

## Land, Media, and the Formation of Settler Colonial Identity

During the interwar period, both Japan and Brazil began to adopt more independent diplomacy in relation to the United States, even though U.S. economic influence grew steadily in both societies during and after World War I. Brazil was the only Latin American power that actively participated in World War I, yet the United States had reservations about supporting Brazil's aspirations to increase its naval strength and claim a seat on the Executive Council of the League of Nations. This led to a deterioration in the countries' political relations. Rio began to pursue a more independent and noncooperative policy vis-à-vis Washington, DC following the former's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1926.<sup>1</sup> Brazilian elites were replacing their existing Europe-oriented racial identity centered on racial whitening with a new, indigenized racial identity based on interracial mixing.

Brazil's adoption of a new racial identity and change in its diplomatic policy during the interwar years found close parallels in East Asia. The Allies' rejection of Japan's request to include the racial equality clause in the Treaty of Versailles and the promulgation of the Immigration Act of 1924 in the United States became important factors in the rapid popularization of Pan-Asianism and nativism in Japanese society. Intellectuals and politicians alike began to embrace a new racial identity for the Japanese; instead of a white people in Asia, they now celebrated the Japanese as the champion of the yellow race and envisioned that Japan would take on the mission to liberate Asian people from the colonial rule of the West.<sup>2</sup> The empire's creation of Manchukuo as a purported racial paradise for East Asians in 1932 and Tokyo's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933 were clear examples of this transformation in both racial thinking and foreign diplomacy.

The changes taking place in Brazil, Japan, and the world at large in the 1920s and early 1930s contributed to the formation of a collective identity in the Japanese

community in Brazil. The Japanese Brazilian community, concentrated in the state of São Paulo, experienced unprecedented population growth and geographic expansion as a result of increased immigration from Japan and successful agricultural development in the community. As Brazil's traditional *fazenda*-centered coffee production was being replaced by small farmer-centered cultivation, the coffee economy's absolute dominance was challenged by the growing production of rice, beans, vegetables, and cotton. The Japanese settler community played a major role in both of these economic changes. With a vibrant transoceanic network of information between Japan and Japanese communities across the Pacific, Japanese Brazilian elites connected southeastern Brazil's racial politics in their daily lives with the evolution of Japanese colonialist expansionism in Asia as well as Japanese exclusion in the United States.<sup>3</sup> In this process, these community leaders gradually established a collective identity that defined the Japanese in Brazil not as immigrants but as colonizers who were uniquely suited to civilize Brazil's primitive land.

In these settler leaders' imagination, of all the civilized peoples in the world the Japanese were the most qualified colonizers: not only were they exemplary farmers, unlike the selfish and racist Anglo-Americans who practiced discrimination and exclusion, but the Japanese were willing to be a partner of and guide for the local people and make contributions to local society. To exemplify this superior settler colonial identity, settler leaders emphasized the need for all Japanese immigrants to settle permanently and the importance of Japanese education of the next generation.

This chapter delves into the world of Japanese settlers in Brazil during the interwar period and examines how Japanese Brazilian elites created and cultivated a colonist identity for ordinary settlers. Central to this colonist identity was the strategic biculturalism that the settler elites adopted. By exploiting the fact that Japanese settlers served as agents of settler colonialism for both Japan and Brazil, community elites described Japanese settlers as both trailblazers of the Japanese empire in South America and vanguards of Brazil's own land exploration. This chapter's analysis focuses on Japanese-language print media in Brazil, the primary platform through which the settlers communicated with one another. The formation of this settler colonial identity was the formation of the Japanese settler society itself. In this process, individual settlers, men and women, first and second generation, rural and urban, began to connect with each other through an imagined collective identity as never before.

#### THE RISE OF SETTLER MEDIA

The rise of the migration state in Tokyo during the interwar years ushered in the golden age of Japanese migration to Brazil. As the number of Japanese who reached the shores of São Paulo grew steadily, Japanese farming villages continued to grow. By the mid-1930s, five hundred to six hundred self-identified Japanese colonies had emerged in the state.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the growing number of farming

settlers who arrived directly from Japan, the proliferation of Japanese farming villages was due to the fact that an average Japanese plantation laborer could become a farming settler with relative speed and ease. In 1912, only 8 percent of Japanese subjects in Brazil were farmers; by 1932, this number grew to 45.5 percent, including 23.8 percent owner-farmers and 21.7 percent tenant farmers.<sup>5</sup>

This laborer-to-farmer transition took place in the context of the overall transition of the coffee economy in Brazil from big fazenda-centered production to small farmer-centered production. As the ratio of Japanese immigrants to total immigrants in Brazil grew substantially during the interwar years, they became a main immigrant group.<sup>6</sup> Like others, they benefited from the loteamento system of land distribution that was part of the Brazilian government's policy to encourage immigrant-driven land colonization and coffee cultivation.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Japanese immigrants played a key role in facilitating the rise of the small farmer-centered coffee economy. *Kyō hakushaku* (*A Mad Count*), one of the earliest novels to emerge from the Japanese Brazilian community, testified to this transition and highlighted the role played by Japanese immigrants. The novel was serialized in 1923 in *Burajiru jihō*, the most widely circulated newspaper in the Japanese Brazilian community before World War II. It featured a confrontation between a Japanese immigrant, Shinsaku, a revolutionary young man representing the new small farmer-centered coffee economy, and a wealthy coffee planter, Count M, a symbol of the old fazendas. Armed with socialist ideas, Shinsaku criticized Count M for exploiting the laborers on his plantation, which was eventually destroyed by flood and labor strikes. Bankrupt, desperate, and deeply ashamed, Count M went insane.<sup>8</sup> The character's mental collapse and the demise of his plantation symbolized the fate of fazenda-centered coffee production in general, doomed to be replaced by the new coffee economy represented by the Japanese immigrants.

