

“Orphan of the World”

The Myth and Reality of Racial Inclusion

“Japan is an orphan of the world,” concluded Ishikawa Tatsuzō in his 1931 book, *Saikin Nanbei ōraiki* (On a Recent Journey to South America), after completing a trip to Brazil. Ishikawa correctly sensed the increasingly isolated international environment the Japanese empire was facing. In his book, he claimed that global leadership was in transition, implying that the Japanese would replace the Anglo-Americans as the dominant race (*chikyū wo shihaisuru jinshu*).¹ To substantiate this point, the book devoted a full chapter to a long message given by Carvalho Barbosa, a bureaucrat of the Brazilian federal government who was in charge of agriculture in São Paulo. The civilization of the northern hemisphere, claimed Barbosa, was doomed to decline and to be replaced by that of the southern hemisphere. The future of the world would hinge on the partnership of two nations: Brazil and Japan. While Brazil would emerge as the leader of the southern hemisphere, the Japanese, a superior race and the best farmers in the world, were essential contributors through immigration. The synergy between Brazil’s rich resources and Japan’s excellent farmers would usher in the global ascendancy of the southern hemisphere.²

As the word *orphan* implied, the Japanese empire indeed found itself increasingly isolated in the Anglo-American order when its expansion into Northeast Asia rapidly intensified. Yet Barbosa’s words also pointed to a surprisingly warm relationship between the governments of Japan and Brazil, two increasingly authoritarian regimes in the 1930s. In the wake of the Manchurian Incident, mounting tensions between Japan and the Anglo-American powers pushed Tokyo to explore South America as an alternative supplier of raw materials, leading to unprecedented Japanese interest in the Brazilian market. As the Vargas regime sought to revitalize the national economy following the Great Depression, the

sharp growth in Japanese investments and raw material purchases was met with great enthusiasm by Brazil. This intimate trade partnership brought dazzling economic opportunities to Japanese settlers in Brazil.

At the same time, the decade preceding World War II presented serious challenges to the settlers. The Vargas era was marked by the rise of Brazilian ethnic nationalism that celebrated Brazil's long history of racial mixing and its unique racial identity alongside Brazil's cultural and economic independence from Europe and North America. As inclusive as this racial discourse appeared, it did not have a place for the Japanese. Advocates of Japanese immigration such as Barbosa found themselves in the minority in the 1930s. Defining the Japanese as racially unassimilable, anti-Japanese politicians pushed through a quota to restrict immigration from Japan. As a result, the annual number of new Japanese immigrants dropped sharply, from 21,930 in 1934 to 3,306 in 1936, then to 1,414 in 1939.³ This was only one of a series of setbacks that the settler community suffered as a result of Rio's new policies. Restriction on immigration was soon followed by the forced closure of Japanese schools and a ban on all Japanese-language newspapers by the outbreak of the Pacific War.

Given these contexts, the lives of Japanese settlers in Brazil during the 1930s were marked by three broad changes: the increasing capitalization and economic prosperity of the community, the settlers' search for new identities, and the settlers' new connections with the empire. First, the capitalist turn in the community was twofold. Following the decline in migration, Japanese expansion in Brazil became increasingly capital based. It was marked by the rapid growth of Japanese business interests and investments in agriculture in both the Amazon region and São Paulo. On the other hand, the ratio of owner-farmers in the Japanese Brazilian community grew steadily and nearly doubled through the 1930s. By 1942, when Japan and Brazil terminated their diplomatic relationship, almost 60 percent of Japanese immigrants in Brazil had become landowners.⁴ This change took place hand in hand with the shift from coffee to cotton as the primary crop of Japanese farming settlers.

Second, political and economic changes in local and global contexts led the Japanese settlers to search for new identities. The approach of strategic biculturalism that the community elites promoted in the 1920s faltered in the new decade. As ethnic nationalism continued to rise in the Shōwa empire and the Estado Nova, Japanese Brazilian elites grew divided over how to redefine their racial identity in Brazil. This not only resulted in a heated debate on whether the settlers should return to Asia and join the empire's "holy war," but it also led to a bitter confrontation in the settler community that lasted until two decades after World War II.

