The Motivation to Migrate: The Ethnic and Sociocultural Constitution of the Japanese-Brazilian Return-Migration System

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I. Introduction
In recent decades migration has been taking place amidst increasing global economic, political, and social integration, which has been accompanied by the greater speed and ease of international transportation and communication. As a result, contemporary migration often involves short-term, temporary sojourns in the host country, in contrast to earlier generations of migrants who left their homelands to settle abroad permanently. Although many of today's sojourners still end up settling in the host country, the initial intention to remain abroad only temporarily has a significant impact on their willingness to migrate. Because many contemporary migrants can return home at a moment's notice—as long as they have money for the necessary transportation—migration no longer entails a long-term commitment to the host country. As a result of improved international communications and media networks migrants can now stay in close touch with those left behind and keep up with news, events, and even television programs back home. Since migration has become less risky and costly, individuals are now more willing to migrate and do so under considerably less pressure. Because the "threshold of migration"—the point at which economic, political, and social pressures become sufficient to cause individuals to migrate—has been lowered it has become easier to convince people to leave their home countries.

The recent "return migration" of Japanese-Brazilians to Japan as unskilled foreign workers certainly exemplifies this type of short-term, relatively low-cost migration that is initially motivated by a sojourner mentality. Since the migrant flow began in the late 1980s, the number of Japanese-Brazilians in Japan has increased to 220,000 and continues to grow at a steady rate despite the Japanese recession. Since a vast majority of them have intentions to work in Japan for only a couple of years

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and then quickly return home with their earnings, they have been called *dekasigi* (the Japanese word for temporary migrant worker). However, many have already brought their families to Japan, and the process of long-term immigrant settlement has begun. Despite their middle-class socioeconomic and educational status in Brazil, they are employed mainly in unskilled jobs in Japanese small and medium-sized firms in the manufacturing sector. The Japanese-Brazilians have also been accompanied by smaller numbers of *nikkeijin* (Japanese descendants born and living abroad) from other South American countries, primarily Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

An economically driven "push-pull" perspective is inadequate to understand how this migrant flow has been constituted because many other causal factors have been involved. In addition to economic pressures and incentives, one must also consider the important ethnic and sociocultural variables that have created and sustained such a large migrant flow over such a great geographical distance. Therefore, when explaining what motivates the Brazilian *nikkeijin* to migrate, a comprehensive migration systems approach is necessary, which attempts to explain migration flows among a group of countries by using a dynamic and multicausal perspective that examines various transnational economic, sociopolitical, and ethnic-cultural linkages between the sending and receiving countries. Using Japanese-Brazilian return migration as an example, I will emphasize the indispensable importance of transnational ethnic and sociocultural dynamics in the shaping of migrant flows. Although push-pull forces arising from fundamental structural economic disparities between Brazil and Japan were the initial impetus for migration, ethnic connections and linkages between the Brazilian *nikkeijin* and the native Japanese population determined the precise destination of the migrant flow. The full development of a "culture of migration" in the Japanese-Brazilian sending community in Brazil, as well as the formation of transnational migrant networks between Brazil and Japan, served as the sociocultural factors that subsequently increased the volume and diversity of the migrants.

**II. The Economics of Migration: Pushes and Pulls**

It is widely acknowledged in migration studies that immigration flows cannot be sufficiently explained by economic factors that simply push migrants out of the sending country and pull them to the receiving country. However, economic pressures still remain the dominant force that initially instigate most labor migration. Research surveys conducted with the Brazilian *nikkeijin* in Japan show that 61%–84% of the respondents cite purely economic reasons as the principal motive for migrating.

*Wage Differentials and Rational Choices*

The economic basis for Japanese-Brazilian return migration can be partly understood through a rational choice, equilibrium model. According to
this perspective, migration is motivated by rational, economic decisions that individuals make in response to income disparities between specific countries. Because of the significant wage differential between Brazil and Japan, nikkeijin who work as unskilled factory workers in Japan are able to earn five to ten times their middle-class Brazilian incomes. This was one of the major economic incentives that most nikkeijin mentioned when they discussed their decision to migrate. In Brazil, close to 60% of them earn less than $800 per month, and, according to the Brazilian census, the average salary for all Asians in Brazil (which consists mainly of Japanese-Brazilians) is a mere $377. In Japan, 40%–46% of them earn between $2,000 and $3,000 per month with 25%–40% earning over $3,000 per month. Only 20%–30% were in the lower income bracket of $1,000–2,000 per month. As a result of their high wages, in Japan the nikkeijin save an average of $20,000 per year, which is approximately four or five times their average yearly income in Brazil. These large income disparities are undoubtedly a product of fundamental economic imbalances in the international division of labor and the unequal distribution of wealth and productive capacity between advanced industrialized and developing countries.

Because the Japanese-Brazilians are acutely aware that it may take decades to earn in Brazil what they can earn in Japan in just a few years, they behave according to the principles of Homo economicus. One of my informants summarized this rational decision-making process as follows: “We hear about the incredible wages in Japan and start doing these calculations—comparing our Brazilian salaries with how much you can earn in Japan. Then we say, wow, our monthly salaries in Brazil can be earned in Japan in a few days. Despite the sacrifices and difficulties, we end up migrating to Japan because the economic opportunity is just too good to pass up.” Many Japanese-Brazilians plan to use their high earnings in Japan to buy a house, purchase consumer goods, or open a business in Brazil, and many send remittances back home to support their families.

Structural Economic Factors: Prolonged Economic Crisis in Brazil and an Acute Labor Shortage in Japan
Cost-benefit calculations of wage disparities by individuals on a purely microeconomic level are insufficient to initiate a mass migration without the presence of other economic push-pull pressures based on changing macrostructural economic conditions between the migrant sending and receiving country. These include the hierarchical international division of labor between core and peripheral countries, the development and expansion of the capitalist mode of production, the dislocations of economic development, cyclical fluctuations in economic conditions, and the impact of structural economic changes on labor demand and supply.

Undoubtedly, the primary structural economic push factor that
caused the Japanese-Brazilians to return migrate was the long-term deterioration of the Brazilian economy throughout the 1980s. This prolonged economic recession was characterized by massive hyperinflation, declines in real income, decreasing job security, and a series of ineffective and sometimes counterproductive anti-inflation economic programs by the government. Despite some brief results, all of these efforts to resuscitate the economy failed to control inflation and generate sustained industrial growth. Economic statistics for Brazil during the 1980s and early 1990s paint a grim picture. While Brazil's external debt continued to mount, reaching 123.9 billion by 1987, the annual economic growth rate remained very sluggish for most of the period despite a brief growth spurt in the mid-1980s. From 1988 to 1992, negative or negligible economic growth predominated. During this period, incredible rates of hyperinflation hit Brazil in three successive waves, cresting to higher and higher levels each time, and reaching the 2,000% per year mark by 1993. Meanwhile, the combined rate of unemployment and underemployment was 15% by 1991. The government had attempted to resuscitate the economy through a series of eight economic plans, all of which failed miserably to control inflation and some of which were actually counterproductive. In the 1980s, Brazil changed the finance minister more than 10 times.

Many of the Brazilian nikkeijin bore the brunt of the economic crisis. Since most did not suffer from severe unemployment, it was not the inability to find jobs, but the decline in income and purchasing power that pushed them out of Brazil. Not only was the real value of wages constantly eroded by the corrosive effect of hyperinflation despite the indexing of salaries, but there was also a decline in the absolute value of wages. This was further exacerbated as the market for professional and highly skilled jobs dried up, making it increasingly difficult for the well-educated, middle-class Japanese-Brazilians to find satisfying jobs commensurate with their higher qualifications and income expectations. As M. J. Piore remarks specifically in reference to Latin America, "The urban occupational structure of these developing countries is unequal to the size of the aspiring middle class . . . that has not only the aspirations but is also educated for and equipped to assume professional and managerial roles in the economy." Therefore, on the economic level, the return migration of the nikkeijin was driven by a serious labor market mismatch in the Brazilian domestic economy.

Although Japanese-Brazilians suffered much less from the Brazilian economic crisis than did Brazilians at lower socioeconomic levels, it was their relatively high socioeconomic status that made them more willing to migrate. People are frequently motivated to migrate not by the level of absolute economic deprivation but by relative deprivation, which is based on a discrepancy between expectations and economic reality. Because the Brazilian nikkeijin had enjoyed a comparatively privileged and
high standard of living and had developed higher expectations about the quality of life, they were less willing than others to let their deteriorating wages lower their living standards during the economic crisis. As a result, they opted to migrate in order to maintain their privileged way of life. In contrast, many poorer Brazilians were more willing to accept worsening economic conditions and chose not to migrate to more prosperous countries.