A major force behind this economic transition, Japanese settler villages that emerged in the 1920s and early 1930s were mainly located in western and northern São Paulo, the new coffee zones where land was sold via the loteamento system to encourage land colonization by small farmers. Railway lines connected these villages to each other and also linked them to urban centers like São Paulo, Bauru, and the Port of Santos on the eastern coast. Along with coffee, goods, people, and information traveled on the railway; a well-connected Japanese settler society with a collective identity was taking shape. Central to the formation of this collective identity were vernacular newspapers and magazines in São Paulo that emerged in the 1910s and 1920s, which were transported and sold among Japanese villages along the railway lines. Japanese settlers subscribed to these newspapers at a substantial rate. According to a survey at the end of the 1930s, nearly 90 percent of Japanese households along the Noroeste and Paulista lines subscribed to vernacular newspapers.<sup>9</sup> Since all major Japanese newspapers and magazines in Brazil were based in São Paulo, an analysis of Japanese media in this state would reveal the nature of Japanese media in Brazil at large.



FIGURE 14. A Japanese settler village near a railway station in rural São Paulo. Source: Japanese Striving Society Archive. The trains carried food, crops, goods, newspapers, magazines, and letters between the cities and Japanese settler villages multiple times each week.

A close look at their origins reveals three key aspects of Japanese-language media in Brazil: their connection with land acquisition, the impact of Japanese migration to the United States, and influences from Tokyo. First, Japanese settler media in Brazil, from the very beginning, were tied with Japanese settlers' land acquisition efforts. The original impetus for the media was to facilitate the sale and purchase of land. The first newspaper created by Japanese settlers in Brazil was *Shūkan Nanbei* (*O Nambei Semanario*). It was established in 1916 by Hoshina Ken'ichirō, a Japanese landowner based along the Sorocabana line, for the purpose of selling his land to other Japanese settlers.<sup>10</sup> *Shūkan Nanbei* was soon followed by *Nippaku shinbun* (*Nippal-Shimbun*), founded by Kaneko Hōsaborō also in 1916; *Burajiru jihō* (*Notícias do Brazil*), founded by Kuroishi Seisaku in 1917; and *Seishū shinpō* (*Semanário de São Paulo*), founded by Kōyama Rokurō in 1921.<sup>11</sup> The latter three became the most influential newspapers among Japanese settlers in Brazil before the outbreak of World War II. All these newspapers functioned as key platforms for land sale among Japanese settlers, with substantial portions of their pages dedicated to property advertisements.

Second, Japanese media in Brazil carried the deep imprint of the Japanese American migration experience in previous decades, and a number of their founders were once immigrants in the United States who migrated to Brazil. Hoshina

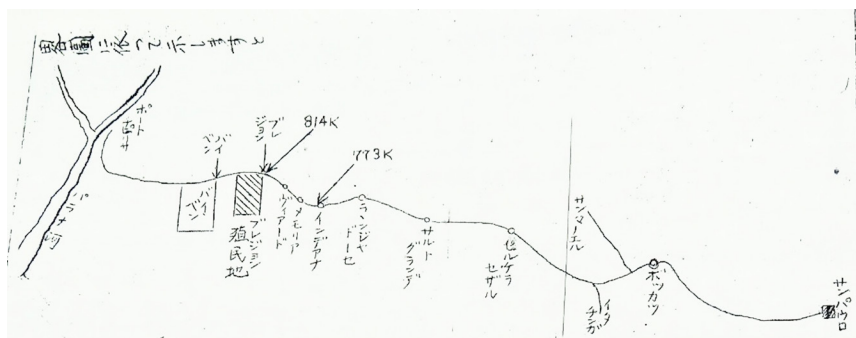


FIGURE 15. The map featured in *Shūkan Nanbei* highlighted two parcels of land for sale owned by Hoshina, demonstrating that the settler media served as a platform for land transactions among the settlers. One parcel was part of the Japanese Burejon Colony, and the other was located near the Indiana railway station. Source: *Shūkan Nanbei* 1, no. 29 (1918): 28.

Ken'ichirō, founder and editor of the *Shūkan Nanbei*, had first migrated to Hawai'i and then moved to Texas to build a rice farm before remigrating to São Paulo.<sup>12</sup> Both Kuroishi Seisaku, founder and editor of *Burajiru jihō*, and Wako Shungorō, a central figure behind the creation of both *Nippaku shinbun* and *Burajiru jihō*, worked as journalists for Japanese American newspapers before moving to Brazil.<sup>13</sup> With this background, it was natural for the past of Japanese American migration to serve as a central reference for Japanese Brazilian media in their discussions of the present and future of Japanese community in Brazil.

