students in Brazil. Doi's text shows an emerging interest in a form of the language that is not the standard, a topic that would be raised again by Tae Suzuki's article on the Japanese language in Brazil and the acculturation of immigrants in the sixth volume of the journal, and Yoshio Mase article on the speech of Japanese immigrants in the seventh volume of the journal. We can see here the first signs of the language spoken by the Nikkei in Brazil being taken as a worthy object of study within academia.

The profile of the journal and its contributors changed with the passage of years. Volume 15 from 1995, for example, includes two papers by non-Nikkei male contributors: Luís Fábio Marchesoni Rogado Mietto's paper on the *Kojiki*, and Valdinei Dias Batista's investigation into Portuguese *haikai*. The next year's volume 16 marked the establishment of the master's program in Japanese Studies, and contained papers presented at several symposia held to commemorate this event. Volume 18 has an article on the *dekasegi* (Nikkei Brazilians in Japan), as well as one on religious syncretism within the Okinawan community in Brazil, attesting both to the broadening of themes contemplated by the journal, and also to persistent interest in topics related to Brazil. The 2008 special issue, number 28, commemorates the 100 years of Japanese immigration to Brazil, and includes mostly articles related to the topic.

My classification shows that over time, the bulk of articles published in issues of *Estudos Japoneses* shifted from classical literature and language to a more variegated range of topics including history, sociology, anthropology, and Japanese popular culture. The Japanese language spoken in Brazil (sometimes referred to as コロニア語 *Koronia-go*), the teaching and history of Japanese in the country, and literary works by Nikkei authors gradually became common topics on the journal's pages. The four most recent issues, volumes 40 through 43, encapsulate how much *Estudos Japoneses* has changed in focus over the four decades of its

existence. Today, most of the journal's authors are non-Nikkei, there are few articles on classical literature or classical language, and many articles focus on the Nikkei community. In the next section, I will attempt to analyze what prompted this transformation.

### **3 Japanese Studies Today: Breaking Linguistic Shackles**

Taking the University of São Paulo group as the origins of today's academic study of Japan in Brazil, we have seen how its outline has transformed over the years. The profiles of the students and faculty have shifted, and the topics discussed under the guise of Japanese Studies have expanded. Let us now take a brief look at the state of Japanese Studies in Brazil today.<sup>20</sup>

According to a 2020 Japan Foundation report, in 2018 Brazil had the fourteenth largest number of Japanese language learners in the world, amounting to 26,157 people. Among these, 1,499 learners were in higher education. Brazil also had the largest number of institutions teaching the Japanese language at any educational stage of all the countries in Latin America, numbering 380 overall.<sup>21</sup> However, this number is dwarfed by the 1,004,625 Japanese language learners (575,455 in higher education) at 2,435 institutions in China, or even by 166,905 language learners (68,237 in higher education) studying Japanese at 1,446 institutions in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, a 2017 Japan Foundation São Paulo report lists eight institutions in Brazil that currently offer a bachelor's degree in Japanese or Japanese Studies (see Table 3). These programs employ a total of 46 faculty members and serve 867 students. A breakdown of the faculty into Nikkei and non-Nikkei shows a shift from 24 Nikkei faculty members and 12 non-Nikkei faculty in 2009 (totaling 36) to 28 Nikkei faculty members and 18 non-Nikkei faculty in 2017 (totaling 46). Among students, 144 were Nikkei and 541 were non-Nikkei in 2009 (totaling 685), while 137 were Nikkei and 730 were non-Nikkei in 2017 (totaling 867).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The following discussion is based on statistics about students enrolled in Japanese Language or Japanese Studies bachelor's degree courses and the faculty teaching at those institutions. Although we should not equate the field of Japanese Studies with students and faculty who come from these courses (I myself did not major in Japanese Studies), it is undeniable that they represent a large share of the people involved with the field of Japanese Studies.

<sup>21</sup> Japan Foundation, *Survey Report on Japanese-Language Education Abroad 2018*, Japan Foundation, 2020, p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–45.

<sup>23</sup> Japan Foundation São Paulo, *Ensino de Língua Japonesa Ensino Fundamental, Médio e Superior*, Kokusai Kōryū Kikin San Paulo Nihon Bunka Sentaa 国際交流基金サンパウロ日本文化センター, 2017, p. 10. For the purposes of this essay I am not including institutions that offer Japanese language or Japanese culture classes only as elective subjects, nor students enrolled in those classes.