Third, new developments in the Japanese Brazilian community interacted closely with Japan's ongoing expansion on the other side of the globe, allowing Japanese settlers in Brazil to form new ties with the empire in Asia. Either directly

or indirectly, they functioned as the arms of the empire to acquire raw materials from both the Amazon and southeastern Brazil. A small number of settlers also repatriated and participated in the empire's expansion in Southeast Asia and the South Seas. Their relocation and activities were facilitated by Japanese companies in Brazil that were also shifting their operations to the Asia-Pacific region.

This chapter illustrates these three new aspects of Japanese settlers' lives in São Paulo in the 1930s and early 1940s. This was a time marked by a strange mixture of opportunities and failures, rationality and mania, and cosmopolitanism and insularity. The chapter also explores the Japanese Brazilian elites' different approaches to the discourse of identity, analyzing the impacts these approaches had on the Japanese empire as well as their community in Brazil. It begins with a discussion of the rapid development of cotton cultivation among the Japanese settlers in São Paulo and the formation of a new trade partnership between Japan and Brazil in the 1930s. It then examines and compares the two regimes of ethnic nationalism in the Shōwa empire and *Estado Novo*, illustrating how they worked together in unexpected ways to trigger an identity crisis in the settler community. The chapter ends with a discussion of the different choices made by the settlers in this time of extremes, ranging from returning to Japan to staying in Brazil and assimilating into its society.

FROM COFFEE TO COTTON

Coffee, which dominated the economic lives of Japanese immigrants in São Paulo before the 1930s, was replaced by cotton following the Great Depression. The rapid expansion of cotton cultivation among Japanese settlers in São Paulo secured economic prosperity for the community in the 1930s and during World War II. Further, it created new ties between the settler community and the Japanese empire. These new connections fostered a surprising increase in bilateral trade between Japan and Brazil amid escalating tensions across the Pacific Ocean during the years right before World War II. They also prompted Japanese settlers to renegotiate their identities, though in divergent ways, in terms of how to define their relationship with the two regimes of ethnic nationalism. The arising differences not only led to immediate confrontations but also sowed the seed for chaos in the Japanese settler community both during and after World War II.

Like rice, cotton had been a side crop that the Japanese contract laborers had cultivated to achieve financial independence since the 1910s.⁵ Compared to coffee, cotton's advantage was twofold. To start with, it required less capital and expertise upfront and generated returns more quickly. This made cotton an ideal cash crop for plantation laborers who were eager to become independent farmers. Moreover, unlike coffee, cotton was not vulnerable to frost; it was also more suitable to the sandy soil in Alta Paulista and Alta Sorocabana, new areas of settler expansion to the west of São Paulo.⁶ Yet up to the 1930s, Japanese immigrants in São Paulo

simply adopted the coffee-centered economic mode of local farmers; thus, coffee remained their primary crop.

Two factors spurred the popularity of cotton among the farming settlers in the 1930s. The first was the global Depression and, consequently, the Brazilian government's restriction on coffee production. The trading value of coffee on the international market plummeted during this worldwide crisis. Rising to power amid the Great Depression, Vargas and his followers prioritized mitigating the damage that the Depression had on an economy that disproportionately relied on coffee exportation. To this end, the new regime banned the planting of new coffee trees throughout the country and encouraged economic diversification.⁷ This policy, combined with the precipitous drop in coffee prices, pushed coffee farmers to turn to cotton and other cash crops as alternatives.

The impact of these new political and economic changes on the settler community is reflected in Japanese Brazilian literature in the 1930s. *Selling a Coffee Farm* (*Kafēen wo uru*), a short novel by Sugi Takeo that was serialized in *Burajiru jihō* in 1932, told the story of a Japanese farming family in the western part of São Paulo during the chaotic early 1930s. Coming to Brazil with the goal of getting rich, the family acquired a small farm and planted coffee trees. However, instead of achieving financial success, they met one misfortune after another amid the political turmoil and economic depression. On his deathbed, the father attributed the failure of the family farm to its overdependence on coffee. The story ended when the son was forced to sell the coffee farm, seeing the family's years of efforts come to nothing.⁸

The second incentive to switch to cotton came from Japan's government and business leaders. Beginning in the early 1920s, they began to encourage Japanese settlers in Brazil to cultivate cotton by linking the crop with the interest of the empire.⁹ The most successful case of Tokyo-guided cotton cultivation was Bastos, the largest among the four settler colonies managed by Burataku, the local agent of Japan's Federation of Overseas Migration Cooperatives. With advanced planning and technical support from Tokyo, Japanese farmers in Bastos responded quickly to the changes of the new era. By 1932, the year that the Japanese empire established Manchukuo in Northeast Asia, cotton had replaced coffee as the primary crop of the colony. Cotton output that year increased nearly sixfold from 1931, and the crop became the colony's biggest source of income.¹⁰

