

Conclusions

To a discomfoting extent, this study itself participates in a sort of colonial logic, instrumentalizing and objectifying the Japanese-language literary activities of Brazil in order to speak to a concern—national literature—that historically has been and might logically tend to be dominated by a metropolitan perspective.¹ It is essential to note, therefore, that prior to the Second World War, critics, readers, and writers in Brazil themselves participated in this debate, and were not lacking reflexivity. Though they rarely employed the rhetoric of “Japanese literature” and perhaps never employed the rhetoric of “Japanese-language literature” to discuss the works they produced in the aggregate, this is not to say that they ignored the issue of categorical rubrics. In fact, during the course of the more than a century that the community has existed, within it individuals have debated, adopted, created, and employed multiple alternative rubrics in ways that often structured the discursive environments in which the texts were both read and written.

When the *Burajiru jihō* announced in January 1932 that it would be bestowing a Colonial Literary Short Fiction Award, this was not the first time that such works had been thought of not only in the aggregate, but also as distinct from other literary works written in Japanese.² As we have seen, works produced in the colonies were not new in 1932, nor was the contest the first time that the newspaper had taken an active role in trying to encourage local literary production. In April 1922, for example, the newspaper called for reader submissions of various types, including essays on the problem of educating children, plans for encouraging youth groups, the experiences of farmers, poetry in *tanka* and *haiku* forms (on “tasteful material found in Brazil”) and short fiction “whose subject matter is the lives of Japanese in Brazil.”³ More importantly for our discussion, the specific rubric of “colonial literature” (植民文藝) was already in circulation there when the newspaper adopted it.

According to Hosokawa Shūhei, a version of the term first appeared in print in Brazil in the 8 August 1925 issue of the *Seishū shinpō* newspaper in an

article by its founder, Kōyama Rokurō (writing under the name K-sei). Titled “Nihon ishokumin bungei wo okosu,” the article begins with the following weighty pronouncement:

Buddhism has its sutras; Christianity has the Bible. England has Robinson Crusoe, which whet Englishmen's appetite for adventures at sea; Japan has the *Man'yōshū* and many other books that have nurtured the great Yamato race to this day, but it does not yet have a representative work of the Japanese race's expansion overseas. That is as it should be. It is likely because it must be led by those of us in Brazil.

As Hosokawa notes, in Kōyama's mind the primary function of such a literature would be “to preserve a record of the lives and feelings” of this first generation of Japanese settlers overseas.⁴ What is most important to us here, however, is that Kōyama imagined this literature as a part of a specific continuum: the literary culture of the great Yamato (Japanese) race. He believed that the literature of the Japanese colonists requires its own unique name, and he wanted his fellow settlers in Brazil to be “the first Japanese colonists to have culture.” Though he does not make clear how he saw the relationship of that culture to the one he imagined the land of his birth to possess, it seems likely that he believed the former to be a subset, or an expansion, of the latter. At the very least, the precise logic of the concept remained ambiguous. This can be seen in an article that appeared four years later, in July 1929, when someone calling themselves Harada wrote an article expressing confusion about to what precisely the term refers.⁵ While this shows that the concept was in circulation, it also reflects its unstable referent.

“Colonial literature” (presented as either 植民文芸 or 植民地文芸) was a key categorical rubric that was actively debated and discussed by intellectuals in Brazil.⁶ The 1932 award was part of a larger discourse that took place in Brazil from the late 1920s and continued throughout the 1930s.⁷ The focus of the award's selection committee aligned with that of essays written in Brazil and appearing in the pages of the newspaper from as early as 1929, which called for a literature suited to the new world being created by *shokuminsha* (植民者, colonists) and *iminsha* (移民者, migrants), a literature stemming from the feelings and experiences characteristic of this community. An early definition of the term came from Imai Hakuō in 1930: “[A]rtistic expression stemming from all areas of the lives lived by pioneers themselves and beautiful expressions of their natural observations. Put differently, it must at least be a literature built on the great nature of Brazil—as great as eternity itself; a literature that is both a record of the pioneers' precious experiences and an idealistic expression toward the future; and a literature with a rich colonial hue.”⁸ Critics took various positions on the concept; some of the primary examples are provided below. What all of their positions share, however, is an implicit belief that the received rubric of Japanese literature was inappropriate or insufficient for the works their community had produced and would go on to produce.