Indeed, most Brazilian nikkeijin continued to earn sufficient wages during the recession to support themselves, and few went to Japan because they could not survive economically in Brazil. Instead, they wished to use their sojourn in Japan to improve or maintain their standard of living in Brazil by purchasing homes, cars, and “luxury” items such as video and audio equipment, home appliances, TVs, and other electronic goods—things that they had come to expect in their lives, but which had become increasingly unaffordable. When reflecting on the reasons for migrating to Japan, remarks such as the following from a nikkeijin woman were very typical: “We never suffered from a lack of money or had serious economic problems back home. There was always enough to live on, to put food on the table, to buy basic necessities. The problem was that because of the economic crisis and Brazilian inflation, we couldn’t do anything more than this with our salaries—couldn’t buy a house, buy a car, or plan for our futures.” A young man also expressed a similar sense of unmet economic expectations: “I was a banker in Brazil, earning about $300 a month. This is enough to sustain a family, but only to eat. You can’t buy a house, or spend money on entertainment and travel. This is simply how Brazil is. So I had no choice but to come to Japan.” Thus, the threshold of migration is frequently lower for those of the middle class, so that they tend to migrate under less absolute economic pressure than do the destitute. Migration is the result of the unmet expectations of the relatively well-to-do as much as the economic desperation of the dispossessed. This is one important reason why migrant flows sometimes consist of better educated individuals of higher socioeconomic status.  

In addition to the economic push factors of declining wages and restricted job opportunities in the migrant sending country, there must also be sufficient economic demand for migrant labor in the receiving country for migration to be initiated. In the Japanese-Brazilian case, the severe and extended economic crisis in Brazil coincided with a growing economic crisis of a different sort in Japan—an acute shortage of unskilled labor, which was a significant pull factor drawing the Japanese-Brazilians to Japan.

By the late 1980s, the Japanese labor shortage threatened to cripple the country’s industrial base, especially in the manufacturing sector. According to statistics compiled by the Japanese Ministry of Labor, 48% of the companies in the manufacturing sector were labor deficient in
1989, and the proportion increased to 60% in 1990. The shortage in unskilled labor arose from a combination of fundamental and long-term economic, demographic, and sociocultural changes in Japan. Because of a continuous decline in the birth rate, the rapid aging of the population, and the depletion of previous rural labor sources, the Japanese domestic work force was unable to meet the increasing demand for unskilled labor during the period of economic expansion in the 1980s. In addition, Japanese youth, increasingly better educated and socially mobile, have come to actively shun unskilled and undesirable jobs designated as "3K" (the Japanese acronym for dirty, dangerous, and difficult), even if opportunities are more limited in the white-collar labor market.

Meanwhile, alternative sources of labor power were becoming increasingly insufficient to alleviate the growing labor shortage. Because the number of women in Japan's labor force had already expanded considerably (especially among part-time workers), Japanese female labor-participation rates had become quite high among industrialized countries, leaving little room for further significant increases. Despite an expanding population of elderly, notable increases in the employment of older workers were also limited. Because of the tradition in which retired workers continue working in lower-status jobs (frequently at smaller subcontractors), Japan's labor-participation rate for people older than 60 was already quite high and has remained stable for decades, making further substantial increases unlikely. Although mechanization and rationalization of production as labor-saving techniques had proved effective in the past, and further automation was still possible at many firms, this option had begun to show its limits partly because Japanese industry was already much more mechanized than that of other industrialized countries. Relocation of production abroad remained a viable alternative that continues to be vigorously pursued by large manufacturers as part of industrial restructuring. Yet, this option also had its limits—manufacturing cannot be completely transferred abroad without gutting the domestic economy, increasing unemployment, and disrupting the closely knit relationships between large manufacturers and smaller subcontractors, which provided the Japanese production system with its famed efficiency and flexibility. Although total Japanese investment abroad continued to rise, the rate of increase had declined significantly by the early 1990s. Also, small and medium-sized firms, where the labor shortage was most acute, generally did not have the know-how and capital required to relocate part of their production overseas. As a result, many labor-deficient firms began employing foreign workers as the only realistic and cost-efficient source of labor power. This abundance of high-paying jobs in Japan became a powerful economic incentive for migration among the Japanese-Brazilians when faced with declining job opportunities at home.

It is apparent that without strong economic pressures in both send-
ing and receiving countries, migration usually does not occur. However, just as important as the magnitude of both of these economic push and pull forces is their timing. If the worst phase of the Brazilian economic crisis had not coincided with the most acute stage of the Japanese labor shortage, a sustained return-migrant flow would not have been initiated. For instance, if the economic crisis in Brazil had occurred a number of years later, in the early 1990s when the Japanese labor shortage had abated because of a prolonged recession, it is unlikely that so many Brazilian nikkeijin would have migrated to Japan. Likewise, if the Brazilian recession had come earlier when Japan still had not begun to suffer from a crippling labor shortage, the Japanese-Brazilians would probably have gone to a different country, such as the United States, which has always had a strong demand for foreign labor and has been a traditional migrant destination for Brazilians.

*Economic Pressures and the Migrant Motivational Structure*

Even the economic determinants of migration are not based simply on a calculus of wage differentials and labor supply and demand in the sending and receiving countries, but also on a fundamental difference in motivation between native and migrant workers that is inherent in the dynamics of migration itself. The jobs available for migrant workers are usually those shunned by native workers—unskilled and low-status manual work that offers little hope for advancement. However, migrants agree to perform such undesirable work in the host society not only because wages there are higher than they are back home. Since migrants view themselves as temporary sojourners with strictly instrumental motives, they are responding to a different reward structure than do native workers. Therefore, unlike the natives, migrant workers view demeaning and dead-end jobs as a means to an end—a short-term opportunity to reap substantial economic rewards that will enable them to return to their home country to regain their previous lives on better financial footing. Because they view their jobs as only temporary, and they maintain a strong future orientation for a better life back home, they are personally less affected by the social degradation associated with their low-status jobs. In fact, many of them experience a reorientation from a “native” to a “migrant” motivational structure when they move abroad, which is especially apparent for well-educated and middle-class migrant groups such as the Japanese-Brazilians, who are willing to endure in the host country precisely the type of degrading jobs that they shunned and actively avoided as natives in their home country. If migrant workers did not have a motivational structure and work orientation that differs from that of native workers, a labor shortage in the host society, no matter how acute, would not be an incentive to migrate.
III. Transnational Connections and the Channeling of Migrant Flows: Ethnically Motivated Migration and Immigration Policies

Beyond Push-Pull Economics: Ethnicity and the Migrant Flow

Although an economic analysis provides us with a general understanding of the fundamental forces that initiate migration, it is insufficient to explain the entire migration process. The simultaneous conjunction of push forces in one country and pull forces in another does not, by itself, specify the exact direction of the migrant flow. In order to understand why the Brazilian nikkeijin migrated specifically to Japan in the late 1980s instead of to other advanced industrialized countries in need of migrant labor at the time, one must consider the impact of historical connections and linkages between Brazil and Japan. As emphasized by those taking a migration-systems approach, transnational economic, political, and historical linkages between sending and receiving countries are important determinants when understanding how migrant flows are constituted. Once general economic push-pull factors that instigate migration are in place, such transnational connections channel and direct migrants to specific countries because they serve as bridges and links between these countries that enable migration to occur. When faced with general economic pressures to migrate, individuals tend to choose countries that have close relationships with their own.

Among the most important of these transnational linkages between countries are the economic relationships that have emerged between advanced industrialized and developing countries because of the internationalization of capitalist production. However, what is notable about Japanese-Brazilian return migration is that it occurred in the relative absence of an intensive economic relationship between Brazil and Japan. Despite the global expansion of the Japanese economic system to numerous regions of the world, Japanese industry was not actively involved in the Brazilian economy in the 1980s. Because of the limited amount of foreign investment, trade, and transfer of capital between the two countries, economic ties and relationships were too weak to have a real impact on Japanese-Brazilian return migration. In addition to this low economic interaction, political ties and international relations between Japan and Brazil have also been weak. Except for a brief period of contact between the two governments at the beginning of the century to negotiate the acceptance of Japanese emigrants, there were no sustained political interactions, military conflicts, or relations of colonialism between the two countries that could have influenced migration from Brazil to Japan.

Instead, it was the transnational ethnic connections between the Brazilian nikkeijin and the Japanese that directed the migrant flow specifically to Japan. Such transnational ethnic ties were obviously the product of the historical emigration legacy of the Japanese to Brazil and have
remained relatively strong especially because some of the initial Japanese emigrants to Brazil (the first-generation issei) are still living and most have some contact with their Japanese relatives in Japan. However, even the second-generation nisei and third-generation sansei have maintained a strong sense of ethnic affinity with the Japanese, based on a consciousness of shared descent and presumed cultural affinities. Japanese-Brazilians are well regarded in Brazilian society for what are perceived to be their distinctive “Japanese” cultural attributes. In turn, they feel significant cultural differences with the majority of Brazilians, which they interpret as a product of their Japanese descent and parental upbringing. They take pride in their “Japanese” ethnic qualities, generally distancing themselves from what they perceive negatively as “Brazilian.” Therefore, many of them believe they are culturally similar to the Japanese of Japan and continue to maintain and assert a prominent “Japanese” ethnic identity in Brazil.