The success of cotton cultivation in Bastos, in turn, stimulated further attention from Tokyo. Japan began importing raw cotton from Brazil in 1934, shortly after the empire surpassed the United Kingdom to become the world's largest cotton textile exporter as well as the largest raw cotton importer.¹¹ In response to the growing tensions between the United Kingdom and the Japanese empire after the Manchurian Incident, the Commonwealth countries began boycotting Japanese textiles in 1932. The British Raj, Japan's primary supplier of raw cotton, started to restrict exportation to the empire in 1935.¹² In addition, Japan's

relationship with the United States, its top export destination, continued to deteriorate following the Manchurian Incident. These events pushed Japanese policy makers and business elites to explore alternative sources of raw cotton and trading partners in general.¹³ The success of cotton cultivation in Bastos came as fortuitous news to those who had always sought ways to make use of the Japanese settlers in Brazil for the empire.

Also in 1935, Tokyo took another step to enhance its economic partnership with Rio by dispatching a special delegation to Brazil led by Hirao Hachisaburō, a business tycoon who also presided over the Federation of Overseas Migration Cooperative Societies. The delegation was received by the Brazilian government with enthusiasm. The amount of Brazilian raw cotton exports to Japan skyrocketed from 2.5 tons (representing 1.8 percent of all Brazilian cotton exports) in 1935 to 43 tons (21.6 percent overall) in 1936.¹⁴ By then, cotton produced by Japanese settlers in São Paulo already made up more than half of the total output in the state. Due to a decrease in cotton exportation from North America at the time, the price of cotton shot up in the international market, leading to a substantial increase in the income of Japanese cotton growers in São Paulo.

In 1936, a year after the delegation's visit, Hirao orchestrated the privatization of the Federation of the Overseas Migration Cooperative Societies' properties in Brazil. He became the founding president of the Nichinan Industrial Company (Nichinan Sangyō Kabushiki Gaisha), a privately funded enterprise that inherited the properties of the federation, including Burataku, which were previously owned by the Japanese government. The Nichinan Industrial Company not only attracted more private investment from Japan to the settler community but also stimulated bilateral trade as a whole.¹⁵ It established the Nanbei Ginkō (South American Bank) in the city of São Paulo to provide financial services to Japanese settlers. It also exported coffee, diamonds, crystal, and other raw materials to Japan through the end of the 1930s.¹⁶

More Japanese investment and governmental aid poured into the settler community specifically to encourage cotton cultivation. In 1936, the Japanese consul in São Paulo held a two-day workshop to provide the settlers with tips on how to achieve economic success through cotton. Two years later, the consul held another workshop that facilitated the formation of the Cotton Association (Menka Rengōkai), which promoted mutual help among Japanese settlers in the state.¹⁷ Around the same time, the Japanese Brazilian Cotton Company (Nippaku Menka Kabushiki Gaisha) based in Osaka established a factory in São Paulo to process raw cotton before shipping it to Japan.¹⁸ As more assistance from Japan poured into Japanese settler colonies in São Paulo to expand cotton production, the number of Japanese cotton-growing households in the state soared from 14,000 in 1935 to 40,000 in 1942, when Japanese settlers produced as much as 70 percent of the raw cotton output in São Paulo and 30 percent of that in Brazil overall.¹⁹

The popularization of cotton also served as the final push in the transition of the Japanese settler population's social status from plantation laborers to owner-farmers. Promoting cotton cultivation was a central agenda of the "Gozar a Terra" (Give and Take, also known as GAT) campaign, which included a series of workshops and discussion meetings for the settlers. This social campaign was launched by Burataku in 1934 and grew into a social movement across Japanese villages in São Paulo. Directly responding to the drop in coffee prices caused by the global Depression, the campaign aimed at diversifying the Japanese settler economy and turning away from the slash-and-burn mode of farming that kept them constantly on the move. GAT promoters organized workshops to disseminate tips for cotton cultivation and formed the Cotton Growth Cooperative (Menka Zōshū Kumiai) to encourage cotton production. The ultimate goal of the campaign was to ensure the settlers' commitment to permanent settlement.²⁰ It disseminated knowledge about how to fertilize the soil for long-term farming, how to choose crops according to soil conditions, and how to develop supplementary farming ventures such as raising pigs, chicken, and silkworms. It also encouraged the settlers to band together for better economic gain and good health.²¹ The campaign fell short of its mission of crop diversification: motivated by profit, the settlers quickly embraced cotton as the primary substitute for coffee.²² However, it did prove effective in terms of fostering permanent settlement by speeding up the transition of Japanese farm laborers to owner-farmers. In the decade between 1932 and 1942, the ratio of owner-farmers among the Japanese farming population more than doubled. By 1942, 59.7 percent of the Japanese farmers in São Paulo had become landowners.²³