An early example appeared in 1931, when the author Kita Nansei implored his brethren (同胞) who had made new lives in Brazil not to be satisfied with imitating the homeland (故国) but instead to develop a literature rooted in their lives in the colony (植民地).⁹ Throughout the article Nansei invoked a “we” (吾等) whose referent is limited to the residents of the colonies. Although he did not employ the term “colonial literature,” he clearly imagined a textual identity aggregating the literary production of the colonies as distinct from that of Japan. As he wrote after conceding that the claim might be a bit excessive (饜語), “The literature of Japan . . . is no longer our literature.”¹⁰ In response to this situation, Nansei developed—over the course of three subsequent articles—an argument for the adoption of a separate focus for the literature of the colony in Brazil: peasant literature (農民文学).¹¹ His conception of peasant literature—a notion that Nansei was aware was also in circulation in Japan at the time—resembled proletarian literature in its motivation but differed in its nature. Nansei lamented the absence of anything that he believed should truly be called *shokumin bungei* (植民文芸) or *iminchi bungaku* (移民地文学), finding the local production thus far dominated by works of imitation and amusement, and exhorted his fellow colonists to begin “truly” producing literature. Such fiction must have, Nansei argued, an intimate connection to the lives of those in the colony (*shokuminchi*), to the special existence of individuals who lived under the rule of a sovereign country but who remained foreigners. This fact—that they were an “inassimilable people” (同化せざる国民; presented in quotes in the original)—made them a unique society, and forced them to determine what sort of literature they must have. What that literature would be is unclear; for Nansei, however, it would not be (what he considered) the strange stories of corruption, indulgence, and self-deception that dominated the Japanese literary establishment (文壇).

An article that appeared in the following year, 1932, both shows the flexibility of the terminology concerning the colony and the underlying sense that the ethnic community in Brazil was growing ever more distinct from the home country.¹² The pseudonymous author attempted to distinguish the community in Brazil from those in the formal colonies, making the point that the society of his fellow countrymen in Brazil was “not, strictly speaking, a colony,” and noting that its special circumstances were causing the society of Japanese in Brazil to grow more independent of the “motherland” year by year. In Brazil, the “two-dimensional” society of sojourners was transforming into a “three-dimensional” one of permanent residents; that is, it was developing its own culture. Literature, as part of this new culture “shaped and tinged with the particular hue of the colony itself,” would lead this new society in the right direction.

Sugi Takeo, an active critic as well as writer, joined the debate in 1934. In a series of articles titled “The Establishment of a Literature of the Colonies” (植民地文学の確立) Sugi calls for a literature firmly rooted in reality, the reality of the colony,

not in the ideals of literature coming out of Japan.¹³ To this society, works of literature from Japan—and the local pieces that mimicked them—seemed to be “the dreams of madmen.”¹⁴ He saw the demand for literature as a sign of its importance to the community, but lamented that everyone turned to works from Japan, to which (he believed) they were drawn because of the works’ corrupt nature. The desires of the colonists—the emotions born of the atmosphere of Brazil and the colony—had not yet been accessed by local literature. Praise of the moon and stars meant nothing here, Sugi argued, where money dominates; a true *shokuminchi* literature must probe this, without sentimentality. Sugi’s identification of these texts with those of the formal colonies becomes clear with his note that such a literature had appeared in Korea, making it lamentable that the same could not be said in Brazil.