Consequently, when the Brazilian economic crisis of the late 1980s created considerable pressure to emigrate, the Japanese-Brazilians naturally turned to Japan, not only because of the abundance of high-paying jobs there, but also because of a strong consciousness of transnational ethnic connections to their ancestral homeland. Without this transnational link, the migrant flow would not have been initially directed toward Japan, given Japan’s highly restrictionist policies toward unskilled migrant workers that made it very difficult for even the nikkeijin to obtain work visas before the revised Japanese immigration law was implemented in 1990. However, despite such legal difficulties, Japan seemed familiar and culturally and personally accessible to the Japanese-Brazilians. Not only did the nikkeijin’s presumed cultural similarities and some knowledge of Japanese facilitate their sociocultural adaptation to the country, the very first migrants were able to find jobs through their relatives in Japan. Also, before the Japanese immigration law was revised, the only way for nikkeijin without Japanese nationality to reside and work in Japan was through a relative who could sponsor their stay. Given the importance of such transnational ethnic ties in enabling the Japanese-Brazilians to establish an immigrant beachhead in Japan, it is significant and not coincidental that the first Japanese-Brazilians who migrated to Japan in the mid-eighties were generally first-generation issei (most of whom have retained Japanese nationality) and second-generation nisei (with dual nationality) who had the closest ethnic attachments to Japan.

Soon, this initial trickle of Japanese-Brazilians into Japan would become a flow, and that flow would become a flood—a sudden and massive influx of immigrants unprecedented in modern Japanese history. In 1989, a mere 14,528 Brazilians were registered as foreigners in Japan. Three years later, the population had exploded 10-fold to 147,803, and their numbers have continued to expand at a steady pace since then, despite Japan’s prolonged economic recession (see table 1).
TABLE 1

NUMBERS OF FOREIGNERS FROM BRAZIL REGISTERED IN JAPAN, 1988–96

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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4,159</td>
<td>14,528</td>
<td>56,429</td>
<td>119,333</td>
<td>147,803</td>
<td>154,650</td>
<td>159,619</td>
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Source.—Ministry of Justice, Immigration Bureau Statistics.

However, what caused so many Japanese-Brazilians to migrate to Japan in such large numbers for economic reasons was not only their sense of ethnic commonality and identity with the Japanese, but also a strong awareness among the Japanese of their transnational ethnic ties with the Brazilian nikkeijin. When the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was implemented in 1990, the Japanese government decided to legally admit the nikkeijin without restriction up to the third-generation sansei. This new immigration policy opened the floodgates, enabling mass return migration. Although the government’s decision was based on economic and political considerations, a sense of transnational ethnic affinity with the nikkeijin based on common ties of blood and racial descent provided the critical ideological justification necessary to make the change in policy acceptable.

Japanese Immigration Policy and the Politics of Ethnicity

By the late 1980s, the shortage of unskilled labor in Japan was so acute that it threatened to paralyze many small and medium-sized businesses, especially in the manufacturing sector where close to half of the companies were suffering from insufficient labor. As a result, the Japanese government was confronting considerable pressure to liberalize its restrictive immigration policies, which strictly forbade the acceptance of any type of unskilled foreign worker. The government was also concerned with the rapidly expanding stock of illegal immigrants from various Asian countries who had come to Japan in response to the growing demand for foreign labor. There was also pressure from various sectors of the business community that suffered the most from the labor shortage, and government ministries representing business interests began taking a more liberal stance on immigration.

Within this general political landscape, the legal admission of the nikkeijin became an increasingly attractive option for the Japanese government. A few Japanese-Brazilians had already come to Japan to work, and there was pressure from various nikkeijin associations in both Brazil and Japan to eliminate the restrictive immigration barriers that they faced. Pressure was also mounting from Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Diet members from industrial areas with serious labor shortages, and the LDP policy committee on foreign workers advocated the creation of a special visa category for the sansei. Officials from various govern-
ment ministries involved in immigration policy making reasoned that the open acceptance of the nikkeijin would not only appease the demands of labor-hungry Japanese employers by providing them with the workers they needed but also bring the increasing tide of illegal immigration to Japan under control. In addition, since the total nikkeijin population in Brazil and South America was relatively small, the policy makers figured that they would not be faced with a deluge of immigrants as they would if they accepted foreign workers from nearby Asian countries, where the potential pool of immigrants seemed to be limitless by comparison. Some policy makers also believed that since the nikkeijin were not poor and destitute, relatively few would eventually migrate to Japan and they would quickly return to Brazil and not settle in Japan.

Although the government’s eventual policy to admit the nikkeijin was a response to these different economic and political pressures, it was ultimately a strong Japanese consciousness of transnational ethnic attachments and commonalities with the nikkeijin, based on shared racial descent, that proved to be decisive.59 Racial descent is the primary basis for the definition of Japanese ethnic identity because of an underlying Japanese ethnic assumption that correlates race with culture.60 In other words, those who are racially Japanese (i.e., of Japanese descent) are assumed to be culturally Japanese as well because Japanese culture is transmitted through family socialization among those of Japanese descent regardless of national boundaries.61 Because of such feelings of cultural similarity based on the primacy of racial and blood ties, there was a strong expectation among most Japanese I interviewed that despite their having been born in a foreign country nikkeijin have “inherited” a considerable amount of Japanese culture because they were raised by Japanese parents. This type of ethnic attitude toward the Brazilian nikkeijin is clearly expressed in the following statement by a Japanese store owner: “We think the Brazilian nikkeijin, as descendants of Japanese, must have retained good Japanese traditions because even if born abroad, they grew up in Japanese families. So they must be like the Japanese, at least a little . . . if their face is pure Japanese, we have the idea that their customs and attitudes will be at an above average Japanese level.”

Such sentiments of transnational ethnic affiliation were used as an appropriate ideology by Japanese immigration policy makers to make the legal admission of nikkeijin migrant workers politically possible. Although it is evident that the government viewed their legal admission as a convenient means to alleviate a crippling labor shortage and reduce the influx of illegal foreign workers,62 officials from various ministries claim that this was not the true intent of the policy and that they do not officially recognize the nikkeijin as unskilled foreign workers. Instead, the policy was (and continues to be) ideologically justified as an opportunity provided by the benevolence of the Japanese government for those of Japanese descent born abroad to explore their ethnic heritage and visit

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their ancestral homeland.\textsuperscript{43} Of course, Japanese ministry bureaucrats admit that the \textit{nikkeijin} are in fact working in Japan, but it is repeatedly stressed that the purpose of such labor is supposed to be for experiencing their ethnic homeland by visiting relatives, traveling, and learning the Japanese language and culture. For instance, the following remarks by a Ministry of Labor bureaucrat are very typical:

Previously, the \textit{nikkeijin} didn’t have opportunities to come to Japan. Now a lot of them come to Japan as \textit{dekasegi} [migrant workers]. But I don’t want people to forget that they are thus able to get to know the country of Japan and to visit their relatives. They are ancestral migrants—those that return to their ancestral homeland. This is the ideology of why we accept the \textit{nisei} and \textit{sansei}. Of course, they can do what they want in Japan—this is a right we respect. But it wasn’t just for \textit{dekasegi}—we separated the \textit{nikkeijin} from simple \textit{dekasegi} migration. For the \textit{nikkeijin}, it is hard to go back and forth between Japan and Brazil with the money they earn in Brazil. So now, they can work in Japan and pay for their expenses during their stay. It simply makes Japan closer for them.

By appealing to an ideology of common ethnic ancestry in this manner, the government was able to disguise its economic motives and acquire a much-needed and docile migrant labor force without contradicting, at least at the level of official appearances, the fundamental principle of Japanese immigration policy that no unskilled foreign workers will be accepted.

In addition, because of this ideology that privileges common descent as the basis for cultural affinity, government officials assumed that the \textit{nikkeijin} would have cultural and ethnic characteristics similar to the Japanese and would assimilate smoothly to Japanese society in contrast to other foreigners.\textsuperscript{44} As a result, the government viewed them as an effective way to deal with the labor shortage without disrupting Japan’s cherished ethnic homogeneity,\textsuperscript{45} which was viewed as responsible for the country’s social harmony and prosperity. According to the chairman of the LDP policy committee on foreign workers, “It is true that the proposal to actively accept the \textit{nikkeijin} as workers is an effective way to eliminate the labor shortage that confronts us and can be implemented quickly. If we accept Asians in large numbers . . . it would destroy the ethnic composition of Japan which is close to an ethnically homogeneous nation-state. However, if it is our \textit{nikkeijin} brethren, even if they can’t speak Japanese adequately, we are not as concerned.”\textsuperscript{46} This type of thinking toward the \textit{nikkeijin} was especially prevalent in the Ministry of Justice, which is in charge of immigration policy. A former Ministry bureaucrat who was involved in the immigration debate described the dominant ethos in the Ministry at that time: “\textit{Kettoshugi} [the principle of blood and lineage ties] and the privileging of foreigners with blood ties with Japanese was a fundamental concern of the Ministry of Justice from the very beginning when thinking about immigration policy. . . . The be-
lief in ethnic homogeneity and the wish to maintain it is especially strong with Ministry of Justice bureaucrats. They are really conservative and old-fashioned people. So the nikkeijin were not seen as a problem in this respect and they were the most acceptable out of all foreigners.” Therefore, immigration policy makers felt that the legal admission of the nikkeijin, as similar ethnic brethren of the Japanese, would not cause the social disruption and conflict associated with culturally and racially different foreigners. Again, this view was expressed by the LDP committee chairman cited above: “One big argument for those who oppose opening the country to immigrant labor is that if we accept Asians with different cultures and customs, conflicts such as racial discrimination are likely to occur. . . . [However,] even those who oppose the acceptance of foreign workers will probably not have many complaints with the special treatment of the nikkeijin, who have properly internalized Japanese customs. . . . [Therefore,] in the case of the nikkeijin, even if their citizenship is of a different country, they should be easy to admit as our brethren.”