Third, the Japanese government exerted substantial influence on Japanese settler media in Brazil. Though not uniformly uncritical of Tokyo, all of the three largest newspapers relied on Japanese consulates in the state of São Paulo as a primary information source. These consulates regularly collected up-to-date information about Japanese settlers in the state by dispatching agents to tour along the railway lines. For this reason, all three newspapers were produced and printed in the cities where Japanese consulates were located. Both *Nippaku shinbun* and *Burajiru jihō* were based in the city of São Paulo, and *Seishū shinpō*, though founded in Bauru, later also relocated its headquarters to São Paulo. The city was also a major international destination for print media from Tokyo.<sup>14</sup> Through various types of booksellers in São Paulo, editors, journalists, and columnists had access to a wide range of contemporary newspapers as well as popular magazines imported from Japan, such as *Kingu* and *Shufu no tomo*.<sup>15</sup>

The types and locations of Japanese settler media in Brazil were diverse. Beyond the three major newspapers, there were more localized newspapers such as *Ariansā jihō* and *Hokusei minpō*, which were based and circulated in the Aliança and Birigui Colonies, respectively.<sup>16</sup> Another newspaper, *Nihon shinbun*, primarily targeted Okinawan readers in São Paulo.<sup>17</sup> There were also magazines devoted to specific topics. Two noteworthy magazines were *Nōgyō no Burajiru* and *Shokumin*



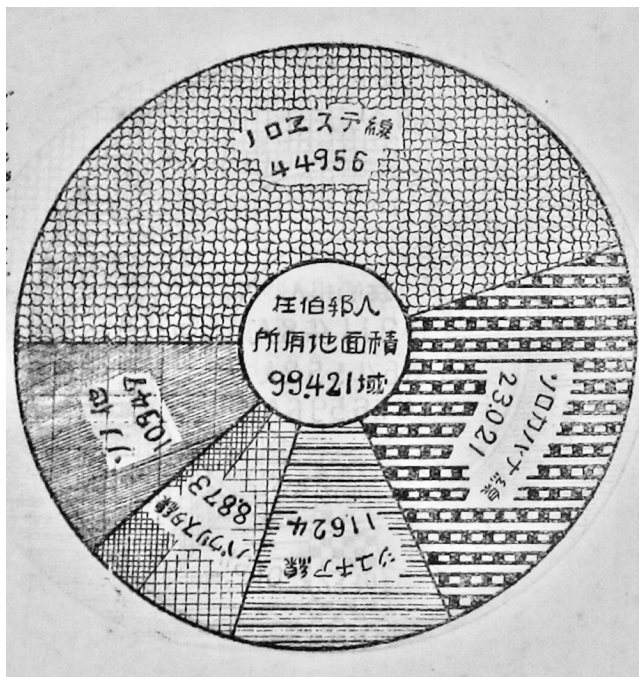


FIGURE 16. A pie chart showing the farmland owned by Japanese settlers along each major railway line in the state São Paulo in 1934. Nearly half was located along the Noroeste line. Source: Kōyama Rokurō, *Zaihaku ishokumin 25 shūnenkan* (São Paulo: Kōyama Rokurō, 1934), preface, 1.

*no hikari*, both aiming to guide Japanese settlers in Brazil to achieve success in farming.<sup>18</sup>

The three major newspapers often disagreed with one another due to the differences in their financial bases and the intellectual stances of their editors. *Burajiru jihō* was the most friendly to Tokyo, because the newspaper itself was the official mouthpiece of Kaikō, a close partner of the imperial government. *Nippaku shinbun*, on the other hand, had a markedly different stance. It often criticized Kaikō and Tokyo for their inability to protect the interests of Japanese settlers in Brazil. It also emphasized the political independence of the Japanese settler elites.<sup>19</sup> *Seishū shinpō* kept its distance from settler elites and the Japanese government, as its founding editor, Kōyama Rokurō, branded the newspaper as representing the ordinary Japanese settlers living along the Noroeste line. This area was home to more than half of the Japanese population in the state and was also where Japanese settler agriculture had most success. More than half of the Japanese settlers in the region had become owner-farmers by the outbreak of the Pacific War.<sup>20</sup>

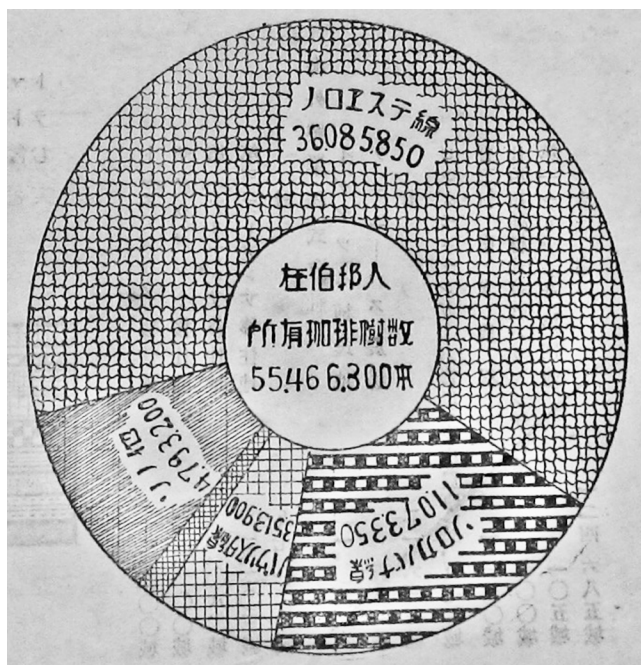


FIGURE 17. A pie chart showing the number of coffee trees owned by Japanese settlers along each major railway line in São Paulo in 1934. More than half were located along the Noroeste line. Coffee trees were the primary crop of the Japanese farming settlers at that time. Source: Kōyama Rokurō, *Zaihaku ishokumin 25 shūnenkan* (São Paulo: Kōyama Rokurō, 1934), preface, 2.

