

## Shortbook: Japanese Immigration to Brazil

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Japanese mass immigration to Brazil began on June 18, 1908, when the steamship *Kasato-maru* brought the first group to work in coffee plantations of São Paulo state. Although there are some records about a few adventurers and individuals who migrated to Brazil before this event, 1908 is considered the commencement of Japanese immigration to Brazil. From this date until the beginning of the Pacific War in 1941, 188,985 people arrived in Brazil (Reichl 1995, 37) in an almost continuous flow. Just a few years had comparatively low numbers of immigration or none at all. In the aftermath of the war in 1952, migration to Brazil resumed and remained high until the 1960s when it started to decline due to development in Japan. Even so, between 1952 and 1975 it is estimated that 250,000 Japanese entered Brazil (Tigner 1981, 471). Pre and post-war movements have distinguishable characteristics. While the former is characterized by the movement of workers for plantations and settlements, the latter gradually declined in numbers and changed to skilled labor immigrants such as technicians and other qualified workers who headed for the urban sectors.

The definition of immigrant and the period of time to be considered can significantly change the final statistics; nevertheless, Japanese are among the important nationalities which migrated to Brazil. They are the fourth largest group after Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards. Today, it is believed that Brazil has about 1.5 million people of Japanese descent (MOFA, 2010). The majority of them reside in Sao Paulo and Parana states. In the mid 1980s, a reverse movement began; Japanese-Brazilians went to Japan as *dekasegis* looking for better salaries. Many of them went to work in factories in prefectures like Aichi, Shizuoka, and Gunma. In 2007, before the economic crises of 2009, there were 316,967 of these immigrants in Japan (MOFA, 2010).

While studies in Brazil about Japanese immigrants mainly focus on topics related with ethnic conflicts, including prejudice, there is a lack of studies concerning other themes. The role of the beginning of the diplomatic relations between the two countries (Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation, signed in November 5, 1895) and the hope for an evolution into trade; strong policies about migration and workforce management in both governments; interest and pressure of economic groups from each country are among the important factors to the beginning of Japanese immigration to Brazil and yet these topics remain largely uninvestigated and the studies that exist are mostly out of date. One recurrent claim is that the Brazilian motives for welcoming Japanese immigration in 1908 was the necessity of workers in the Sao Paulo plantations. It is true that during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> labor largely relied on immigrants. However, studies have revealed that the crucial point was not a shortage of workers, but rather a lack of a proper labor market, at least from the plantation owners' point of view. Plantation owners along with the government tried to control labor force and salaries through an active and conscientious management of immigration. This policy created a labor market surplus that permitted a peaceful end to slavery (slavery in Brazil was abolished in 1888) and granted low wages and control of workers (Hall, 2003). This strategy was maintained during the mass immigration years and was still in effect when the first Japanese arrived.

### Point of interest:

1. Made by Japanese National Diet Library, in following website there is a virtual exhibition about the hundred years of Japanese immigration to Brazil (Portuguese or Japanese only): <http://www.ndl.go.jp/brasil/index.html>
2. Website dedicated to topics related to the *nikkei* community around the world: <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/>

### Bibliography

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