BETWEEN THE TWO REGIMES OF ETHNIC NATIONALISM

For Koseki Tokuya, architect of the GAT movement, permanent settlement was also a remedy for a pressing crisis the settlers were facing at the time. Koseki had studied agriculture at Hokkaido Imperial University before migrating to São Paulo to become an agricultural engineer and community leader. He observed that most of the Japanese settlers harbored resentment because they wanted to return to Japan but could not afford it. Only the "religion" of permanent settlement (*eijūkyō*), as he called it, could soothe their distress and stabilize the community.²⁴ The "resentment" described by Koseki was part of a larger identity crisis that plagued the Japanese villages in São Paulo despite their economic prosperity. As ethnic nationalism intensified in both imperial Japan and Brazil, the Japanese settlers in São Paulo found their biculturalism no longer tenable as an identity strategy.

Though emerging in drastically different local contexts, the discourses of ethnic nationalism in Brazil and Japan during this decade bore unexpected similarities. The tradition of racial mixing in Brazil began to be received with increasing positivity after World War I; the publication and immediate popularity of Gilberto

Freyre's *Casa-Grande* marked the decline of the discourse of scientific racism. The latter, which had dominated in Brazil's elite circles since the late nineteenth century, had served to justify the First Republic's decades-long policy of racial whitening, or branqueamento. In its stead, *Casa-Grande* heralded the new discourse of "racial democracy," which gained popularity under the rule of Getúlio Vargas. It celebrated Brazil as a land of racial harmony, where individuals of varying skin tones had equal access to political and social rights, in contrast to the oppression of white supremacy in the United States.²⁵

This racial discourse mirrored the theory of racial hybridity that gained popularity in the 1930s in the Japanese empire. Represented by the ideas of Kita Sadakichi and Takamura Itsue, this theory rejected the assumption that the Japanese had a monoracial origin. Instead, it claimed that the Yamato race was a product of long-term interracial marriages among different ethnic groups residing both inside and outside the territory of the Japanese empire.²⁶ Similar to Freyre's criticism of racial segregation in the United States, advocates of Japanese racial hybridity emphasized the superiority of the Japanese approach over Western practices. Takamura Itsue, for example, argued that history had shown that while the Japanese exemplified how different peoples became one through peaceful means, Westerners could only do so by violent conquest.²⁷

In addition to contrasting themselves to racist Euro-Americans, the Japanese and Brazilian discourses of racial mixing were similar in that both were used to advance forced racial assimilation in their settler colonial contexts. Kita's claim about the Japanese's hybrid racial origin conveniently legitimized the ongoing project to assimilate the empire's colonial subjects in Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula. The theory dressed up the violence and coercion associated with this process with the trope of family reunification.²⁸ It also came with what Takashi Fujitani calls a "polite" form of racism that gained popularity in the Japanese empire around this time. Propelled by the need to procure some degree of consent among the colonial subjects and mobilize them for war, policy makers and cultural elites of the empire were obligated to shun the "vulgar" expressions of racism and openly disavow racial discrimination, even as racism remained omnipresent in the everyday life of the empire.²⁹

Similarly, the proclaimed "democratic" tradition of race proved to be useful to the Vargas regime as it sought justifications to enforce the national singularization of language and culture. It also denied the existence of racism in its policies of coerced assimilation and immigration restriction. By this logic, those who became the targets of exclusion could only blame their own failure to assimilate. It was, therefore, not surprising that the Brazilian government promulgated a race-based quota on Japanese immigration just one year after Freyre's book extolled Brazil's tradition of racial mixing. It was also natural that the leaders of anti-Japanese campaigns in Brazil in the 1930s uniformly denied their racist inclinations. Miguel de Oliveira Couto, a university professor and the architect of the proposal to restrict immigration by imposing a quota, made it clear that the Japanese were not inferior.

