

The Japanese-Brazilian community in Japan and the "Brazilian diaspora" in the world

Angelo Ishi (Professor, Faculty of Sociology, Musashi University)

Profile: Member of the Board of *Nihon Imin Gakkai* (The Japanese Association for Migration Studies); Member of the first *Conselho de Representantes Brasileiros no Exterior* (Council of Representatives of Brazilians Abroad); Member of the Board of *Kaigai Nikkeijin Kyokai* (The Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad). Papers published in the following books: *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Immigrants and Overseas Communities* (Routledge Curzon), *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese-Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Duke University Press) and *Transcultural Japan: At the borderlands of race, gender, and identity* (Routledge Curzon).

Abstract

This presentation aims at: 1) Summarize the 20 years history of the so-called "Dekassegui" phenomenon, i.e., the migration of Nikkeijin from Brazil to Japan; and 2) Analyze these migrants from a new perspective: not only as "return migrants" in the Brazilian-Japanese route, but as members of the rising "Brazilian diaspora" all over the world. The research is grounded on a long-term participant observation of the Brazilian community in Japan since the reform of the Immigration Law in 1990. I have actively "participated" in the formation of this community, as the editor-in-chief of a leading ethnic paper (in the 1990s) and as a leader of several migrants' associations (in the 2000s). I have conducted in-depth interviews in key locations: Oizumi, Hamamatsu, Nagoya, etc. I have also made field research in several countries with a high presence of Brazilian migrants: USA, UK, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Australia. One estimates that the total population of Brazilians living abroad may reach 3 million. Even the Brazilian government has adopted the term "Brazilian diaspora" in its official documents and discourses.

What I outline is a parallel between the evolution of the Brazilian community in Japan and the evolution of the terms used to call this migratory movement and migrants. Changes in terminology reflect changes in perception about this migratory movement by both migrants themselves but also by whom they relate. Over those 20 years, the "reality" of these immigrants was not the only thing that has changed. Their "perception" about their stay in Japan has also changed. The meaning as well as the spelling of this term has changed in a way that could be divided in 4 stages, as follows.

1) From "U-Turn" to "Dekassegui": The pre-1990

If the official history of this migration begins in 1990, one cannot ignore the period of "pre-history" of this phenomenon, which had begun in the mid 80s. There is no consensus regarding the "year zero" of the Japan-Brazil migration. The first term used to refer to the migration in Brazil-Japan route was the "U-Turn Phenomenon". In my view, the term "return migrant" should only be used to refer strictly to the "Issei" (first-generation immigrants). "U-Turn" was gradually replaced by the most famous

term "dekassegui", spelled with "k" and two "s". The term was more appropriate to include the growing number of "Nisei" and "sansei" (third generation) that flew to Japan.

2) From "Dekassegui" to "Decasségui": The 1990s

The 90s were marked by the extraordinary increase in the number of Brazilians in Japan. For some, the first half of the decade was like a golden age, with high profits and a lot of overtime. For others, it was a nightmare of various labor problems. The first restaurants, food stores and ethnic papers were launched – giving origin to what I define as an "Industry of *saudade* (nostalgia)." The launch of the first Brazilian shopping center in 1996 and of a television channel in 1997 are facts that define decisive changes in the lifestyle and behavior of Brazilians in Japan. Throughout the 90s, due to the actual trivialization of the Japan-Brazil migration, the word "dekassegui" was no longer something so extraordinary. Who tried a new life across the world was less stigmatized. I and many authors came to spell the word dekassegui no longer with the kanji, but with *katakana* to unlink it from the negative connotation that was embedded in the original word spelling. The 90s was the period in which the word "dekassegui" became popular not only within the Japanese-Brazilian community, but the Brazilian population in general. The Houaiss Dictionary, one of the most important dictionaries of Portuguese launched in 2001, included the term "decasségui" with "c" and an accent on the "e".

3) From "Decasségui" to "immigrant" ("Brazilian in Japan"): The 2000s

The new millennium may be defined as the period during which a considerable portion of decasséguis were freed from the "illusion of return" and have accepted their condition of "permanence" in Japan. The number of people who took a Permanent visa, which was only 2,644 in 1998, has increased exponentially, to 10,568 as of 2003 and more than 100 thousand in the next years. The centenary of Japanese immigration to Brazil, in 2008, was another defining moment for Brazilians in Japan -- some have celebrated simultaneously the "20 years of the dekassegui movement". In the future, historians certainly will divide the history of Brazilians in Japan into "pre-2008" and "post-2008": the global financial crisis and massive layoffs of workers in Japan had devastating effects on the Brazilian community in Japan and triggered unprecedented events such as rallies that took place in Tokyo and Nagoya in early 2009.

4) From "immigrant" ("Brazilian in Japan") to "Brazilian in the world": 2010 ~

If the first decade of the new millennium was marked by a change in the positioning of decasséguis and an increasing consciousness as "immigrants", the end of the first decade marked the rising of a new era in which Brazilians in Japan are being identified as part of the huge and heterogeneous group of "Brazilians in the world", or a new "Brazilian diaspora". The networking among Brazilians abroad is strengthening not only in political activities, but also in virtually all sectors: information exchange, business partnerships, cultural events, and artistic productions.

In sum, many aspects of the migration Brazil-Japan would be better understood if one pays attention to a broader picture: I am trying to understand what is happening on transnational spaces – the rising of transnational networks between migrants settled in Japan and migrants settled in other parts of the world.