Despite these important differences, the close relationship with landownership, the impact of Japanese migration to the United States, and the influence of Tokyo loomed large as the three central factors that defined Japanese settler media in Brazil. Naturally, these factors also shaped the content that was published. Below I examine common debates in the settler media that were highly relevant to the settlers' daily lives. Not only did these debates share some dominant themes; they also interacted with changes in the sociopolitical reality on the ground. They collectively molded the minds of Japanese settlers in Brazil and ushered in a new, shared settler identity.

#### THE MAKING OF THE JAPANESE SETTLER MENTALITY

By the early 1930s, how Japanese immigrants would succeed in permanently settling in Brazil had become the overarching theme in the core debates of almost all Japanese settler media in São Paulo. The discussion of transforming immigrants into settlers coalesced into two major debates: how to achieve success in agriculture and how to advance settlers' children's education. Farming was key to the

formation of the Japanese settler community. Therefore, it was natural that agriculture occupied a central place in the minds of the editors and writers of the settler media. As a whole, Japanese farmers in Brazil were remarkably successful when compared to their counterparts in the Japanese empire's colonies such as the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, southern Manchuria, and Micronesia. During the 1910s and 1920s, Japanese farming settlers in São Paulo expanded dramatically both in terms of population and geography. During the interwar era, the Japanese population in Brazil had a much higher proportion of farmers than that in Japan's colonies. For this reason, Brazil became one of the most desirable destinations for Japanese emigration in the minds of Japanese empire builders.<sup>21</sup>

While the *loteamento* system of land distribution in São Paulo made it relatively easy for Japanese coffee laborers to transition into independent farmers, an immediate reason for the geographic expansion of Japanese settlers in the state was their adoption of the local method of coffee cultivation. Because of the sheer size of the coffee economy, it was natural for the majority of newly independent Japanese settlers to start out with coffee as their primary crop, and they embraced the traditional methods of coffee cultivation out of convenience. A farming cycle would begin with slash-and-burn, after which coffee trees were planted on the ashes. Because of insufficient fertilization and care, the soil would usually lose its productivity within a few years; then the farmers would abandon the land and move on to start the cycle anew.<sup>22</sup>

With their rapidly growing population, Japanese farming settlers in São Paulo launched the Westward Campaign (*Seishin*) in the late 1910s. In keeping with the slash-and-burn method, they collectively moved from the traditional coffee zone in the east to the west and north of the state, turning once-forested lands into new coffee zones. The development of the rail system enabled the settlers to conveniently resettle and push the coffee zones' boundaries outward. The popular Japanese-language newspapers also played critical roles in facilitating this move by promoting land sale among the settlers.

While celebrating the geographic expansion of their community, the settler media criticized their current farming practices. A turning point came in 1924, when a series of natural disasters such as frost and drought decimated the coffee trees owned by Japanese farmers along the Noroeste and Sorocabana lines, leading to a poor harvest. With the support of *Seishū shinpō* and the Japanese ambassador to Brazil, Tatsuke Shichita, the settlers collectively appealed to the Japanese government and received a low-interest loan of 850,000 yen for disaster relief.<sup>23</sup> Though the majority of the affected Japanese settlers managed to survive, critiques of traditional farming practices quickly emerged in the settler newspapers. The critics insisted that cultivating coffee as the only crop would leave Japanese farmers vulnerable in the long run. They also asserted that constantly moving and exploring new land would hinder the formation of long-term community.





FIGURE 18. Japanese settlers turning a forest into farmland using the slash-and-burn method. Source: Japanese Striving Society Archive.

A 1927 editorial in *Burajiru jihō*, for example, complained that Japanese settlers in Brazil had forgotten their pride and wisdom as farmers, even though Japan had over two thousand years of farming tradition. In Brazil, the article argued, Japanese immigrants adopted the inferior practice of local farmers, cultivating coffee as their only crop and giving little care to the soil. This made them vulnerable to weather and market changes. The writer urged Japanese settlers to return to traditional Japanese farming practices by diversifying their crops and cultivating cotton, potatoes, and grains in addition to coffee.<sup>24</sup> Another editorial, published two years later in the same newspaper, urged its readers to stop abandoning the land that they had explored with their “sweat and blood.” It argued that the key to success was to maintain and protect the land they already had; it promised that with diligent cultivation and care, the farmers would always have good harvests.<sup>25</sup> There were also articles calling for more cooperative societies among the settlers to serve as platforms for mutual help. Others provided detailed advice on farming techniques and market analysis.<sup>26</sup>

Another major topic of discussion in mainstream settler newspapers was how to advance the new generation’s education. Taking place in the context of anti-Japanese campaigns in North America, Japanese campaigns of migration to Brazil, from their very inception, had been family-oriented. Japan’s policy makers and



FIGURE 19. Children of Japanese settlers in Brazil. Source: Japanese Striving Society Archive.

migration promoters alike were convinced that the Japanese migrants' so-called sojourner mentality (*dekasegi konsei*) was the main reason for the anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States, and they were determined to avoid the same outcome in Brazil.<sup>27</sup> Seeing the sojourner mentality as a result of the absence of a familial structure, they considered family migration crucial for Japanese settlement in Brazil to succeed. Both Tokyo's subsidies and the recruiting programs of migration companies were designed to encourage Japanese subjects to migrate together with their family members. Though some fabricated family relations in order to receive governmental subsidies, many indeed migrated with their spouses, children, and siblings.