The next year Sugi returned to the topic in an article titled “On Colonial Literature” (植民文学について).¹⁵ In it, he argued that literature that emerges from lived reality, that is not a mere product of fantasy, necessarily differs depending on the society that produces it. He laid out a vision of a colonial literature that would take a hard look at economic structure and social system, which Sugi argued were the foundations of the ideology of the colonies. The authors of colonial literature must do this in order to expose reality, which so many are so unwilling to confront.

Ikeda Shigeji responded to Sugi in a number of articles on the topic. In his two-part “The Ideology of Colonial Literature” (植民文学のイデオロギー), Ikeda argued that a colonial literature must take up neither the class-conscious worldview of proletarian literature, nor the narrow worldview of bourgeois literature.¹⁶ Human consciousness in the colonies, Ikeda argued, was not formed through class conflict, but through the desire to conquer nature. *Shokumin* literature, therefore, must be imbued with this ideology. He noted that peasant literature movements had appeared in a variety of countries, including Japan, but had, for various reasons, failed. *Shokumin* literature, written in “the language of the [home] country” (邦文), must grasp the specific nature of this society. Two months later, Ikeda continued his discussion in a separate series of four additional articles.¹⁷ These praised the organization of the literary world in the colony: “It is thrilling to see this first step by the society of our countrymen [in Brazil], which has focused solely on economics, toward a society of spiritual living.”¹⁸

While Sugi and Ikeda considered themselves to share diametrically opposed viewpoints on colonial literature based on whether it ought to be autonomous or not, what they shared was a view that such a literature existed, and that it had an important function to play in the development of the “society” of individuals of Japanese descent in Brazil. A few preliminary observations can be made about this discourse as a whole, despite the fact that individual positions differed. The first observation concerns the use of conventional deictic terms for identity, and the underlying logic of identification that those terms suggest. It is far more common to see references to *dōhō* (同胞, brethren) and *hōjin* (邦人, countrymen)—or even

“we,” used in explicit contrast to the population of Japan—than the proper noun *Nihonjin* when referring to the colonists.¹⁹ The use of these deictic terms is not in itself noteworthy; it does, however, highlight the fact that the writers considered the referent absolutely clear. These were writers who premised their discussion on a shared identity with their readers. This identity, however, would appear to be based on something that either precedes the state (presumably “race”) or succeeds the state (“our colonial society” [我等の植民社会]), as identification with the contemporary polity in Japan seems to be consciously avoided. Given this, the use of the commonplace term *hōbun* might suggest a notion of the language as detached from the state. At minimum, it is clear that the critics presume a fundamental autonomy of the colony from the Japanese nation-state.

The assertion of autonomy (or difference) seems to bear a resemblance to the “reactive notion of authenticity in the form of cultural nationalism” that often marks a minor culture’s reaction to a major culture; what differs, however, is the absence of an overt call to tradition or essence, which is often central to cultural nationalism.²⁰ This seems inevitable given the shallow history of the community; yet one might argue that an incipient tradition-building process was underway, as the critics identify situational contexts that would (in their minds) inevitably lead to differentiation. A majority of the critics share scorn for (what they believe to be) the materialistic nature of their society in Brazil and see literature as offering a solution to this problem. Sympathy for the proletarian literature movement is common, but so is the belief that such literature would be inappropriate in the colony, if for no other reason than the centrality of agriculture (rather than industry) there. The writers take pride in their own grittiness, not just the robust vigor of people who survive through hard physical labor, but also the raw directness of their lifestyles. Even as there are calls for spiritual development, there are also gestures to embrace the visceral side of colonial life as part of what makes it unique.

Finally, the implicit foundation upon which all of these essays rest is a commitment to colonial society. Simply by writing these treatises, the authors present the colony as something lasting, as something that can develop, improve. As Hosokawa Shūhei points out, almost all the essays saw literature as “a spiritual and cultural undertaking” that could benefit the entire community of settlers.²¹ As such, they presented colonial literature—even if just the ideal of colonial literature—as something worthy of attention and effort. This simple fact suggests a shift, from sojourners who are biding their time before they can return to their homes, to settlers who have begun a process of re-identification.