In this manner, the Japanese government’s effective use of an ideology of transnational ethnic affinity made the open admission of the nikkeijin politically acceptable. In fact, the proposed change was generally supported by policy makers and did not cause any serious controversies or objections among the involved government ministries in contrast to the conflicts that were occurring over other proposed revisions to the immigration law. Only the Ministry of Labor raised a short-lived quibble that the new nikkeijin policy would be inconsistent with Japan’s immigration laws. Nor did the nikkeijin policy raise any concerns among the Japanese public or mass media despite the intense public debates at the time about whether Japan should open its doors to other migrants from Asia and the Middle East.

Therefore, transnational ethnic connections between the Japanese-Brazilians and the Japanese were directly responsible for channeling the migrant flow specifically to Japan in two different ways. In response to declining economic prospects in Brazil, the Japanese-Brazilians naturally chose Japan as their migrant destination because their ethnic affinities with the Japanese, as well as their personal contacts with Japanese relatives, seemed to facilitate their access and adaptation to Japan. Japan was then made even more accessible by a change in Japanese immigration policy that was motivated by the effective political manipulation of a transnational ethnic ideology. This is an example of how transnational connections between countries determine the precise destination of migrant flows that are instigated by economic conditions.

IV. The “Culture of Migration” and the Expansion of the Migrant Flow

Although increasing attention has been paid in the migration literature to the impact of immigration policies, political relationships, historical connections, and social networks on the migration process, rarely are
migrant actions and decisions analyzed as culturally motivated. Instead, culture is usually relegated to a residual category and relatively neglected in the explication of migrant flows. Although labor migration is seldom undertaken primarily for cultural purposes, cultural attitudes and perceptions of the migration process can have a significant impact on the decision to migrate.

Changing Meanings of Migration
It is unlikely that individuals would be willing to move if migration were not positively valued in the sending community. The local cultural perceptions of the economic benefits and rewards of migration and its acceptability as a strategy for economic survival are crucial variables that encourage individuals to migrate. However, it cannot be taken for granted that migration will always have positive cultural meanings in all potential migrant-sending communities. In some communities, migration for economic purposes, despite its considerable financial rewards, can have negative cultural connotations and even be subject to disapproval, scorn, and stigma, thus at first generating considerable reluctance to migrate. The Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil are a case in point.

Migration to Japan as an unskilled dekasegi worker for economic purposes was initially seen as a shame and embarrassment in the Japanese-Brazilian community and an indication of economic failure. Such concerns were especially strong because the migrant flow was initiated mainly by the first-generation issei. Many of them had left Japan long ago with considerable fanfare and strong hopes of succeeding economically in Brazil and then repatriating with considerable wealth a number of years later. As a result, the prospect of returning to their homeland after so many decades abroad to earn money as dekasegi migrant workers was equivalent to a belated and shameful admission of economic failure in Brazil. In fact, when migration to Japan first began, Japanese-Brazilian newspapers in São Paulo openly worried that the Japanese would think that the nikkeijin were having trouble surviving in Brazil and thus saw the dekasegi as an embarrassment to the entire community.

In fact, dekasegi migration was initially seen as an indication of low socioeconomic status. One of my informants recalled, “People were saying back then that if you are well-educated and hard working [as a Japanese-Brazilian], there should be absolutely no need to swallow your pride and go to Japan to work as a manual laborer. Only those who were poor and without ability would have to do such an embarrassing thing.” An issei woman described the situation at that time as follows: “When the son of a certain family would go to Japan as a dekasegi, the news would get out and others would gossip about how so-and-so had to send his children to Japan to earn money, saying what a shame that the family had to do such a thing.” Therefore, the negative cultural meaning and
stigma associated with dekasegi migration was based on a fear of appearing economically wretched and dishonorable not only in the eyes of the Japanese but within the Japanese-Brazilian community as well. Such feelings were especially strong among the Brazilian nikkeijin because of their high socioeconomic status in Brazilian society and reputation as a successful minority group.

These negative attitudes and unfavorable images of dekasegi migration were a significant cultural barrier that deterred migration for a number of years despite its economic benefits. As a result, even those who were suffering economically in Brazil refused to go to Japan since it would simply hurt their pride too much. The issue who did migrate in this early period did so secretly or used some other acceptable reason for going to Japan, such as visiting Japanese relatives or the ancestral grave. Despite worsening economic conditions in Brazil and the relatively large number of Japanese-Brazilians who could already legally migrate and work in Japan at this time, the total number of Brazilians registered as foreigners in Japan remained low for a number of years. In 1988, the registered immigrant population in Japan was still a negligible 4,159. Even in 1989, the year that Japan’s immigration law was revised, there were only 14,528 Brazilians in Japan. Only afterwards did the population expand dramatically to significant levels.

Although negative cultural sanctions can initially impede and restrict migration, as the economic benefits of migration become increasingly apparent to the community such cultural barriers usually dissolve. As the number of dekasegi gradually began to increase in response to the deepening Brazilian economic crisis, migration eventually became socially acknowledged among the Japanese-Brazilians, weakening its previously strong negative cultural connotations. In contrast to the earlier sense of shame and embarrassment, community leaders began to justify the return migration of the Japanese-Brazilian by saying that Japan was requesting their assistance to maintain its prosperity or that the Japanese economy would collapse without them. The dekasegi experience also began to be touted as an opportunity for the younger nikkeijin to learn Japanese, experience Japanese culture, discover their homeland, and acquire technical skills in Japan. Meanwhile, around 1989 and 1990, the first group of dekasegi began to return to Brazil with their substantial savings. As the returnees started to use the money earned in Japan to purchase nice homes, open businesses, and buy cars and other household items, stories about their economic success were widely disseminated, both through their acquaintances and by prominent coverage in local nikkeijin community papers. With the continued increase in the number of returnees, dekasegi success stories about instant wealth in Japan continued to proliferate, and in a couple years, almost everyone in the tightly knit community had heard about or knew acquaintances or relatives who had gone to Japan and had been able to realize their economic dreams.
The extraordinary economic benefits of migration became readily apparent, even to the most skeptical. Of course, there were a good number of Japanese-Brazilians who did not succeed in Japan and had considerable difficulty meeting their financial goals. However, such migrants were hardly noticed back home because they tended to remain quiet and preferred not to draw attention to themselves. They were thus completely overshadowed by those with positive economic experiences, some of whom ostentatiously displayed their instant wealth and talked openly with others about their successes.\(^{56}\) In addition, those \textit{dekasegi} who were unable to earn and save sufficient money were more likely to remain in Japan in continued pursuit of their economic goals and, thus, did not directly influence their home communities.\(^{57}\) Therefore, only migrant success stories were noticed back home.