As children constituted a substantial portion of the Japanese population in Brazil since the beginning of the migration, the need to educate the second generation (Nisei) emerged naturally. The first-generation Japanese immigrants (Issei) in Brazil started arranging age-appropriate education for their children almost as soon as they arrived. Formal schools in the settler community emerged in the mid-1910s.<sup>28</sup> Due to the lack of public education facilities in Brazil's countryside, these schools usually provided Brazilian civic education and Japanese language and culture courses.<sup>29</sup> In order to gain accreditation, the majority of these Japanese schools went through an authorization process and had to hire Brazilian teachers. Once authorized, they would offer civic education in Portuguese following

the government's education mandate in the morning and then teach Japanese language and culture in the afternoon.<sup>30</sup> To meet the Japanese farming settlers' quickly growing demand for Nisei education, they were generally community funded and independent from one another. With the influx of Japanese migrants in the 1920s, more Japanese-language schools emerged together with new settler villages in São Paulo.<sup>31</sup> As a result of the efforts of community leaders and the Japanese government, the education programs in these schools became standardized in terms of their goals, curricula, and textbooks by the end of the decade.

Settler newspapers played a critical role in this process of standardization, as they served as the primary platforms for the discussion of the goals and strategies of Nisei education. While authors and editors held divergent opinions, most of their agendas could be categorized as belonging to one of two loosely defined camps: "Brazil First, Japan Second" (*haku-shu nichi-jū*) versus "Japan First, Brazil Second" (*ni-sshu haku-jū*). As their labels suggested, the former considered teaching the Nisei to be law-abiding Brazilian citizens the top educational priority, while the latter saw providing education in Japanese language and culture as the most important task for the Japanese schools.<sup>32</sup> Despite differences in their priorities, these two schools of thought shared a two-pronged approach, seeking a balance between Brazilian civic education, on the one hand, and education for Japanese subjects, on the other. For this reason, they were often not readily distinguishable from one another. A 1927 article in *Burajiru jihō* revealed this heterogeneous stance. It criticized the idea that the Nisei should be exclusively educated as Brazilian citizens. While the full assimilation of Japanese into Brazilian society could certainly be the ultimate goal, it argued, it meant that the Japanese would have to give up their native language, custom, and tradition—something that could not be achieved in a short time. For the present, the best strategy for the Nisei's education was to combine the good elements of both Japanese and Brazilian cultures.<sup>33</sup> The same newspaper also published an editorial that year with more concrete suggestions on how this strategy could be carried out. It called on the Nisei schools to meticulously follow the Brazilian government's education mandate and cultivate exemplary Brazilian citizens. At the same time, however, they should offer effective courses on Japanese language and cultures. To this end, the writer welcomed Tokyo's financial aid for Nisei education and suggested that the money should be used for designing standardized textbooks and raising the living standards for teachers in Nisei schools.<sup>34</sup>

The evolution of Nisei schools indeed followed this path. The formation of the Japanese School Parents' Association in São Paulo (Zai San Paulo Nihonjin Gakkō Fukeikai) in 1929 marked a milestone in the institutional and ideological standardization of Japanese-language schools in the state. Created under the auspices of the Japanese consul general in São Paulo, Nakashima Sei'ichirō, the association functioned as the central node of all Japanese schools in the state, standardizing their curricula and programs. Its main office was located in the consulate general

building in the city of São Paulo, with branches throughout the state. The association was led by a council composed of members elected by each branch.<sup>35</sup> The influence of *Burajiru jihō* on the Parents' Association was evident, as Kuroishi Seisaku was named its founding vice president; the post of president was left vacant.<sup>36</sup>

In sum, settler media tied the Japanese population in São Paulo together and played a key role in molding the settler mentality among readers. In particular, through discussions on key issues like farming and children's education, the media strived to turn individual Japanese immigrants into self-conscious settlers. Armed with this mentality, Japanese immigrants would not only put down permanent roots in the South American soil as farmers, but also consciously associate their lives with the general course of Japanese expansion.

#### RACE, GENDER, AND THE ILLUSION OF THE COLONIAL IDENTITY

Though the formation of the Japanese settler mentality in Brazil was an ongoing project, it took a leap forward in the early 1930s and gave birth to the Japanese settlers' collective identity. This identity emphasized the imagined racial character of the Japanese, which made them uniquely qualified to colonize the primitive land of Brazil. The Japanese settler elites believed that unlike the white colonizers, the Japanese acted in accordance with the principle of "coexistence and co-prosperity" (*kyōzon kyōei*) while carrying out their colonial mission. By following this principle, they argued, the Japanese were not only racially superior, but more benevolent than the Anglo-Americans, as they were willing to guide the inferior locals and share the fruits of progress. It was with this collective belief that the settler elites united individual Japanese in São Paulo as members of an imagined community.

Such a collective identity came into being in the early 1930s as a result of historical changes taking place in both East Asia and Brazil. The Manchurian Incident in 1931, initiated by the Kwantung Army, led to the immediate escalation of Japanese expansion in Northeast Asia and turned Manchuria into a de facto colony. Japan occupied Manchuria by the end of 1931 and established the puppet state of Manchukuo the next year. The Kwantung Army and the imperial government wasted no time launching campaigns to relocate Japanese farmers to this new frontier of the empire. Japanese settler media in São Paulo correctly sensed that geopolitical changes in East Asia and Tokyo's new migration priorities would lead to a decrease in Tokyo's support for Brazil-bound emigration and a drop in the number of Japanese immigrants coming to Brazil. In response, they reassured their readers that Brazil continued to be the most suitable destination for Japanese migration even after the Manchurian Incident. A 1932 editorial in *Nippaku shinbun*, for example, contended that Manchuria, though huge, was a good place for capital investment, not for migration. This was because Japanese farmers could not compete against local Chinese farmers, who had a much lower standard of living.<sup>37</sup>

While geopolitical changes in Northeast Asia caused the Japanese settler elites in Brazil to worry about the decline in the migration flow from Japan, the intensification of Brazil's ethnic nationalism caused a crisis within the Japanese settler society itself. The global economic depression worsened preexisting conflicts between the planter elites and politicians in Brazil. The Revolution of 1930 ended Brazil's old republic and brought Getúlio Vargas to the center of political power. The rise of Brazilian ethnic nationalism during Vargas's presidency quickly led to renewed efforts to restrict Japanese immigration by a group of Brazilian politicians and social elites.