Instead, he argued that the Japanese should be a target of restriction because they had failed to assimilate into Brazilian society.³⁰

The shared nature of exclusivity of these two regimes was also revealed in their redoubled efforts to control the Japanese immigrants in Brazil. Ethnic nationalism in Japan and Brazil simultaneously pushed the Japanese settler elites to drop their strategic biculturalism in favor of more extreme stances. A primary venue through which both regimes exerted their control was education. The Japanese Culture and Education Association (Nihonjin Bunkyo Fukyukai) was an organization established in 1929 to unify the curricula and administration of Japanese schools in São Paulo. As it was under strong influences from the Japanese consul, it became increasingly nationalistic after the Manchurian Incident.³¹ Its leaders acted collectively to boycott a new set of textbooks specifically designed for the settlers' children on the grounds that they lacked patriotism toward Japan. The Japanese government tightened its ideological control over the settlers in 1937, the year when the empire entered a total war with China. Ishi Shigemi, a special officer appointed by Japan's Foreign Ministry to reform the association's leadership, had become its de facto head.³²

Education was also a core area in which the Vargas regime was projecting power into the settler community. In 1931, Rio promulgated a new law that required all teachers in foreign-language schools in the country to pass an annual standard Portuguese-language test. Ironically, this nationalist decree in Brazil further exposed the Japanese schools in São Paulo to Tokyo's ideological manipulation. In the name of helping Japanese school teachers pass the required Portuguese test, the Japanese Culture and Education Association would organize a special workshop for Japanese school teachers in the state right before the language test each year. Lasting for a period of between two weeks and a month, the workshop not only covered Portuguese-language training but also courses such as Japanese history and language pedagogy. It became a venue for Tokyo to disseminate imperial propaganda to the settlers.³³ This annual workshop continued even after 1938, when the Brazilian government banned foreign-language education for children below the age of fourteen in the countryside. This policy forced all Japanese schools in the state outside the city of São Paulo to shut down.³⁴

THE QUESTION OF ASSIMILATION AND THE IDENTITY CRISIS

Caught between these two fervent ideologies of ethnic nationalism, the biculturalism approach that Japanese settler elites had favored in earlier years quickly crumbled. By the time the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, the community leaders had already become profoundly divided in their responses to the new question of the era: Should they settle permanently or return to Japan (*eijū ka, kikoku ka*)? There were three main approaches, and the question of assimilation, the key to

the logics of ethnic nationalism of both imperial Japan and the Estado Novo at the time, was central to each approach. The idea of assimilation was certainly not new to the Japanese settlers, but their internal debate had never been as polarized.

The first approach was to promote permanent settlement in tandem with full assimilation. Its main advocates were those who kept a certain distance from the Japanese empire. An example was Andō Zenpachi, who had worked for *Burajiru jihō* as a journalist and then for *Nippaku shinbun* as its editor in chief. Andō had also served as director of the Emeboi Agricultural Practice Farm. He reminded the settlers that the primary reason for their journey to Brazil was to pursue personal success. Despite the empire's lofty designs for them, he pointed out, most of the settlers had simply come here to make money. Accordingly, he urged them to stick to this goal by resolving to settle permanently and transcend the confines of Japanese nationalism. He also suggested that the settlers focus on facilitating their offspring's complete assimilation into Brazilian society.³⁵

An even more explicit supporter of this approach was Handa Tomoo, a painter and writer who had also worked for *Burajiru jihō*. In an essay published in 1939, he not only equated permanent settlement with full assimilation but also saw racial mixing as the ultimate path to achieve this goal. “While the blood purity of the Yamato race might be considered critical in Asia,” Handa opined, the situation was quite different in Brazil because it was impossible for the Japanese settlers to culturally assimilate while maintaining their blood purity. Following the logic of “racial democracy,” Handa believed that the future of the Japanese community in Brazil depended on the settlers' complete mixture with Brazilians, both in mind and in blood.³⁶

Wako Shūngorō, journalist and cofounder of the Aliança Colony, was another supporter of full assimilation through racial mixing. Unlike Andō and Handa, Wako was a faithful believer in Japanese racial superiority. He went as far as to claim that assimilation would help purify the Brazilian racial stock: once the superior blood of the Japanese flowed in Brazilian veins, it would “purge its impurities” (*sono nigori wo jōkashite*). To Wako, this would turn Brazil into a model nation that purified humankind (*jinrui jōka*), which was in tune with both the Japanese tradition and Brazil's national spirit.³⁷