With regard to textual identity, the discourse of textual interrelation known as “modern Japanese literature” seems here primarily to be an object of either tacit or explicit disavowal. This is despite the fact that, given the significant marketplace, texts from Japan would have continued to be significant influences on these writers and critics. They perceived their literature to be one that would be fundamentally different, arising from the particular conditions of their existence and responding

to the particular needs of their lives. At the same time, there was a suggestion of filiation with—if not outright participation in—a textual identity that existed outside of Brazil: the colonial literature of the various quarters of the Japanese empire.

They also shared experiences with other Japanese diasporic subjects in the Western Hemisphere, racism primary among these. Although Japanese immigrants to Brazil may have faced less discrimination than their counterparts in the United States, resistance to these communities did exist. In addition to arguments about racial inferiority, the issue of “assimilability” arose repeatedly. The most conservative elements in the Brazilian government even argued that immigration was a prelude to military invasion. Around 1938, the Japanese government began to consider its direct involvement in the colony to be a liability, particularly in light of growing nationalist sentiment in Brazil.²² The result was rapid divestment. For example, the colonization company behind the creation and management of the Bastos colony liquidated nearly all of its holdings by April 1939, handing over control of the colony to a cooperative made up of its residents. With the declaration of war in December 1941, the semi-governmental companies behind the colonies in Brazil were forced to liquidate their remaining holdings. Deprived of all formal links with Japan, and thus the support and protection that had helped them persist, these ethnic enclaves changed rapidly. Japanese-language schools were closed in December 1938 and Japanese-language newspapers were outlawed in August 1941. On 19 January 1942, the state of São Paulo banned the distribution of Japanese-language texts and the use of Japanese in public.²³

These developments, the isolation of the War itself, and the near-silence from Japan during its immediate postwar reconstruction dramatically accelerated the process of acculturation.²⁴ Although Japanese-language newspapers were re-legalized immediately after the war and emigration began again in 1953, the connection with Japan was never the same.²⁵ Today the migratory flow, in fact, has almost entirely reversed, with young Brazilians of Japanese descent moving to Japan for work. Japanese-language literature continues to be produced in Brazil and efforts are ongoing, though limited, to preserve the literary legacy of Japanese-language texts in the country. Nearly all of the individuals involved in that process, however, are aging first-generation immigrants who, for the most part, see themselves as custodians of a dying art.

Throughout the postwar period, the Koronia Bungakukai and its subsequent incarnations, including today's Burajiru Nikkei Bungakukai (ブラジル日系文学会) have been the key agents in preserving the Japanese-language literary tradition in Brazil. The shifting names of the organizations hint at alternative collective rubrics that have been claimed over the course of the postwar period. The Koronia Bungakukai began with twenty-six members in October 1965 in order to support Japanese-language literary activities in Brazil; it launched its journal, *Koronia bungaku* (コロニア文学), in May of the following year. That journal ran for thirty issues, until October 1976. The Koronia Bungakukai shut down in 1977 but was

restarted in 1979 as the Koronia Shibungakukai (*Associação dos Poetas e Escritores da Colônia*) by Takemoto Yoshio. That organization published *Koronia shibungaku* (コロニア詩文学), which ran for sixty issues from September 1980 until October 1998. In February 1999, the association changed its name to the Burajiru Nikkei Bungakukai, which still publishes its journal *Burajiru Nikkei bungaku*.²⁶

What marks these efforts to perpetuate this “minority literature” in (but not necessarily of) Brazil for the dwindling market of Japanese-language readers in the country, who are now vastly outnumbered by Portuguese-speaking Brazilians of Japanese descent, has been their local focus. Groups have made few efforts to reach any potential readership in Japan, focusing instead on the shrinking readership in Brazil.²⁷ As a result these activities become a fascinating, but likely doomed, experiment in discovering the minimal size of a reading community necessary to maintain literary activities, particularly in prose.