The first major wave of anti-Japanese political campaigns in Brazil can be dated to the early 1920s. The decline of European political and economic influence during and immediately after World War I coincided with a rising tide of nationalism as the nation celebrated the hundred-year anniversary of its independence from Portugal. Precisely at this moment, the cultural glorification of racial whitening, an ideology that had long dominated the nation's racial thinking, was giving way to a new, indigenized version of ethnic nationalism centered on racial mixing, a common practice that had a long tradition in Brazilian society.<sup>38</sup> The discourse of racial mixing, however, proved to be unfavorable to the situation of the Japanese settlers.

The first congressional campaign against Japanese immigrants was spearheaded by Fidelis Reis, a federal legislator from Minas Gerais. In 1923, he submitted what was later known as the Reis Bill to Congress that included clauses to restrict the immigration of "undesirable races," including the Japanese, by imposing quotas.<sup>39</sup> Reis and his supporters justified these proposals by defining the Japanese as unasimilable.<sup>40</sup> In addition, they cited the expansion of the Japanese empire in Asia as evidence that Japanese immigration to Brazil was a means of the empire to realize its territorial ambitions in South America.<sup>41</sup> The Reis Bill failed to pass because Brazilian demand for Japanese laborers and farming settlers reached an unprecedented level following World War I due to a substantial decline in European immigrants. However, anti-Japanese sentiments in Brazil continued to fester and swell at both the state and federal levels and were further inflamed after the Revolution of 1930.

In response to these deteriorating conditions, the Japanese-language settler media carefully reported the arguments of anti-Japanese politicians and elites. They also suggested various ways for their readers to pacify the anti-Japanese sentiments, such as avoiding forming Japanese-only colonies and moving from São Paulo to other states where the Japanese would be more welcome due to their small populations.<sup>42</sup> More importantly, as the history of Japanese immigration to Brazil was approaching its twenty-fifth year, the settler media took the initiative to legitimize Japanese immigration by defining the racial character of Japanese settlers in Brazil. At the center of this racial identity was the principle of coexistence and co-prosperity, which held up Japanese settlers in Brazil as the most competent





FIGURE 20. A cartoon in the journal *Burajiru: ishokumin to bōeki* that argued that Japanese settlers' sojourner mentality was the main cause of anti-Japanese sentiment. As the caption read: "Right after saving a small amount of money, he hurries to return to Japan with pride. This is the very cause of anti-Japanese sentiment." Source: *Burajiru: ishokumin to bōeki*, no. 6 (July 1927): 41.

colonizers because they were endowed with two key characteristics: racial superiority and benevolence. On the one hand, they were born with talent and diligence, which made them the most competent farmers to explore Brazil's primitive land; on the other, unlike the selfish Anglo-Americans who only knew how to exploit or exclude others, the Japanese were willing to cooperate and share the fruits of their work.<sup>43</sup>

This racial identity was articulated through a number of media events across the settler villages to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Japanese immigration to Brazil. The first was the establishment of the Colonial Literature Short Story Award (Shokumin Bungei Tanpen Shōsetsu Shō) by *Burajiru jihō* in 1932. Between 1932 and 1937, the newspaper held four contests for the award, promoting the production and appreciation of colonial literature among Japanese settlers.<sup>44</sup> The award committee's selection criteria explicitly favored entries that were grounded in the unique colonial experience of the Japanese in Brazil as opposed to that of the Japanese in general.<sup>45</sup> Most of the awardees were exactly the ones the committee were looking for: they focused on the specific experience of Japanese settlers in Brazil and contributed to the development of their collective identity. The racial identity that emphasized coexistence and co-prosperity was particularly well-illustrated by a second-place winner of the inaugural contest.

Titled "The Death of a Frontier Settler" (*Aru kaitakusha no shi*), this story by Tanabe Shigeyuki told the personal tragedy of a Japanese landowner in São Paulo, Kaneko Daisuke. Following the common path of Japanese settlers in

Brazil, Kaneko was born into a poor family in rural Japan and arrived at a São Paulo coffee plantation as a contract laborer. He was unusual, however, in his obsession with a dream of returning to Japan as a rich man. Like many other Japanese, Kaneko worked extremely hard and was able to quickly become a successful farm owner, but as he was consumed by the desire to save money for the eventual return, he had little sympathy for the less fortunate and made no commitment to the well-being of the local society. The story began with Kaneko coldly refusing to give food to a starving Black family who were trying to eke out a living on his farm; it ended with the death of Kaneko, who, on his way to return to Japan with a huge fortune, was killed by a Black man seeking vengeance. The selfish protagonist was presented in contrast to the other Japanese who worked on his farm: in the spirit of coexistence and co-prosperity, they not only welcomed the Black family but also sympathized with their plight. The story, therefore, framed Kaneko's tragedy as a cautionary tale for those who clung to the dream of going back to Japan. To avoid Kaneko's tragic fate, the story implied, settlers had to resolve to put down permanent roots in Brazil. As true Japanese settlers, they should all be willing to take the land of Brazil as their own and share their achievement with the locals.<sup>46</sup>