As G. Gmelch notes in his extensive review of return migration, returnees from the host country frequently encourage others to emigrate as well.\(^{58}\) The amazing and conspicuous economic success of the Japanese-Brazilian returnees brought new meaning to \textit{dekasegi} migration—it suddenly became an incredible economic opportunity too good to be passed up. When migrants return to their home country with substantial wealth, the relative deprivation that those who did not migrate feel becomes a strong economic incentive for migration.\(^{59}\) In fact, many Japanese-Brazilians felt that if they did not take advantage of the opportunity, they would be left out of the general economic prosperity that others were enjoying. In the words of one individual, "Today, ironically, those who stay in Brazil suffer the sensation of losing a once in a lifetime economic opportunity."\(^{60}\) Indeed, for some, \textit{dekasegi} migration had become similar to winning the lottery—it was equated with a financial dream come true.\(^{61}\)

The result was nothing short of a complete reversal in cultural attitudes as the meaning of migration quickly changed from something to be avoided to the logical and obvious thing to do. This economically motivated cultural change is quite remarkable. According to a nisei man in Brazil, "At first, we were saying that only those who are dumb and were suffering economically in Brazil go to Japan to earn money. Now we say that you are dumb if you don't go to Japan to earn money." Yet another remarked, "At first, we said, why go to Japan to do \textit{dekasegi}? What an incredible embarrassment. Now we say \textit{dekasegi}, and think nothing of it. Instead, recently, we tell our kids, why don't you become a \textit{dekasegi}? You are going to work and earn lots of money—what is wrong with that?"\(^{62}\) Likewise, an issei woman in Brazil observed, "Even those who were at first saying that going to Japan as a \textit{dekasegi} was a shame and disgrace eventually ended up migrating to Japan themselves." By the time I conducted fieldwork in the Japanese-Brazilian communities of Ribeirão Preto and Porto Alegre during 1993–94, there were absolutely no negative attitudes remaining about the \textit{dekasegi}. 
Not only did the dekasegi returnees from Japan cause such a dramatic change in cultural attitudes by making migration appear to be a potential financial jackpot, they also made this migrant dream of easy riches seem readily attainable. No longer were there just rumors of instant wealth in Japan—now there was tangible proof that it could be done. The returnees were living demonstrations that any Brazilian nikkōjin could go to Japan, earn a lot of money in a couple of years, and return with savings that could take decades to accumulate in Brazil. Thus, a sense of realism is brought to the immigrant dream. As one Japanese-Brazilian in Japan remarked, "Most of us are influenced by the earlier dekasegi. Lots of the nikkōts want to do the same thing now because they see these dekasegi come home and buy houses, a car, a stereo, open a business, and show off their wealth. We think we can realize the same dream because we are the same nikkōjin with the same privileges. In fact, I think very few of us would have come to Japan if it weren't for this dream we got from the earlier dekasegi."

Such cultural perceptions of the extraordinary economic rewards of migration were, of course, often misleading. As mentioned above, these expectations were frequently the product of exaggerated accounts of migrant success and the relative obscurity of those dekasegi who did not succeed. Others were misled by labor brokers who did not fulfill their promises of high salaries in Japan and deducted significant amounts from wages as kickbacks. Most found it harder to save money than expected because of the high cost of living in Japan. In addition, by 1991, the nikkōjin hiring boom ended among Japanese companies as a serious recession beset the Japanese economy, making it very difficult for the Japanese-Brazilians to maintain their previous income levels. However, despite such increasing confrontations with economic reality in Japan, there is no indication that the immigrant dream is dying. The most recent dekasegi I interviewed in Japan still had the same high hopes of quick riches in a couple of years, although most were aware that with the recession earnings were lower now. Once a positive cultural meaning of migration is firmly established in a community, the economic dream lives on and continues to fuel further migration.

In this manner, a "culture of migration" was firmly established among the Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil. A community with a culture of migration is one in which positive attitudes and a high regard for the economic benefits of out-migration has developed and become firmly entrenched, creating a cultural propensity to move abroad for economic reasons. As a result, migration becomes prevalent and routine to the point where the community's members are dependent on it as a critical means for economic survival, sustenance, and advancement.

The development of a culture of migration therefore greatly increases and expands the migrant flow. By the early 1990s, a migrant rush to Japan (called the dekasegi "boom") was on, as the Japanese consulate
in São Paulo was suddenly flooded with visa applications, and flights headed for Japan were booked with eager Japanese-Brazilians ready to take advantage of the economic opportunities awaiting them in their ancestral homeland. "The whole world was going to Japan during that period," one individual recalls. "Some of my friends and relatives had already left. Others were planning to go." Although their return migration is barely over a decade old, a good portion of the entire Japanese-Brazilian community already has migrant experience in Japan. Since the total immigrant population is now close to 220,000, this means that about 18% of the entire Japanese-Brazilian population of 1.2 million currently resides in Japan. This percentage is even more remarkable when one considers that it does not include a large group of individuals who migrated to Japan in the past and have returned to Brazil and that close to 45% of the Japanese-Brazilian populace consists of very young and older individuals who generally do not migrate because of their age. The number of repeat migrants entering Japan each year also rose dramatically, doubling from 12,552 in 1991 to 26,446 in 1994.

In addition to increasing the sheer volume of Japanese-Brazilian dekasegi, the culture of migration also greatly diversified the migrant flow. As the economic advantages of return migration became culturally acknowledged and valued in the Brazilian nikkeijin community, migration was no longer viewed simply as a way to deal with economic hardship in Brazil. It also became the most effective means to realize financial goals and to attain socioeconomic mobility. Therefore, although the very first Japanese-Brazilian dekasegi tended to be poorer and lower-class individuals who went to Japan in response to pure economic necessity, as the return migration of the Japanese-Brazilians developed, an increasing number of individuals of higher socioeconomic status began joining the migrant flow, causing a marked shift in migrant composition. Such individuals can be classified as "opportunity migrants" who view migration not as a necessary means of economic survival, but as a quick and appropriate strategy of social mobility and advancement. In fact, a good proportion of the migrant flow now consists of such opportunity migrants. In a culture of migration, even better-off individuals without any real economic need become dependent on migration to pursue their socioeconomic aspirations.

The culture of migration also diversified the migrant flow in terms of generation and age. In contrast to the first group of migrants, which consisted of older issei along with a contingent of nisei, most dekasegi are now nisei and sansei, and the issei have become only a small minority. Of the Japanese-Brazilians in Japan, 67% are nisei and 30% are sansei, whereas only 5.5% remain issei. At the same time, the migrant flow now consists of more young people. Among those surveyed by the 1995 Japan Institute of Labor study, the proportion of migrants older than 40 declined from 33.8% before June 1990 to 24.3% between June 1990 and
April 1991, while for those in their 20s it increased from 10.1% to 42% during this period.

In the Japanese-Brazilian case, therefore, culture has played a significant role in expanding the migrant flow. Undoubtedly, local cultural attitudes and values prevalent in the sending community structure how individuals perceive the migration process itself, which influences the decision to migrate. The development of a culture of migration not only encourages more individuals to migrate, it diversifies the migrant flow in terms of socioeconomic status, generation, and age.

V. Transnational Social Networks
Transnational social networks that link the sending community to the host country are another variable that considerably increases the migrant flow. In the Japanese-Brazilian case, they consist of a transnational employment system and the personal networks of Japanese-Brazilians residing in both countries. Such migrant networks are critical for facilitating migration.

Labor Recruitment and Employment Networks
Although the return migration of Japanese-Brazilians is still relatively recent, an extensive, highly organized, and efficient transnational labor recruitment and employment network has already been established. The system consists of two parts: (1) indirect employment (kansetsu koyo) through the mediation of transnational labor brokers and (2) direct employment (chokusetsu koyo) through the recruitment efforts of Japanese companies. By providing potential Japanese-Brazilian migrants with jobs and housing in Japan as well as with other social services, this migrant labor system has encouraged further migration by greatly simplifying the process.

The indirect employment system consists of a network of labor-broker agencies and firms in both Brazil and Japan. There are numerous brokers in Brazil who recruit Japanese-Brazilians through extensive personal contacts in the community or through advertisements in local community papers. The Brazilian broker agencies send the Japanese-Brazilians to Japan, where they are turned over to a Japanese labor-broker firm. This labor-broker system in Japan partly utilizes the existing Japanese system of labor recruitment. Japan has always had a system of labor-broker firms (assen gaisha) that have traditionally supplied companies with a disposable, marginal work force of Japanese part-time, temporary, and seasonal workers. Since the nikkeijin migrants are also part of Japan’s peripheral labor force, the same assen gaisha system has been for them as well. These broker firms have extensive contacts with a variety of Japanese companies, which simply “borrow” from the broker the necessary number of Japanese-Brazilian workers for limited periods of time. When the workers are no longer needed, they are
conveniently "returned" to the broker's firm, which then transfers the excess workers to another company that needs the labor.

In this manner, these transnational networks of labor brokers provide direct access to a wide range of jobs in various Japanese companies. They also take care of the paperwork needed to acquire a visa and they finance all travel expenses, which are later deducted from the salaries of the Japanese-Brazilians. Once in Japan, the Japanese labor-broker firm provides the nikkeijin with housing, transportation to and from work, medical and accident insurance, and an array of other miscellaneous employment and social services. Labor brokerage has become a very profitable business, since brokers charge exorbitantly for their services and deduct a considerable amount from the hourly wages of the Japanese-Brazilians as kickbacks.

In addition to this indirect employment system, a smaller number of Japanese-Brazilians were brought to Japan through the direct recruitment and employment efforts of Japanese companies who do not rely on the transnational labor-broker system. This direct employment system, which was started as early as 1989, was created by various companies partly in response to the problems and abuses of the labor-broker system. Such companies rely on nikkeijin organizations, personal contacts and agents, newspaper advertisements, or an employment agency sponsored by the Japanese government to recruit Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil, who are hired directly by the company on contracts that usually last from 6 months to a year with the possibility of renewal. The abuses and excesses of the broker system such as broker fees, extra charges, and kickbacks are completely eliminated, and the companies themselves incur the necessary housing, transportation, and other related costs. Like the broker system, however, the nikkeijin are hired strictly as temporary contract laborers (kikan shain) and not as permanent, formal workers (seishain), except in a few rare cases.