## Japanese Studies in Brazil

Year	New Development
1963	BA in Japanese Language and Culture at the University of São Paulo (USP).
1968	Foundation of the Center for Japanese Studies (CEJAP).
1976	Opening of the Casa de Cultura Japonesa building.
1979	BA in Japanese Language at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFERJ).
1979	Establishment of <i>Estudos Japoneses</i> .
1986	BA in Japanese Language/Translation, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).
1992	BA in Japanese Language at the São Paulo State University at Assis (UNESP-Assis).
1996	MA in Japanese Language and Culture at the University of São Paulo (USP).
1997	BA in Japanese Language at the University of Brasília (UnB).
2002	Foundation of the Brazilian Association for Japanese Studies (ABEJ), the only association for Japanese Studies in Brazil.
2004	BA in Japanese Language at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ).
2009	BA in Japanese Language at the Federal University of Paraná (UFP).
2011	BA in Japanese Language at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM).

**Table 3: Japanese Studies in Brazil, 1963–2020**

The data clearly shows that over time more faculty members and students have become non-Nikkei, although this tendency is more evident among the student body. To put it plainly, the days when the CEJAP could count on a surplus of Nikkei students fluent enough in Japanese to be able to handle grammar-based classes that used classical works as textbooks are now long past. By the 1990s conversation-based classes for undergraduates not fluent in Japanese were deemed necessary, and modifications to the curriculum were undertaken accordingly, even if somewhat begrudgingly. A shift in interests to topics such as pop culture, manga, anime, and “Cool Japan” is recognizable in Brazil, as in other parts of the world. In sum, it would be fair to state that the basic profile of the student majoring in Japanese Studies has evolved considerably.

As I have argued throughout this essay, the history of Japanese Studies in Brazil cannot be understood without taking the Nikkei community into consideration. Not only was the CEJAP founded by an immigrant intellectual, but also the second generation of scholars came almost exclusively from the Nikkei community. This interdependence between these two groups, though decidedly an advantage when first establishing Japanese Studies programs, turned into a hindrance once bilingual students were no longer the majority.

Present-day Japanese Studies in Brazil is, therefore, at a crossroads: for its further

development and continuation, direct reliance on the Nikkei community is no longer possible. Interconnections between the community and the academic field having been so significant during the first decades of Japanese Studies in Brazil, the question that presents itself now is whether the field will be able to change without disintegrating. Is it possible to exist once freed from these linguistic shackles? To conclude this essay, I will turn to this question and discuss the future prospects for Japanese Studies in Brazil.

#### **4 Conclusion: Can Japanese Studies in Brazil Be Relevant?**

In this essay I have traced the origins of Japanese Studies in Brazil, its achievements, and its current situation. In this last section, it remains of us to ask two uncomfortable questions: Does the field of Japanese Studies in Brazil have a future? And if so, can it be relevant?

The first of these questions has much to do with what was discussed above. Faced with ever-changing circumstances, Japanese Studies in Brazil must adapt accordingly. This has not escaped scholars in the field. For example, Leiko Matsubara-Morales, a second-generation Nikkei and professor at the CEJAP, argues for the necessity of shifting the focus of Japanese Studies from “immigration language” to “study language”.<sup>24</sup> Matsubara-Morales is referring not only to higher education, but to all levels of Japanese language teaching in Brazil, from primary school to the master’s course at the CEJAP. Although Matsubara-Morales’ article focuses mainly on language, and not on Japanese Studies as a field, in her discussion the necessity of reframing the study of the Japanese language in the country we can discern the dilemma facing the entire field now. It is still grasping for a new identity, more independent from the Nikkei community.

Another point that hinders the growth of the Japanese Studies field in Brazil is the ongoing lack of doctoral programs in Japanese Studies, despite the continued efforts of faculty members at the CEJAP to create one. While not holding a doctoral degree was not necessarily an impediment to embarking upon an academic career when Japanese Studies first started in Brazil, it certainly is now. Since they are unable to get a doctoral degree in the area, Japanese Studies majors are forced to move on to other departments, such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology,

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<sup>24</sup> Leiko Matsubara-Morales, *De Língua de Imigração a Língua de Estudo: Caminhos para a Revitalização da Cultura e da Língua Japonesa no Âmbito Paulista* (From an Immigration Language to a Study Language: Paths for Revitalizing the Japanese Culture and Language in the State of São Paulo), *Revista Linguagem e Ensino*, Pelotas, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2020.