While these contests promoted a collective identity through literature, the publication of two special yearbooks by *Burajiru jihō* and *Seishū shinpō* consolidated this identity through historiography. *The Yearbook for the 25th Year Anniversary of Japanese in Brazil* (*Zaihaku ishokumin 25 shū nenkan*), by the editor of *Seishū shinpō*, Kōyama Rokurō, provided a comprehensive history of Japanese migration and settlement in Brazil. Kōyama was among the first official group of Japanese migrants who arrived on the *Kasato Maru*, and he completed his yearbook by combining the information he collected in careful research and his personal recollections.<sup>47</sup> The book emphasized the settlers' subjecthood to the Japanese empire by beginning with a history of Japan's diplomatic relations with Brazil and describing the settlers as Japan's representatives in South America. It provided detailed information on each Japanese settler colony in and outside the state of São Paulo, including the settlers' names, native prefectures, occupations, and sometimes the size of each settler family's land plot. The book showcased the splendid achievements of the Japanese settlers in farming and documented their contributions to the progress and prosperity of Brazilian society.

While *The Yearbook for the 25th Year Anniversary*, from a horizontal view, highlighted the Japanese settlers' contributions to Brazilian society, *The Yearbook of Brazil* (*Burajiru nenkan*), put together by the editorial board of *Burajiru jihō*, presented the story of Japanese collaborative settler colonialism through a vertical lens. It integrated Japanese immigration and community building experiences into the ongoing historical process of settler colonialism in Brazil. This yearbook contained two parts. Part 1 was a comprehensive overview of the history of Brazil, from the European "discovery" to the 1930 Revolution. It presented Brazilian



FIGURE 21. Japanese settlers with caboclos. Source: Japanese Striving Society Archive. This photo highlights the racial hierarchy between the Japanese and the caboclos; all of the former are in more relaxed poses and uniformly dressed in white shirts, while the caboclos assume more tense poses and are dressed in colorful attire. The lighter skin of the Japanese is further contrasted with the much darker complexion of the caboclos.

history as a process through which a primitive land was gradually enlightened by modern civilization. It also portrayed Brazil as a land of abundant natural resources by providing detailed information about the country's geography, agriculture, mining, and fishery. Part 2, on the other hand, focused on the twenty-five years of the Japanese settlers' experience that fit seamlessly into the historical and geographic narrative in Part 1. It narrated the history of Japanese migration as a heroic saga in which the Japanese settlers achieved great success tapping into Brazil's natural wealth by overcoming myriad difficulties. The bulk of Part 2 was devoted to detailing the information of each settler village. It presented the achievement and prosperity of the Japanese settlers not only as an indispensable part of Brazil's history of progress but also as evidence of the Japanese settlers' contribution to that progress.<sup>48</sup>

This self-portrait stood in contrast to the reality of Japanese settler elites' discrimination against the nonwhite locals. Indeed, the demarcation between the Japanese and the nonwhite Brazilians was also central to the settlers' collective

identity, a process in which gender played a role as important as that of race. Most of the settler elites believed that the Nisei, without proper education, would head down the path of racial degeneration due to a combination of Brazil's primitive nature and the prevalent local practice of miscegenation.<sup>49</sup> In their mind, proper mothering was the key to reversing this dark course. For example, a front-page article in *Seishū shinpō* in 1927 lamented that it was common for husbands to mistreat their wives; they not only forced the women to take on a full load of farmwork during the day but also burdened them with all household chores. The article urged the men to stop enslaving their wives, not because doing so was morally wrong, but because when the women were overworked to such an extent they could no longer fulfill their childcare duties. Many Japanese settler families ended up hiring caboclos, people of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry whom the Japanese deemed inferior, to look after their children. These caboclos, the article contended, only knew how to raise children as farm animals. Under such circumstances, it asked, how could the settlers still claim they were colonizers (*shokumin*)?<sup>50</sup>

In 1934, *Seishū shinpō*'s editor, Kōyama Rokurō, published an article in *Burajiru: ishokumin to bōeki*, a journal published in Kobe but circulated in both Japan and Japanese settler societies in Brazil, reiterating his concern for the Nisei. He lamented that though the Japanese had made impressive achievements in land exploration in Brazil, they did so at the expense of their children, who were heading down the path of racial degeneration. Hardworking as they were, Japanese settlers neglected their duty in childcare and let the caboclos raise their children instead. Kōyama was worried that the next generation of Japanese settlers would become adulterated and inferior just like the caboclos.<sup>51</sup>

A short story serialized in *Burajiru jihō* in the same year more bluntly revealed Japanese settlers' racism against mixed-race Brazilians. Titled "After Settling Down" (*Nyūshoku kara*), the story was told from the perspective of Shūnsaku, a new arrival from Japan at a Japanese settler farm in São Paulo. Shūnsaku described a group of mixed-blood Brazilian children as savage as monkeys or animals that "lived in the stomach of a poisonous snake." He was particularly shocked after realizing that there were a few children of his fellow Japanese settlers in this group who "had lost their Japaneseness" and spoke Portuguese as their mother tongue. The novel also referred to the caboclos as *dojin*, a derogatory Japanese word for Indigenous people.<sup>52</sup> The Japanese had used the same term for the Ainu in Hokkaido and Native Americans.

