Since 1908, about 250,000 Japanese people moved to Brazil leaving their marks on the new land. Like any other large movement of immigration, this story was filled with difficulties and misunderstandings, but it was also a rich process of cultural exchange between the Brazilians and the Japanese.

This cultural exchange is part of a process that started with the arrival of the first immigrants and is still happening along those one hundred and five years of history. It is a continuous movement of changes that can be seen not only within the community of descendants of the Japanese immigrants but also within the Brazilian society as a whole. To better explain these movements, I would like to point out four aspects of this process: 1) How the Japanese learned to be more Japanese in Brazil; 2) The Japanese culture modified into a Japanese-Brazilian ['"nipo-brasileira"] culture; 3) the “living together” [the relationship]; 4) Brazil as receptor of Japanese cultural contributions.

1. How the Japanese became more Japanese in Brazil

Forty years after the beginning of the Meiji Era (1868-1912), the first Japanese immigrants set foot on Brazil bringing along as their inheritance not only the deep changes that happened in the second half of the 19 century in their country, but also the specific aspects of their local cultures, still very much present among the first groups of immigrants. The local linguistic variations were predominant over the standard Japanese language, and the cultural habits of people from different provinces caused difficulties since they first met in Kobe, their port of departure. Wisely, the families were sent out to their destinies in Brazil according to the regions in Japan they came from. So, people from Okinawa and Kyushu, for example, were taken to coffee plantations different than those where the people from Shikoku went to. This strategy attenuated the process of change, protecting the families against the culture shock of the first contact with the unknown land, and – why not – with other Japanese.

As the years passed on, those regional singularities tended to dissolve, even more so when the children of the immigrants started to attend Japanese classes with people of higher education, and then with teachers that taught with textbooks brought from Japanese schools.

In the adaptation process in Brazil, the immigrants started to learn how to be a Japanese person different than that one who had left his country years before, except in the privacy of his family life. Inside his home, most of the habits brought from his region in Japan still prevailed, and the culinary was an example of that.

The newspapers that started to circulate a few years later, helped to disseminate the standard Japanese language. Most immigrants had also access to a few imported
magazines, health brochures, business news and materials from the consulate, which were all written in standard Japanese, like the newspapers.

Beside the school, the associative life was another aspect that contributed to break down the localism. In the second part of the history of the Japanese immigration to Brazil, a significant number of the families was able to become small land owners. They tended to buy lands next to each other, which led to the creation of neighbors’ associations, the *Nihonjinkai*, where families from different provinces congregated. Inside the associations, the immigrants shared a lot of experiences, which promoted a type of sociability based on what people had in common, in terms of language, values and habits, even though there were many differences in terms of details. The arrival of a massive number of immigrants between 1924 and 1941 – 137,572 people, corresponding to 67% of the total – created a new profile of Japanese people in Brazil, most of them born and raised during the Taisho and the beginning of the Showa eras. These new immigrants, socialized and educated under the patterns of a modern, industrialized and urbanized Japan, blew a new breeze of “Japanese-ness” among those who were already living in Brazil.

2) The Japanese culture modified into a Japanese-Brazilian “nipo-brasileira” culture

In the context described above, we can observe the introduction of a second factor: the formation of a Japanese-Brazilian culture. Like in any other large movement of immigration, the Japanese had to adapt to the conditions offered by the host country, becoming part of the local society and thus modifying their own original culture. Preserving the basic values brought from Japan, they went through a process of changes which derived from the ways the immigrants organized their family and community lives as they adapted to the specific circumstances of their working and housing places.

It is possible to observe the changes they went through in the details that governed the everyday life of the immigrants who lived first in the countryside and small towns of the State of São Paulo, and then in the big metropolitan areas like São Paulo, the capital city.

The Japanese language spoken at home added words in Portuguese, especially those without an equivalent in Japanese, like table, bench, coffee, mug, etc. Other terms, like bus (*jardineira*), comrade (*camarada* - rural employer), farmer (*fazendeiro*), etc were rapidly incorporated. The pronunciation of Portuguese words were adapted to the sounds and intonations of the Japanese resulting in sounds not always understandable to the Brazilians and sometimes causing laughter.