NAMING COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS

So, what are these texts, when thought of collectively? Are they colonial literature? Given that individuals involved in their creation called them that, one is obligated to take such a designation seriously. Yet, as we have seen, individuals involved in the production of Japanese-language literary texts in Brazil did not entirely agree on that matter (or at least on the details) when they debated it, nor did their successors find those early rubrics satisfactory. This is why other names, such as *colônia* literature and Brazilian Nikkei literature, have been used. The leading scholar on these literary texts in Japan, Hosokawa Shūhei, named them “Nikkei Brazilian migrant literature,” consciously or unconsciously reversing the primacy of *ethnos* and place. His predecessor, Maeyama Takashi, referred to it as a “minority literature” in Brazil, which prefigured the work of recent scholars such as Ignacio López-Calvo, who reads Portuguese-language literary works by this community within the context of Brazilian literary production.²⁸ They could just as easily be brought into a discourse on multilingual Brazilian literature, in the vein of Marc Shell and Werner Sollors’s *Multilingual Anthology of American Literature*.²⁹

As for seeing it as “colonial literature,” we still face the problem the author Shōken-sei identified in 1932—that Brazil was never a formal colony of the Empire of Japan—making it potentially misleading to simply refer to the texts as colonial literature. What nomenclature could differentiate these communities from the “formal” colonies of the Japanese empire? Shu-mei Shih has used “semicolonialism” to “foreground the multiple, layered, intensified, as well as incomplete and fragmentary nature of China’s colonial structure,” noting that it should not be taken to denote a “half,” but rather the “fractured, informal, and indirect character” of the colonialism that existed in China at that time.³⁰ While this term could conceivably be adapted to describe the situation in Brazil, one might further distinguish it, at the risk of an awkward profusion of terms, as “paracolonial.” The goal

of this term would be to stress homologies and simultaneity, while also bringing into relief the contemporary perceptions among its practitioners of a relation to literatures produced under formal imperialism; at the same time, the term would identify these activities in Brazil as being distinct from—literally, “alongside”—the formal colonies.

Yet it also might be productive—as a result of being more provocative—to consider these works (and perhaps even the post-World War II production) to be colonial literature, sans distinction, working from the insights gained through postcolonial and world systems theory.³¹ Such an approach would stress the ways in which this Japanese-language literary production in Brazil remains within an asymmetrical power relation that is partially a result of its position in a history of imperial expansion and colonial subordination, but is also partially a result of a contemporary world system that continues to render peripheries (variously defined) subordinate to metropolises in far more fluid and complex relationships. Perhaps the use of *Nihongo bungaku* while maintaining *Nihon bungaku* for texts produced with the normative model of national literary production achieves this. Such a model of the global economy can be applied to literary production both as a metaphor for and as a concrete description of the marketplaces within which literary commodities circulate.³²

As the Japanese-reading population of Brazil declines precipitously in the absence of continued immigration from Japan—a condition that results from continuing economic asymmetries between Japan and Brazil—the writers of Japanese-language literature no longer find themselves in the same position as the critics from the 1930s mentioned above concerning writing as a sociocultural institution. The attitude of development marking the 1930s, when the future for Japanese-language literature in Brazil looked bright and writers and critics actively debated the direction it should take, differs dramatically from the attitude of resignation during the postwar phase, when migration has all but stopped and a defensive posture has been struck, in which the few remaining writers struggle to preserve and perpetuate the social potential for their literary activities. All textual identities, by definition, imply an informing past; most (if not all) also imply an informable future that must extend beyond the individual writer. Literature is, after all, a social activity, even though its production and consumption are so often imagined to be solitary. This need for literature to be a social activity is doubly important for writers without independent means, who require a minimum audience/market in order to have their books printed, let alone to receive sufficient material gain to survive.