Supporters of the other two approaches, however, firmly embraced Japan's expansionist ideology. They distanced themselves from Brazilian society and refused to assimilate. The main difference between the second and third approaches was that one called for permanent settlement and the other urged settlers to return to Asia. Despite this ideological divergence, both lines of thinking were deeply influenced by Tokyo. The second approach still promoted permanent settlement, but unlike Andō and Handa, its advocates saw this as the ultimate means for the settlers to fulfill their mission of Japan's imperial expansion in South America. Kishimoto Kōichi was a key supporter of this approach. He founded the Gyōsei School (Gyōsei Gakuen) in 1932 in the city of São Paulo and designed it as a private

boarding school for Japanese children who came to urban São Paulo for advanced education.³⁸ Contrary to Handa and Wako, Kishimoto opposed assimilation and believed that the Japanese would never become good Brazilian citizens through assimilation. Being assimilated into one's environment, as he saw it, only served as evidence of one's weak character.³⁹ For him, staying in South America was the settlers' duty to the empire. Certain of Japan's expansionist destiny, Kishimoto regarded Japanese migration to South America as an essential part of this historical process. Though he recognized the political and social changes that the settlers were facing in Brazil, he urged them to overcome these difficulties and settle permanently to defend the empire's frontier.⁴⁰

This approach suited the policy makers in Tokyo who had consistently urged immigrants to settle in Brazil permanently. To this end, the Japanese consul in São Paulo, Sakane Junzō, not only sponsored the GAT campaign and provided aid to Japanese farmers in the state but also propagated the idea of permanent settlement via the settler newspapers.⁴¹ In response to the rising call for repatriation in the settler community, the consul issued a special announcement to the settlers in 1939, urging them to stay in Brazil. Their loyalty to the empire, he claimed, was measured by the extent of their resolution to stay. Those who returned to Asia without preparation, Sakane warned, would only suffer failure.⁴² The following year, the new Japanese ambassador, Ishii Itarō, issued a similarly strong warning to Japanese settlers in Brazil and commanded them to give up the thought of return.⁴³

With similar sentiments, *Burajiru jihō*, Kaikō's mouthpiece, published an anthology of biographies of Japanese settlers in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Mato Grosso in 1941. Sponsored by the Japanese consul in São Paulo, this book came out to celebrate the 2,600th anniversary of Emperor Jimmu's mythical ascension. It featured the stories of those who were able to become landlords and business owners to showcase the Japanese settlers' accomplishments while putting down roots in South America. In his enthusiastic preface to the anthology, the Japanese deputy consul in São Paulo referred to the settlers as "brethren on the front lines" (*dai'issen no dōhō*). On the one hand, he praised them for their contributions to the empire's "holy war" by donating money and providing moral support. On the other hand, he urged the settlers to fulfill their own duty to the empire by maintaining their foothold in Brazil, as this would be their ultimate way to participate in the empire's grand mission to "put the entire world under one roof" (*hakkō ichiu*). More specifically, he listed a series of virtues that the "brethren on the front lines" should maintain based on Tokyo's expectations. In addition to believing that Japan was the paramount empire of the world, they should practice obedience, perseverance, agility, and modesty to ensure success for their permanent settlement in Brazil.⁴⁴

The third approach was for the settlers to return to the Japanese empire. Kōyama Rokurō, founding editor of *Seishū shinpō*, was an early advocate, and one of the most vociferous, of this strategy. A brief look at how his idea evolved illustrates

the development of this discourse. Though he once had been a strong supporter of permanent settlement, Kōyama began calling for repatriation as early as 1935. He divided the Japanese settlers in Brazil into two distinct groups: those who could assimilate and those who could not. While the former should fully assimilate and become 100 percent Brazilians, the latter would be better off if they returned to Asia.⁴⁵ His stance became more assertive in 1938, after Rio banned all Japanese schools for children under the age of fourteen in the countryside. In a number of articles that he published between the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939, Kōyama argued that because of the racial discrimination that the Japanese experienced in Brazil and the country's increasingly exclusionist policies, there was no longer room for them in Brazil. It would be better for all the settlers to return to Asia, where they actually belonged, in “a retreat with glory” (*kōei aru taikyaku*).⁴⁶ Moreover, like many of his peers, Kōyama was not immune from racism himself: he believed that the settlers' racial mixing with Brazilians would lead to the racial degradation of the Japanese.⁴⁷