On the other hand, when speaking Portuguese, many words in Japanese were maintained in the informal conversation, like for example, *motainai* (waste), *baka* (silly), *enryo* (excessive ceremony) are still commonly used. The most curious about the preservation of the Japanese in the conversation among the Japanese-Brazilians is the use of the expression *gaijin* (foreigner). Like in the past, it refers to all non-Japanese
people. It is a form of identity between conversational partners that draws a line between us and them. And, cooked rice is still *gohan*.

In other aspects of the everyday life, changes and adaptations also happened because of the circumstances. Clothing was totally changed among rural and urban workers: it was meaningless to keep the traditional clothes. It was common to undo the old clothes and refashion them into western garments. So many *kimonos* turned into party dresses! But the stuffed bedspread *futon* was kept.

In the houses, there are adaptations that call attention for their continuity over time. When decorating the houses, people still prefer Japanese objects or copies made in Brazil to adorn their western furniture, such as dolls wearing *kimonos*, the luck cats (*maneki neko*), the calendars known in Portuguese as *folhinhas* and, in the past, pictures of Japan’s emperor and empress. The calendars used to show pictures of Japan with the heading of the commercial house that offered them to clients as end-of-the-year gifts. The *ofurô* was indispensable in most homes since the time of the coffee plantations and in the urban residences, even in the big cities. Over time, it was made of different materials, but the conception was the same. Nowadays, the *ofurô* is available in the market, as a symbol of relaxation.

As expected, the food was the field where the best combinations of permanence, change and adaptation happened. The preparation of the food with the available ingredients but keeping as a reference the traditional recipes and feeding habits show the women’s creativity. There was a continuous trend of adapting the culinary, and these changes were incorporated as “typically Japanese”. One example is the use of corn to leaven the soy sauce, the *shoyo*. Little by little, the families’ daily foods were mixing with the Brazilian patterns as they settled down in Brazil. The contemporary Japanese culinary in Brazil adds Brazilian fruits and sweets to the sushi, such as mango, guava jam and *doce-de-leite* (a type of milk fudge).

The culinary adaptations happened in the past when the Japanese ingredients were unavailable in Brazil. When they started to be locally produced and commercialized or imported by accessible prices, the adaptations tended to slow down. For instance, when the *azuki* was not available, it was replaced by common beans; if there was no *katsuobushi*, freshwater fish was salted and used as a base for broth; if there was no *motigome*, the *motis* were made with a mix of wheat flour and water. Likewise, the *zenzai* were prepared with beans and little flour cakes sweetened with brown sugar (*mascavo*)

3) “Living together”, an essential aspect to the understanding of the Japanese-Brazilian culture

Brazil is a multicultural country since its discovery in the XVI century. The Brazilian culture became, over time, a mix of Iberian, Native and African influences, to which the immigration currents were added from the second half of the XIX century on. The Japanese were among the immigrant waves that participated, in the beginning of the XX
century, of Brazil’s cultural renovation – or more precisely, of the State of São Paulo’s. It is in this context that we must understand the Japanese culture’s place in Brazil: the “living together” and its contributions.

Let’s examine two aspects that signalize the degree of incorporation of a culture into the other: language and marriages. Both show how society gives away the estrangement to open space to the trivial. The Portuguese dictionary added to its vocabulary many Japanese words with modified orthography, such as Tóquio.

The other aspect, the exogamic marriages, also confirms that the immigrants have been able to overcome the cultural barriers. The rate of marriages with non-descendants of Japanese reaches 70%. This means that many families are a mix from different ethnic backgrounds which resulted in the formation of a lineage of mixed cultures. In the first times, the marriages outside the community triggered family crises and even tragedies because they opened the path to the rupture of traditional patterns brought from Japan.

What I call “living together” is evident in the realm of the private family rites. In funerals, for example, we can say that there is a combination of rituals. There is a combination of the Buddhist rite of incense burning with the Catholic rituals of the seventh-day mass, and then in the 490.day, there is a return to the Buddhist rite, which is more a moment of family reunion than of religious profession. The same happens at the wedding rituals, when the option is for the western procedures in the Catholic Church with the bride’s white dress. But the butsudan still lingers among the descendants, which is a demonstration of respect for the beliefs of the older generations.

Just like the 49º.day of death of a relative, the Christmas and New Year’s Eve celebrations are also occasions for family reunion, which is an opportunity for them to experience the “living together” with relatives of diverse cultural origins. The festive table is varied, not many words are spoken in Japanese, but the ozoni and the moti of New Year’s Eve are always on the table.