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or history, or to change fields completely. Moreover, many students, disheartened by the bleak prospect of a research career in Brazil, opt to take their graduate degrees in the United States or in Japan, sometimes never to return to Brazil.

As for the question of relevance, it is a biased one. One might rightly ask: relevant to whom? Surely Japanese Studies in Brazil *is* relevant to the students enrolled in the courses provided, or to the faculty teaching at those institutions. The question, then, can be reframed. Can the kind of Japanese Studies research taking place in Brazil be consequential in a wider societal context? Should it have to be so?

More and more, students and researchers alike tend to equate “relevancy” with “uniqueness” or “originality”. This trend has been exacerbated by the widespread use of academic impact factor indices and competitive grant selection processes. While we must look at this development critically, it is worth considering how the pursuit of uniqueness pertains to contemporary Japanese Studies in Brazil. Indisputably, the uniqueness of Brazil’s Japanese Studies is based mostly upon on its “special relationship” to Japan through the Nikkei community, although as we have discussed above, it is also possible to understand this bond as the field’s Achilles’ heel. Notwithstanding this very reasonable criticism, it is difficult to deny that the history of Japanese immigration is the thematic that draws most foreign scholars of Japanese Studies to Brazil. In a sense, further research in this area could be seen as the “most relevant” contribution to the field that Brazilian scholars, who are well positioned to undertake this kind of endeavor, can make. I would argue that a tacit awareness of this situation is one of the main reasons behind the continued publication of articles on Brazil-related topics in the journal *Estudos Japoneses*, especially those articles that deal specifically with the Nikkei community.

One way for Japanese Studies in Brazil to claim relevance, then, would be to increase research on Brazil-related topics, furthermost immigration. Brazilian archives are bursting with never-used documentation on the subject, immigrant-authored literary works (usually referred to as *Koronia Bungaku* コロニア文学) are yet to have undergone proper analysis in Brazilian academia, and the varieties of Japanese spoken in Brazil are currently of more interest to scholars based in Japan than to those based in Brazil. These are just a few examples of what could become vigorous lines of research.

It seems to me that the existence of ample archives, the skill in reading Portuguese that Brazilian students have from the outset, and the intrinsic value that this kind of research could have in both national and international academia make it difficult not to argue that we should



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pursue it. This could be construed as a “play to your strength” or “advertise your uniqueness” strategy, or as an argument in favor of the creation of a Japanese-Brazilian Studies field in the mold of ethnic studies programs at North American universities. Nevertheless, I would like to stress I am not advocating that scholars should focus on Brazil-related topics just for the sake of a certain uniqueness, but that through a holistic approach to the subject matter the very notion of Area Studies can be critiqued.<sup>25</sup> In sum, Japanese Studies in Brazil does not have to find a new niche for itself in order to survive. Instead, it should invest in building methodological and topical connections to other areas, both within and outside Brazil. Focusing on the uniqueness of Japanese Studies in Brazil is only one possible way of achieving that.

Still, it would be unfortunate if we were to restrict research in Japanese Studies in Brazil to Brazil-related subjects based upon some kind of “relevancy index”. International collaboration with Japan, the United States, Europe, and other parts of the world might be a way for Japanese Studies in Brazil to be consequential without relying exclusively on its historical relationship to the Nikkei community. Whatever path scholars and students choose to take, it is paramount that the field in Brazil open itself to the outside world. There is much to be gained from exchange with scholars from other fields, and surely much to offer and receive from Japanese Studies scholars from other parts of the world. At this time, the dialogue remains too restricted. Only by enhancing its contacts with other researchers—not only as partners in localized research, or by publishing the occasional article, but in a true exchange of ideas and methodology—can Japanese Studies in Brazil be consequential, and not wither away.

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<sup>25</sup> Of course, we should be aware of the problems that “hyphenated ethnic studies programs” can present and, therefore, this shift should be accompanied by a self-critical attitude. Analyzing the situation in the United States, Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian have written that by promising students identity in difference “hyphenated ethnic studies has, perhaps inadvertently, recuperated the concept of national character that attended and served the formation of area studies programs after World War II, but has renamed it as ethnic identity.” Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian eds., *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 4. Reflections like this should be at the center of how Japanese Studies in Brazil reshapes itself.