As the Japanese empire continued to expand southward and occupied the island of Hainan in spring 1939, Kōyama saw yet one more reason for the settlers to return. The Japanese Brazilian settlers' decades-long experience navigating the subtropical forests in Brazil, he reasoned, prepared them both physically and mentally for the colonization of Southeast Asia and made them the most suitable group of Japanese to facilitate the empire's expansion in this new frontier. Kōyama went as far as to claim that God brought them to Brazil some three decades earlier to prepare them precisely for this purpose.⁴⁸

Kōyama's *Seishū shinpō* explicitly advocated for the settlers' return, a position that put it at odds with *Burajiru jihō* and *Nippaku shinbun*, the other largest settler newspapers, which generally supported permanent settlement. However, this did not mean that the voice for return was an anomaly among the settlers. In fact, it represented the majority opinion at the end of the 1930s. After completing a 1939 survey among the Japanese population in the northwest of São Paulo, where more than half of the settlers resided, Wako Shūngorō lamented that 85 percent of the respondents indicated that they wished to return to Japan, while only 10 percent would like to stay in Brazil, with the remaining 5 percent undecided.⁴⁹

This overwhelming inclination to return, to some extent, was a result of misleading information propagated by the Japanese government. Although Japanese consular personnel had repeatedly emphasized the importance of permanent settlement, the Japanese consul's increased control over the community's education and its indoctrination of Japanese nationalism contributed to the increasing popularity of repatriation. In addition, Tokyo had recruited several notable leaders in the settler community to advance the empire's expansion in Asia. One of these leaders was Umetani Mitsusada, an executive director of the Federation of Overseas Migration Cooperative Societies who purchased the land for the four major settler colonies managed by Burataku in São Paulo and northern Paraná. As early as 1932,

Umetani was already working for the Kwantung Army in Manchuria by directing its migration department.⁵⁰ Nagata Shigeshi, president of the Japanese Striving Society who cofounded the Aliança Colony with Wako Shūngorō, helped Tokyo with migration planning and recruitment for its colonial expansion in Asia.⁵¹ Saibara Seitō, who remigrated to Brazil from Texas and had managed farms in São Paulo and Pará, also moved back to Asia. After conducting a Tokyo-sponsored investigative trip in Manchuria, he turned southward to promote Japanese rice and sugar cultivation in Taiwan. Both by deed and by rhetoric, he became a passionate advocate for Japanese expansion in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.⁵²

Koseki Tokuya, a leader of Burataku and the GAT movement, also returned to Asia. There he was employed by Japan's Ministry of Colonial Affairs to investigate the island of Hainan as a destination for Japanese farmer migration. Summarizing his observations in Asia and his sixteen years of experience in Brazil, he penned a book for the purpose of, in his words, "providing reference for the empire's plan for its southward expansion" and the "construction of the Greater East Asia (*Daitōa kensetsu*)."⁵³ Based on the three decades of Japanese migration and community building in Brazil that he described as a success earned by the settlers' "sweat and blood," Koseki made a wide range of suggestions for the empire's ongoing colonial migration to Southeast Asia. These included theoretical points such as the general relationship between migrants and land, as well as the significance of settler migration for the empire itself. He also offered concrete advice on how and where to build settler villages, how to turn forests into farmland, how to choose crops based on local conditions, and how to provide the settlers with both mental and physical training.⁵⁴

Though the desire to return was shared by the majority of the settler population, those who actually returned remained few in number, as the majority could not afford the cost of remigration. Those who could afford it and managed to return were farmers who benefited from the cotton boom. The home archipelago was the initial destination of almost all the returnees, but many had difficulty finding their place in Japanese society. As a result, each year saw a substantial portion of the returnees remigrating elsewhere. A small number of them returned to Brazil; others moved to the front lines of the wartime empire such as Southeast Asia and southern China.⁵⁵

While the Japanese government discouraged the settlers in Brazil from repatriating, it did allow those who already returned to remigrate to the empire's frontiers in Asia so that they could contribute to the empire's wartime expansion. To this end, Tokyo worked closely with Kaikō by providing financial and political support, allowing the latter to investigate possible locations in Asia to accommodate the returnees and transport them there.⁵⁶ The Federation of Overseas Migration Cooperative Societies too joined Kaikō to relocate the returnees with the state's support.