The creation of such well-organized transnational labor-employment networks has greatly expanded the Japanese-Brazilian migrant flow to Japan by reducing the difficulty and uncertainty of migration. Because of the extensive services provided by this transnational employment system, the Brazilian nikkeijin no longer need to pay their own airfare, find their own jobs, fulfill difficult visa requirements without assistance, and live in very cramped quarters in Japan the way the first migrants did. In addition, since all travel expenses are covered by advanced loans and jobs are guaranteed, they do not need a substantial amount of money or personal connections with relatives in Japan in order to migrate. In fact, many times, the only thing that they really have to do is to visit a labor broker or recruitment office in São Paulo. The rest is automatically handled. One dekasegi described the common experience: "It's so easy to come to Japan nowadays to work. All I had to do was go to a tourist agency in Liberdade [a district of São Paulo] and they took care of
everything from my plane ticket and visa to finding me a job and housing in Japan. I just filled out some forms and submitted some documents. Within a few weeks, I found myself working in a factory in Japan."

Not only does this transnational employment network greatly simplify and facilitate the migration process, it allows the Japanese-Brazilians to actually find employment in Japan before they migrate by providing them with specific information about job availability, wages, and working conditions while they are still in Brazil. As noted above, they are sometimes misled by deceptive promises of high wages and favorable working conditions by labor brokers. By guaranteeing the Japanese-Brazilians profitable jobs in Japan, the transnational employment system seemed to eliminate the uncertainty and risk of migration and made the fulfillment of financial dreams appear to be a reality within easy reach, if not almost assured. For many, the instant, ready-made, and profitable migration packages offered by labor brokers and Japanese company recruiters were too financially tempting to resist, greatly increasing the desire to migrate.

**Transnational Personal Networks and the Migration Process**

In addition to such effective and extensive labor-recruitment and employment networks, personal transnational networks between Japanese-Brazilians living in Brazil and Japan have also expanded the migrant flow by increasing the number of chain migrants called over by their families or friends who have prolonged their stays in Japan. Undoubtedly, such migrants find that it is much easier to go to Japan when they are sponsored by a family member or close acquaintance. They can also be assured that they will be part of a cohesive, personal ethnic network of mutual acquaintances who provide practical assistance and advice, as well as emotional, psychological, and social support. Many chain migrants would not have left Brazil without the active support, encouragement, and patronage of those already in Japan.

As was the case with the culturally induced migration considered in the previous section, personal transnational networks have increased not only the number of migrants to Japan but also their diversity. In contrast to the first wave of migrants who were responding strictly to economic incentives, chain migrants are primarily motivated by social reasons (the desire to reunite with family, relatives, or friends in Japan). In addition, since many of them are family members (the number of Japanese-Brazilians with their families in Japan rose from about 35% of the population in 1990 to 60% a few years later), a greater number of women and children are now part of the migrant flow. Whereas earlier migrants were primarily single male sojourners, by 1990 women constituted 38% of the immigrant population in Japan. The proportion of women continued to rise with a more balanced 58%/42% male/female ratio by 1994. In 1990, individuals younger than 24 years made up only 4.8% of the immigrant
population, but by 1994 the proportion was up to 9%. Because of extensive transnational employment and personal networks, migration has become readily accessible and desirable to a wider cross section of the Japanese-Brazilian populace.

VI. Conclusion: A Self-Sustaining Migration System
The explication of any migrant flow is a complicated business, requiring an analysis of various possible causal factors and the extent and nature of their influence. From the perspective of migration-systems theory, in this study I attempted to provide a comprehensive account that considers economic pressures, along with transnational ethnic connections, cultural perceptions of migration, and transnational social networks.

Although there have always been serious economic inequalities between Japan and Brazil in terms of wage and employment levels, the mere existence of such structural disparities between First and Third World countries does not by itself initiate migration, which usually requires additional economic instigators. In the case of the Japanese-Brazilians, a worsening economic crisis at home, which increased the pressure to emigrate, coincided with a crippling labor shortage in Japan, which served as the economic magnet that drew the migrants to Japan.

However, in order to explain the precise direction of the migrant flow, it is necessary to analyze the historical, political, and ethnic linkages that have developed between the sending and the host country. In this sense, I have explored how the course of migration can be ethnically determined. Once the economic incentives for migration were securely in place, an ideology of transnational ethnic affiliation between the nikkeijin and the Japanese served as the crucial international link that channeled the Japanese-Brazilians specifically to Japan. Not only were such strong ethnic bonds critical in the decision of the Japanese-Brazilians to return migrate in response to declining economic fortunes at home, but it also made the Japanese government willing to openly accept them for its own economic purposes.

Meanwhile, a historically conditioned cultural reluctance to migrate among the Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil was finally overcome as the recession continued to deepen in Brazil and those who began returning from Japan offered tangible evidence that the dekasegi experience was immensely profitable. The subsequent cultural glorification of migration within the Japanese-Brazilian sending community led to the development of a culture of migration that encouraged larger numbers and a broader cross section of the community to take advantage of the economic opportunities in Japan. Highly efficient and comprehensive transnational labor-recruitment and employment networks, reinforced by personal networks of friends and relatives, were soon established, greatly facilitating the migration process. The net effect of these cultural influences and transnational networks was to significantly expand and diversify the migrant

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flow to Japan in terms of socioeconomic status, generation, age, and gender. Undoubtedly, these causal factors were powerful enough to initiate and sustain a considerable migrant flow over a large geographical distance between two countries that have had few historical, economic, or political ties.

When assessing the differential impact of these causal variables—economic, ethnic, and sociocultural—on Japanese-Brazilian return migration, one must examine both their nature and relative importance. In this article I have argued that economic forces instigated migration, transnational ethnic connections channeled migration to Japan, and the creation of a culture of migration and transnational migrant labor networks further expanded and diversified the migrant flow. When the relative importance of these various influences on migration is considered, it is evident that economic pressures do not necessarily take precedence over noneconomic variables in the explication of migration systems. Although economic push-pull factors may be the initial underlying force that fundamentally drives labor migration, they account for the movements of migrants only in a very general sense and do not explain the specificity of the migrant flow, either in terms of precise destination or specific composition. In other words, economic forces alone do not explain why Japanese-Brazilians migrated to Japan rather than to other First World countries with labor shortages, nor why so many opportunity and chain migrants, who were not primarily responding to economic necessity, also chose to go to Japan. Without the presence of important ethnic and sociocultural forces that direct and expand the migrant flow, economic forces, however powerful, have very little meaning.

Over time, these sociocultural factors can even reduce the importance of economic conditions as the primary causal force that motivates migration. In other words, once migration is initiated by economic factors, the sociocultural structures that are subsequently developed continue to sustain the migrant flow even if the original economic causes of migration weaken. Although a severe and prolonged recession in Japan since 1992 and a sustained economic recovery in Brazil after the implementation of the Plano Real in 1994 have significantly reduced the economic pressures to migrate, the number of Japanese-Brazilians in Japan has continued to steadily increase (see table 1, p. 10 above). Since migration is now culturally encouraged and highly effective transnational migrant labor networks have made the process so easy, the stigma and personal cost of migration have been greatly reduced, causing the Japanese-Brazilians to migrate under much less economic pressure than before. In this manner, the migrant flow has become self-sustaining because of its sociocultural constitution, making it relatively insensitive to cyclical economic fluctuations in either the host or home country, factors that potentially could reduce the level of migration.72

Therefore, despite continuously changing economic conditions in
Japan and Brazil, a stable migration system has now been established between the two countries that seems to assure the continued influx of Brazilian nikkeijin into Japan. Many of the nikkeijin have become circular migrants who shuttle back and forth between the home and host countries, and they are also prolonging their stays in Japan by becoming immigrant settlers. As the Japanese-Brazilians become a permanent ethnic minority group in Japan, significant future repercussions can be expected not only for the Japanese economy, but for Japanese ethnic relationships and ethnonational identity in general.73

Notes

* This article is based on almost 2 years of fieldwork with the Japanese-Brazilians in both Brazil and Japan. I spent eight and a half months in Brazil studying the Japanese-Brazilian communities in two separate cities in the southeastern region of the country. In addition to participant observation, I conducted approximately 70 interviews with Japanese-Brazilians. During my 1-year stay in Japan, I conducted participant observation by residing in two cities in the greater Tokyo area, both with high concentrations of Japanese-Brazilian immigrants, and by working intensively for 4 months in a large factory with them. I conducted almost 100 interviews with Japanese-Brazilians as well as with Japanese citizens (factory workers and city residents), local and federal government officials, company managers, labor brokers, schoolteachers, and journalists. The research was supported by a Fulbright DDRA Fellowship and a Wenner-Gren research grant (#5757). The write-up of the research was funded by the Social Science Research Council and the Japan Foundation.