4) Brazil as receptor of Japanese cultural contributions.

Until now, we have been talking about the inner dynamics of the Japanese immigrants’ community itself, on how these individuals and their descendants tried to adapt to the new environment and keep some of their original culture. What seems to be very important to highlight now is the retribution that this community has given to Brazil. What marks have been left by the Japanese on the Brazilian culture?

The first answer to this question is the introduction of an oriental style in both perspectives, material and non-material. It is possible to say that the presence of the Japanese in Brazil had opened the way to the trend that reached the whole world, that is, the view of Japan as an economic and cultural power, after the Second World War. Japan’s new international role has provided to the new generations a reason to be proud of being Japanese descendants.
The arrival of the Japanese industries with their portable devices, such as cameras and radios, the haicai and tanka poems that influenced the Brazilian concrete poetry, and the abstract paintings by artists such as Manabu Mabe, altogether introduced a new ingredient in the array of options for the Brazilian culture: the healthy, or “clean”. It is the idea of valorization of a simple and healthy life. From this starting point, people begun to pay attention to oriental concepts that in Brazil are generally labeled as “zen”. “I am zen today” means I am calm, relaxed.

Another aspect is the contribution to the Brazilian diet. With the arrival of the Japanese immigrants, the Brazilian table became more colorful as new ingredients, especially fruits and vegetables, were introduced. And also the way to arrange the dishes, which are cooked fast, resulted in recipes that added to the eastern wave, translated as “simple”. Therefore, the dishes are healthy and look beautiful. The sushi is an example. Another example of contribution from Japan is in the martial arts, the judo being an outstanding example. Nowadays the judo is practiced all over the country, providing opportunities for Olympic medals. Other types of martial arts, such as aikido, sumo and kendo are now reaching more people, beyond the community of descendants. Even the female aikido and sumo are sprouting in Brazil, as it happened with judo in the past.

I couldn’t forget to mention the important contribution of Jpop in Brazil through anime and manga. Those who were young in the 1970s still remember the anime heroes and the Atari games, a passion for electronic games that has been repeated by later young generations since then and until today. The reading of mangas caused a demand for Japanese language courses among the gaijins, creating a need to adapt the teaching methodology for this public. An example of this trend is the success of the Kumon method in Brazil.

As a conclusion for this presentation, I would like to suggest some ways to further explore this theme. As it was already mentioned here, research about the Japanese immigration and the dekasegusis in Japan has been part of the academic preoccupations over the past twenty years in Brazil. However, there is a gap that must be filled in a more systematic way, which is exactly the theme of this presentation. Up to this moment, there is no extended research about how the Japanese culture used to be and how it has been presenting itself to the Brazilian society over the past 105 years. We still need to understand what changes happened and through which ways it is still present in the Brazilian society. The main point is to find out the ways the Japanese culture was re-read, under the conditions offered in Brazil.

Another suggestion would be a systematic and deeper analysis of how Brazilians view Japan. My hypothesis is that the decades of experience of living together with the descendants created among Brazilians an image that mixes familiarity with the exotic in order to mark the identity of the descendants, who are all “Japanese”, “Japanese-Brazilians” (nipo-brasileiros), or nikkei. I justify this hypothesis by pointing out the way the Centenary of Japanese immigration to Brazil was celebrated, in 2008. As a matter of fact, Japan was more celebrated than the immigrants themselves. It was a real mix of
topics raised by the Brazilian media that year, such as the samurais, the atomic bombs, the _gueixas_, the culinary, much more than the immigrants’ history and their participation in the country’s life. On the other hand, the Centenary celebration was an opportunity for the descendants to rethink and elaborate new ways to perceive themselves as “Japanese”, “Japanese-Brazilians” [nipo-brasileiros] or “nikkeis”. The icons that symbolize the Japanese culture in Brazil are the _torii_, the lanterns, the gardens, the Bon Odori celebrations and the _taiko_ presentations, among many others, which are re-significations of the Japanese culture in a very different environment, comparing to the original meanings. But they have a special meaning among the descendants of the Japanese in Brazil as a way of self-identification, and vis-à-vis the Brazilian society: they are symbols and signs that link the new generations of descendants straight with their own perceptions of the Japanese culture and contemporary Japan. But two questions still remain open: how to work with these new images and what is the descendants’ role as citizens in the society that received their ancestors.