This discrimination was the primary reason for Japanese settler society's strict prohibition on interracial marriage. While the settler media at times published fictional stories presenting male Japanese settlers' sexual fantasies involving white Brazilian women, the settler society did not tolerate marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese.<sup>53</sup> Due to a lack of white Brazilian population in the

countryside, the majority of such interracial marriages were between Japanese and the caboclos. The settler elites were particularly intolerant when a Japanese woman was involved in a relationship or marriage with a caboclo, seeing it as a step toward the community's racial degeneration. Women who dared to transgress this rule typically faced both stiff opposition from her own family members and complete ostracization from the entire community. The fellow residents of her colony would collectively strip her communal membership and force her to relocate.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, interracial marriages between Japanese and Okinawans in Brazil had no place in the settler community.<sup>55</sup> This gendered racial discrimination not only belied the Japanese Brazilian settlers' proclaimed commitment to interracial cooperation but also testified to the affinity between their collective identity in Brazil and Japanese colonialism in Asia.

. . .

In 1933, the Brazilian thinker Gilberto Freyre published *Casa-Grande e Senzala* after returning from the United States. Reprinted numerous times, with countless copies sold in the decades to come, *Casa-Grande*, also known by the title of its English translation, *The Masters and the Slaves*, symbolized a sea change in the evolution of racial thinking and national identity in Brazil. A direct response to Jim Crow practices that Freyre had encountered in the U.S. South, the book celebrated the tradition of racial mixing as the central strength of Brazilian civilization.<sup>56</sup> This practice, argued Freyre, ensured Brazilian culture's superiority over its Anglo-American counterparts; while Brazil enjoyed a balanced relationship between races, the United States was trapped in a hopeless struggle between two antagonistic halves: Black and white.<sup>57</sup> As the tradition of racial mixing in Brazil began to be received with increasing positivity since the end of World War I, the publication and immediate popularity of *Casa-Grande* marked the decline of the discourse of scientific racism that had dominated in elite Brazilian circles since the late nineteenth century and served as a justification for the decades-long policy of racial whitening adopted by the First Republic. *Casa-Grande* became the intellectual foundation of a new discourse of "racial democracy," one that gained momentum under the rule of Getúlio Vargas. It praised Brazil as a nation of racial harmony where people of different skin colors, unlike those who suffered the tyranny of white racism and racial segregation in the United States, enjoyed political and social equality.<sup>58</sup>

The rise of this new racial identity in Brazil took place at the same time that Japanese settlers in the state of São Paulo formed their own collective identity and a distinctive sense of community. This was made possible by the demographic and geographic expansion of the Japanese community in Brazil, the proliferation of print media in the community, and geopolitical changes in Northeast Asia and the Americas. Adopting a strategy of biculturalism, the Japanese settlers deemed themselves exemplifiers of the Japanese empire's ideology of coexistence



and co-prosperity, as well as the most qualified colonizers of Brazilian land because of their supposed skills and benevolence.

A parallel between the Brazilian ideology of racial democracy and the Japanese settlers' discourse of coexistence and co-prosperity exists in that both presented themselves as challengers of white racism in the United States. This similarity was natural, because just as Freyre based his book on his observation of racism in the United States, the foremost architects of Japanese settlers' collective identity in Brazil were Japanese Americans who experienced racism in the United States first-hand before remigrating to Brazil. The attempts of both Japan and Brazil to pursue independent diplomacy in the 1920s and early 1930s served as the international context for this shift.

Another parallel was that both racial democracy and coexistence and co-prosperity were centered on the self-claimed principle of racial equality and fairness, yet in reality, both the Japanese and Brazilian elites practiced these ideas hand in hand with their own racial discrimination and exclusion. Japanese settlers in Brazil themselves were excluded from the class of beneficiaries of the splendid "racial democracy." Branded as members of an unassimilable race, they were victims of the institutionalized racism of Getúlio Vargas's *Estado Novo*, as demonstrated by its quota restriction of Japanese immigration. On the other hand, while depicting themselves as altruistic civilizers, the Japanese settlers in Brazil discriminated against locals of Indigenous and mixed origins. A modified version of the coexistence and co-prosperity discourse quickly gained popularity in Asia and became a central justification for Japanese expansion during the Asia-Pacific War.

The Indigenous people in Brazil had no place in either of these seemingly inclusive racial ideologies. The government's ban on planting new coffee trees in São Paulo in the early 1930s prompted further expansion of Japanese and other immigrant communities into northern Paraná, which was exempt from the ban. Consequently, the last independent Kaingang community in northern Paraná saw their woodlands seized by newcomers. These newcomers quickly began extensive deforestation for coffee cultivation, unaware that the soil beneath the rainforest was infertile. Therefore, the deforestation led to the destruction of native plant and animal life. Afterward, some Kaingang were given small plots of land, while others faced death.

Similar tragedies unfolded for the Kaingang in other regions. For instance, the Mangueirinha reserve, which housed the precious araucaria pine trees that sustained the Kaingang year-round, was deforested. This action not only deprived the Indigenous people of their food source but also led to a severe ecological crisis. As a result, the Kaingang living in the reserve became dependent on external food sources, as their once-lush habitat turned into overgrown fields.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, the Revolution of 1930 and the ascendancy of ethnic nationalism under *Estado Novo* did not immediately bring Japanese migration to Brazil to an end. It continued through the end of the 1930s. However, the Japanese

settlers' ambiguous identity as both Brazilian residents and Japanese subjects in the 1920s was no longer viable in the increasingly hostile environment of 1930s Brazil. How did the rising transpacific tensions before World War II affect the daily lives and the collective identity of Japanese settlers in Brazil? This is the topic of the next chapter.