To subsume these texts into the discourse of “modern Japanese literature”—a move metonymically related to Spivak’s “strategic essentialism”—might bring material benefits: it would invest a large number of readers in the literary products of this community in Brazil, allowing it to survive—in the absence of a sufficient local market—through a dependence on a “foreign” metropole, which possesses a

market of Japanese-language readers of sufficient size to sustain literary production. This would not merely be a process in which a text “becomes a commodity whose difference is contained and consumed by those with purchasing power.”³³ Such an incorporation, even as it threatens to erase (through assimilation into a notion of ethnocultural homogeneity) or to exoticize (through an ambivalent application of “stranger [self] fetishism”) the specificity of the texts’ origins as well as the heterogeneity of the texts’ authors, would give them an audience that they do not yet enjoy, one which might enable their continued existence. Sometimes material realities are too readily dismissed in the search for artistic autonomy. Even as this new marketplace might provide writers with readers—the essential social component of the art of literature—it also provides writers with consumers, an oft-dismissed necessity for any artist lacking the material means to support his or her avocation.

Such materialist and instrumental considerations may seem impossibly vulgar, missing the “true” value of literature. The motivation for focusing here on this sort of strategic textual identification is twofold. On the one hand, it highlights the social and historical dimensions of literary production—dimensions that, in a capitalist economy, invariably involve commodification, whether the texts be “pure” or “popular.” On the other hand, it highlights the partial and artificial nature of any collective identification of texts, be it national, linguistic, ethnocultural, or regional. Simultaneously, it reminds us that the scholar is not a detached observer of this situation; simply by raising the issue in certain institutional forums, one draws these texts and their producers into a discourse that has particular ramifications. This raises a follow-up question. Rather than asking what identity (or identities) should be attributed to these texts, one should ask what the ramifications are of one identification over another, when multiple choices are potentially justifiable, but none can encapsulate every facet of even a single literary text.

Additionally, it raises the question of motivation: why name a given collection of texts in the first place? Such a collective identification is not, after all, necessary, nor is there a single, self-evident, overriding essence within a text from which such an identification must be derived. To the extent that such an identification might derive from characteristics of the text, it does so through contingent selection of certain characteristics and inevitable discounting of others. Nor is the act of collective identification necessarily disinterested in its motivation or apolitical in its effects. National literatures may be justifications for nations even as nations are justifications for national literatures. In this, as in all things, “modern Japanese literature” might be particular in its specificities, but it is not unique, and the production of these texts in Brazil is not an aberration, but merely an historically contingent event. It is not the deviation from the norm that should attract our interest so much as the powerful disciplining function of the normative itself.

Less than it is one for the actual writers and readers of literature, this is particularly an issue for scholars, critics, historians, and—at the extremes—even political

actors, who are more likely to be engaged in a discourse of collective identity than the writers and readers we imagine to be central to the intimate act of literary exchange. Moreover, what is at stake in such discourses of literary identity is of course more than a heuristic rubric, precisely because the ultimate goal of such discourses is often actually the definition of the other elements of the holy quadrinity of the national literary imaginary. After all, more often than not, texts are defined collectively based on a community (for example, “modern Japanese literature”) because of a desire to define (as Self or Other) that community (“Japan”) and the living individuals (“the Japanese”) who make it up, rather than because one wishes to illuminate individual literary texts.

The metadiscourse of categorically defining literary texts, then, is ultimately participating in a much broader epistemological management of the world and its inhabitants than the seemingly innocent act might suggest. It treats as ontological a question that is in fact better treated as not only epistemological, but political. This can of course be done consciously and transparently, with either progressive or reactionary political ends in mind. All too often, however, it is done as a conventional reflex, without the transparency, awareness of historicity, and care that it deserves. Lacking these, one risks reinforcing unwittingly a political agenda whose ultimate objective might not be the illumination of literary texts, but the mobilization of the power of a collectively imagined self against a configured, collectively defined Other. The application of literature to such a project misses one of the two paradoxical but wonderful capacities of literary texts: to limn individuals simultaneously in both their commensurability and their incommensurability, their identity and alterity.