1. Mary M. Kritz and Hania Zlotnik, “Global Interactions: Migration Systems, Processes, and Policies,” in *International Migration Systems: A Global Approach*, ed. Mary M. Kritz, Lin Lean Lim, and Hania Zlotnik (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 1. This is, of course, not to deny that many immigrants before World War II (e.g., those who came to the U.S. from Europe) intended only short-term stays and eventually returned home or that a significant amount of migration today still consists of permanent migrants (especially to countries such as the U.S., Australia, and Canada). See Michael J. Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 51–52.


3. I put “return migration” in quotes here because in most cases, it is not the original Japanese emigrants, but their descendants who are “returning” to Japan.


5. For example, see Castles and Miller, pp. 21–22; Wayne Cornelius, Philip L. Martin, and James F. Hollifield, “Introduction: The Ambivalent Quest for Immigration Control,” in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective,*


9. Toyoe Kitagawa, “Gunma-ken Oizumi-machi ni okeru nikkeijin rodosha hiaringu chosa: Eijyuka shikou to ukeire kibanssebi” (Survey hearing of nikkeijin workers in Gunma-ken, Oizumi-machi: The intention to become permanent and the fundamental framework for their acceptance), in *Hitotoko kokusai ni kansuru sogoteki kenkyu: Tokuni gaikokujin rodosha ni kansuru chosa keihou o chushin ni* (General survey on the internationalization of people: Especially focusing on the survey research about foreign workers) (Tokyo: Toyo University, 1992), and *Hamamatsu-shi ni okeru gaikokujin no seikatsu jittai/ishiki chosa: Nikkei Burajiru/Perujin o chushin ni*. According to one survey, the average monthly salary for South American nikkeijin workers in Japan was $3,366 per month for men and $2,044 for women (JICA).

11. According to 1992 World Bank Statistics, the annual per capita income in Japan ($28,220) was more than 10 times that of Brazil ($2,770). The average monthly cost of living in Japan for 1993 was $3,352 per household, whereas it is generally said that $500–$600 per month is sufficient to support a family at a modest level in Brazil. The wage imbalance between the two countries is also a product of phenomenal Japanese economic growth during the 1980s, which caused the value of the yen to skyrocket from 249 to 138 yen to the dollar between 1982 and 1989, greatly increasing the international value of Japanese wages.

12. According to research surveys, the most important financial objectives of Japanese-Brazilians are purchasing a house in Brazil and opening a business, followed by remitting money to family back home, and saving money for educational purposes (Japan Institute of Labor; Kitagawa, Hamamatsu-shi ni okeru gaikokujin no seikatsu jittai/ishiki chosa: Nikkei Buraajiru/Peruji o chushin ni). Most of the Japanese-Brazilian dekasegi I interviewed had one or more of these economic objectives.


14. Few of my informants in Japan had been unemployed before migrating to Japan. Likewise, only 3.5% of those Japanese-Brazilians surveyed by the Japan Institute of Labor study had been unemployed before going to Japan. A similar situation is noted by Cornelius among Mexican migrants to the United States, where underemployment and inadequate wages are more responsible for migration than unemployment. See Wayne A. Cornelius, Mexican Migration to the United States: Causes, Consequences, and U.S. Responses (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for International Studies, MIT, 1978), pp. 39–40.

15. According to nationwide statistics published by Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, the percentage of the populace earning less than five minimum wages (about $400) rose from 46.6% in 1983 to 50% in 1988. In the greater São Paulo area (where most Japanese-Brazilians live), the real value of wages fell 8% in 1987 and 21.6% in 1990, despite some brief increases in real wages in the 1980s.


17. Piore (n. 1 above), p. 139.

18. Relative deprivation is a concept that David Aberle used to analyze the peyote religion among the Navaho. See David Friend Aberle, The Peyote Religion among the Navaho (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

19. Other studies also document how migrants are not always drawn from the rural or impoverished sectors of society but frequently are middle class and


21. The birth rate has declined by almost 32% from 2.14 children per family in 1965 to 1.46 in 1993—the world’s lowest fertility rate. See Wayne A. Cornelius, "‘Japan: The Illusion of Immigration Control,’" in Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield, eds., p. 378. Japan has the fastest growing elderly population among industrialized countries. The proportion of the population over the age of 65 grew from 7.1% in 1970 to 10.3% in 1985 and then jumped to 14.5% in 1995. Future projected increases are equally steep with the over-65 population expected to constitute 19.1% of the entire population by 2005 and 25.8% by 2025 (Minister of Labor Secretariat).

22. The total number of women in Japan’s labor force grew from 19 million in 1965 to 23.7 million in 1985. In 1994, there were 27 million women in the work force. Japan’s female labor-force participation rate is rather high even compared with other industrialized nations and has generally hovered in the 48%–51% range since 1965. In 1994, the female labor-force participation rate was 50.2%, which was higher than that in Germany, Spain, Italy, and France and was comparable to rates in the United Kingdom (52.9%) and Australia (52.7%), although considerably lower than in the United States (58.2%) and Canada (57.6%).

23. Despite the early retirement age of 60 in Japan, 56.6% of those between the ages of 60 and 64 and 24.8% of those over the age of 65 are still working (1994 figures). Labor-market participation rates for elderly in these two age categories have remained at this high level for at least 2 decades and show no signs of seriously increasing in the future. Despite the continued rise in the elderly population, none of the Japanese employers I interviewed felt that increased hiring of older workers was a viable means to deal with labor shortages. They also noted how older workers are more expensive (unless they are retired), less productive, and many are no longer able to adequately perform physically demanding factory jobs.

24. In addition, many small and medium-sized firms, where most of the labor shortage was concentrated, found it difficult to mechanize further due to the lack of capital and their reliance on flexible production schemes to adjust to constantly changing orders from parent firms.

25. Japanese direct foreign investment abroad increased over fourfold from $12.2 billion in 1985 to $56.9 billion in 1990.


27. In his historical overview of migration from Europe and Mexico, Massey (n. 13 above) also notes how the coincidence of economic push and pull forces in the sending and receiving countries was important for initiating or increasing migration flows.

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28. The United States has been the primary destination for Brazilian migrants. Margolis (n. 16 above), p. 15, estimates that there are probably anywhere from 350,000 to 400,000 Brazilian immigrant workers currently living in the United States.

29. The importance of such immigrant motivations in understanding migration patterns is also mentioned by Piore (n. 1 above).

30. The work of Sassen (n. 13 above) exemplifies this type of approach to understanding migrant flows.

31. Although Japanese foreign investment in Brazil rose briefly from the end of the 1960s to the early 1970s before the oil shock, it had fallen to very low levels by the time Japanese-Brazilians started migrating to Japan. In 1985, Japanese direct foreign investment in Brazil was only $314 million, a mere 2.5% of total Japanese foreign investment abroad that year, which amounted to $12.2 billion. In 1990, as Japanese foreign investment continued to expand rapidly, investment in Brazil dropped to only 1% of the total, and then to 0.4% in 1991. Likewise, Japanese trade with Brazil also remains quite low. Since 1985, the total value of Japanese exports to Brazil has ranged from $1.44 billion to $1.8 billion dollars, a mere 0.3%–0.4% of Japan’s entire export trade.

32. The general lack of economic and political relationships between Japan and South America is exemplified by public opinion surveys conducted in Japan that indicate a very low level of awareness and appreciation of South American countries. In a 1993 NHK (Japan Broadcasting Agency) Japanese public opinion survey, respondents were asked to indicate how close Japan’s relationships were to five world regions and three countries (the U.S., Korea, and China): 36.7% felt that Japan did not have close ties with Latin America, which was the second highest percentage after Africa (42.9%) and basically tied with Eastern Europe (37.3%). In fact, respondents felt Japan had closer relationships with Oceania and the Middle and Near East (NHK Service Center, NHK seron chosa shiryosu dai roku shu [NHK public opinion survey compendium, no. 6] [Tokyo: NHK, 1993]). In addition, when respondents were asked why they do not feel a sense of affinity to Latin America, 42% cited geographical distance, 24.5% cited lack of cultural and historical connections, and 20.9% mentioned lack of economic and political relationships. See Prime Minister’s Office, Seron chosa nenkan: Zenkoku seron chosa no genjyo (Annual public opinion surveys) (Tokyo: Prime Minister’s Office, 1985–94).

33. Of the entire Japanese-Brazilian population in Brazil, 12.5% still consists of issei (São Paulo Humanities Research Center [n. 8 above]).


35. Under the new immigration provisions, the nikkeijin are allowed to enter Japan on two types of visas, both of which have no activity restriction and can be renewed an indefinite number of times. For the second-generation nisei, the previously restrictive requirements and procedures for obtaining the Nihonjin no Haigusha (spouse of Japanese) visa were simplified, making it much easier for them to enter Japan, as long as they can prove their Japanese descent. The government also set aside a new teijyusha (long-term residence) visa category for the third-generation sansei.