TABLE 4 Annual number of Japanese returnees from Brazil and subsequent remigrants, 1932–1938

	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Returnees	236	655	1,267	826	1,093	1,586	1,113
Remigrants	28	95	192	182	167	184	187
Remigrants' ratio	12%	15%	15%	22%	15%	12%	17%

SOURCE: Based on letter from Takemoto Takeo to Nakano Takeshi (July 26, 1939), in Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan, *Honpō imin toriatsukainin kankei zakken: Kaigai Kōgyō Kabushiki Gaisha*, vol. 10, J.1.2.0, J 3–1.

Transporting the returnees from Japan proper to the empire’s actual front lines was part of the overall geographic shift that the Japanese enterprises in Brazil had taken. After Brazil’s 1934 Constitution put a quota restriction on Japanese immigrants, the Federation of the Overseas Cooperative Societies began to facilitate relocating Japanese subjects to areas in the Asia-Pacific region such as the Philippines and northern Borneo.⁵⁷ The Nichinan Industrial Company, which inherited all the federation’s property in Brazil, also moved its businesses to Japan and Southeast Asia.⁵⁸ Nantaku too shifted its migration and agricultural businesses from the Amazon to the South Seas after the Brazilian government cut off its diplomatic relationship with Japan in 1942.⁵⁹

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In an article published in *Seishū shinpō* right before the Brazilian government’s ban of all foreign-language newspapers took effect, the editor, Kōyama Rokurō, observed that for the settlers, the Japanese-language newspapers were the “only fountain of wisdom and source of comfort” (*yuiichi no chie no izumi to ianmono*). Without them, he lamented, most settlers would become blind, deaf, and dumb. Along with the ban on Japanese schools, this new law would block the community’s cultural development, leading the settlers down a dark path of degeneration and immorality. Only the breaking dawn in Asia, Kōyama argued, could bring them out from this darkness.⁶⁰ Yet as this chapter has shown, the Vargas regime was not the only reason for the predicament that the Japanese settlers in Brazil found themselves in. The imperial government in Tokyo also tightened its control of the community via settler media and schools, contributing to the intensification of nationalism and polarization among the settler elites.

In this community-wide debate on identity and the future, the young Nisei generation was similarly divided. Some aligned with Kishimoto, resisting assimilation, while others heeded Kōyama’s call and were keen to migrate to Asia. A different faction, particularly those who had migrated from rural areas to urban centers for higher education, endorsed Andō’s vision of complete assimilation. Illustratively, the governing council of the Japanese Student League in São Paulo (Sanpauro Gakusei Renmei) chose to publish its official journal exclusively in Portuguese.

In the journal's first issue in 1939, council members declared their commitment to the ideals of Brazilian ethnic nationalism and pledged to become fully naturalized Brazilian citizens.⁶¹

This identity debate continued after the outbreak of the Pacific War, when the Vargas regime joined the war as a member of the Allies and designated Japan an enemy country. Brazil cut off the sea routes with Japan, completely stopped the migration flow, and confiscated Japanese businesses. Brazil also banned all Japanese-language media and jailed those it deemed spies. The valley of darkness foretold by Kōyama had indeed come to pass. What Kōyama hailed as the "dawn of Asia," however, proved to be a false hope. The escalated expansion of the Japanese empire in Asia only worsened the Japanese settlers' political situation in Brazil, placing them under increasing scrutiny from Rio. Tokyo appreciated the settlers' remittances and the cotton they produced but did not want them back physically. If Japan was an orphan empire in the Anglo-American order, as Ishikawa Tatsuzō observed at the beginning of the 1930s, then the Japanese settlers in Brazil had become the actual "orphans of the world" by the end of this decade: they were unable to find a place as the two ethnic nationalist regimes were in conflict.

As Kōyama also predicted, the community fell prey to irrationality due to severe censorship and the lack of reliable media sources. Identity-centered divisions continued to grow, eventually resulting in a violent and bitter community-wide split that would last until a decade after World War II. It was from this chaotic legacy that the Japanese Brazilian community began to reinvent itself in the 1950s. Some of the key participants of the previous identity debate played critical roles in this process, one that was intimately connected with Japan's own national reinvention during the Cold War.