36. Minister of Labor Secretariat (n. 20 above).
37. A Ministry of Justice study in 1989 found that most of the companies
surveyed wanted an increase in the number of nikkei workers in Japan (Nihon
keizai shimbun [April 23, 1990]).
38. Yasuo Fujisaki, Dekasegi nikkei gaikokujin rodosha (Migrant nikkei
39. See also Takashi Miyajima, Gaikokujin Rodosha to Nihon shakai (Foreign
workers and Japanese society) (Tokyo: Akaishi Shoten, 1993); Yoko Sel-
lek, "The U-Turn Phenomenon among South American-Japanese Descendants:
and Keiko Yamanaka and Takashi Miyajima, "A Paradox of Skilled Workers
'Only': Japan's New Immigration Policies Regarding Foreign Labor" (paper
presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Pitts-
burgh, August 20–24, 1992).
40. See Takamichi Kajita, Gaikokujin rodosha to Nihon (Foreign laborers
and Japan) (Tokyo: NHK Books, 1994), p. 169–70; Dorinne Kondo, "Dissolu-
tion and Reconstitution of Self: Implications for Anthropological Epistemology,
" Cultural Anthropology 1 (1986): 76; Kosaku Yoshino, Cultural National-
ism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry (London: Routledge,
41. See also Kondo.
42. See also Kajita, p. 172; Sellek, p. 263.
43. Compare with Kajita, p. 170.
44. Compare with Yamanaka and Miyajima, p. 20.
45. See also Miyajima, p. 59.
46. Toshiko Nojima, "Susumetai nikkeijin no tokubetsu ukeire" (Pro-
posal for the special admission of the nikkeijin), Gekkan jiyu minsu (November
47. Ibid., pp. 98–99.
48. Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield, eds. (n. 5 above); Kritz, Lim, and
Zlotnik, eds. (n. 1 above); Zolberg, "The Next Waves: Migration Theory for a
Changing World" (n. 7 above).
49. There is occasional mention of how the mass media and popular culture
can encourage migration by familiarizing individuals with the host society
so that it feels closer and less foreign. The reduction of cultural distance or
barriers between societies also facilitates migration, as analyzed by Monica
Boyd, "Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent
Developments and New Agendas," International Migration Review 23
(1989): 638–70; Fawcett and Arnold (n. 4 above), p. 462; and Massey (n. 13
above).
50. Koichi Mori, "Burajiru kara no Nikkeijin 'Dekasegi' no Suii" (Changes in the
nikkeijin dekasegi from Brazil), Iyuu kenkyuu 29 (1992): 144–64, esp.
p. 161.
51. Angelo A. Ishii, "Nikkei Burajirujin dekasegi rodosha no ibunka komun-
ikeshon ni kansuru kenkyu" (Research about the cultural differences communi-
cation of the Brazilian nikkei workers) (M.A. thesis, University of Tokyo, 1991),
p. 164.
53. Although there are no government immigration statistics available
about the proportion of the Japanese-Brazilian population in Brazil that has Japa-
nese nationality, the JICA 1992 report found that 21% of the nikkeijin migrants
had Japanese nationality (either issei or dual nationals). This figure seems a bit
high and a more accurate estimate is probably around 10%. These individuals
could always freely enter Japan to work. Even those without Japanese nationality
could enter legally and work, although visa requirements were stiff.

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55. Fujisaki (n. 38 above); Ishi, “Nikkei Burajirujin dekasegi rodosha no ibunaka komyunikeshon ni kansuru kenyu,” p. 8.
58. Ibid.
59. See Massey (n. 13 above), p. 400, for a summary.
61. Ibid.
63. Cornelius defines the culture of migration as “a set of interrelated perceptions, attitudinal orientations, socialization processes and social structure, including transnational social networks, growing out of the international migratory experience, which constantly encourage, validate and facilitate participation in this movement.” See Wayne Cornelius, “From Sojourners to Settlers: The Changing Profile of Mexican Immigration to the United States,” in U.S.-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence, ed. Jorge Bustamante, Clark Reynolds, and Raúl Hinojosa Ojeda (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992). The culture of migration concept has also been used in this sense by Alan B. Simmons and Jean Pierre Guengant, “Caribbean Exodus and the World System,” in Kritz, Lim, and Zlomnik, eds. Reichert (n. 19 above) has referred to it as “the migrant syndrome.” Castles has used the term in a different way simply to refer to the culture that migrants and their descendants develop in the receiving society, which is usually some mixture of the old culture of the homeland and the new culture of the host society. See Stephen Castles (with Heather Booth and Tina Wallace), Here for Good: Western Europe’s New Ethnic Minorities (London: Pluto, 1984), p. 165.
64. The number of Brazilian foreigners currently registered in Japan is less than my estimate of the entire Japanese-Brazilian immigrant population in Japan. This is because about 10% of the Japanese-Brazilians are either first-generation issei who still retain Japanese nationality or second-generation nisei who are dual nationals. Since such individuals obviously do not register as foreigners in Japan, they do not show up in these immigration statistics.
65. As is true for most immigrant groups, the age distribution of the Japanese-Brazilians in Japan is very skewed with relatively few individuals under age 15 and over age 55 (Immigration Association, Heisei nenzenban zairyu gaikokujin tokei [Statistics on resident foreigners, 1995 edition] [Tokyo: Immigration Association, 1995]). This means that less than 60% of the entire Japanese-Brazilian population in Brazil can be considered a source of potential migrants (based on age distribution statistics reported in the São Paulo Humanities Research Center report [n. 8 above]).
66. A 1995 research survey conducted by the Japan Institute of Labor (n. 8 above) shows that before June 1990, only 21.2% of the migrant flow consisted of Japanese-Brazilians who were “office workers” in Brazil (government bureaucrats, teachers, white-collar company workers, professionals, private business owners, and bankers). The proportion of such individuals almost doubled to 38.5% among those who entered Japan between June 1990 and April 1991. In contrast, the proportion of “technical workers/vocational workers” (including farmers) declined from 32.6% to 27.9% during the same two periods.

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67. JICA.

68. There have been a number of studies that examine the function of social networks in the migration process. For example, see Boyd (n. 49 above); Douglas T. Gurak and Fe Caces, "Migration Networks and the Shaping of Migration Systems," in Kritz, Lim, and Zlotnik, eds.; Larissa Lomnitz, Networks and Marginality (New York: Academic Press, 1977); Massey (n. 13 above); and Massey et al.; Massey; Massey et al. (n. 19 above); Portes and Borocz (n. 5 above); Charles Tilly and C. H. Brown, "On Uprooting, Kinship, and the Austronesian Migration," International Journal of Comparative Sociology 8 (1967): 138–64.

69. For discussions of the labor-recruitment system for the nikkeijin, see Kitagawa, "Gunma-ken Oizumi-machi ni okeru nikkeijin rodosha hiringu chosa: Eijyuka shikou to ukeire kibanseibi" (n. 9 above); Japan Institute of Labor; Hirohisa Mori, "Nikkei Burajiru no nyushoku/shurō jiyotai" (Working and job placement conditions for Brazilian nikkeijin), in Kenkyu hokoku (Bulletin of the Japan statistics research institute) (Tokyo: Japan Statistics Research Institute, 1994); Akihiko Nishizawa, "Nikkei Burajiru/Peruujin rodosha no shakaiteki sekai" (The social world of Brazilian and Peruvian nikkeijin), in Inbe sareta gaibu: Toshi kaso no esugogurai (The hidden outside: The ethnography of the urban underclass) (Tokyo: Sairusha, 1995); Masako Watanabe and Shizue Teruyama, "Burajiru kara no nikkei dekasegi rodosha no jittai to Nihon shakai no taio" (Actual situation of Japanese-descent migrant workers from Brazil and the response of Japanese society), Shakaigaku/shakai fukushi gakku kenkyu 89 (1992): 1–66; and Masako Watanabe et al., "Nikkei dekasegi no kyuzo ni tomonau Nihon shakai no taio to mosaku" (The rapid increase in Japanese-descent migrant workers and the resulting response and uncertainty of Japanese society), Meiji Gakuten Daigaku shakaigakubu fuzoku kenkyujo nenpo 22 (1992): 55–85.

70. The function of social networks in reducing the cost of migration financially, psychologically, and in terms of finding jobs in the host society is also mentioned by others such as Lomnitz.

71. These figures are from a survey conducted in 1990 (Kitagawa, "Gunma-ken Oizumi-machi ni okeru nikkeijin rodosha hiringu chosa: Eijyuka shikou to ukeire kibanseibi") and one conducted later in 1992 (Japan Statistics Research Institute [n. 6 above]).

72. Likewise, Massey notes "the tendency for emigration to become progressively independent of the economic conditions that originally caused it. Once a critical takeoff stage is reached, the movement of population alters social and economic structures within sending communities in ways that increase the likelihood of subsequent migration." Portes and Borocz, pp. 612–13, make similar observations.