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and Tradition in Japanese Media Representations of
Japanese-Brazilian Return Migrants**

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Introduction

Ever since the first Japanese-Brazilians began “return migrating” from Brazil to Japan in the late 1980s in search of high-paying jobs in Japanese factories, they have been attracting a considerable amount of attention among the Japanese public. By now, most Japanese by now have heard of the Brazilian *nikkeijin* (Japanese descendants born and raised outside of Japan), if not actually seen them on the streets, trains, or other public areas. Despite their Japanese phenotype, the Japanese-Brazilians are quite conspicuous in public not only because they speak Portuguese, but because of their distinctly different manner of dress and demeanor. When the Japanese first encounter these strange Japanese descendants from Latin America, many of them are quite confused and disoriented and cannot quite figure out exactly who these people are. One resident of Oizumi-town, Gunma-prefecture, which has the highest concentration *nikkeijin* immigrants in Japan, described his reaction as follows:

The first time the Brazilian *nikkeijin* came to town, I was really surprised. I thought, wow, look at these weirdoes! What in the world are they anyway? They looked Japanese, but they weren't real Japanese. They acted completely different, spoke a foreign tongue, and dressed in strange ways. They were like fake Japanese, like a fake superhero you might see on TV.

However, the Brazilian *nikkeijin* have become much more than ethnic anomalies and peculiar curiosities in Japan. With an immigrant population currently estimated at over 250,000, they have become the third largest group of foreigners in Japan after the Korean-Japanese and Chinese,¹ and their numbers continue to grow steadily despite the country's prolonged economic recession. Because of a severe Brazilian economic crisis and a crippling shortage of unskilled labor in Japan, the Japanese-Brazilians began return migrating to Japan in the late 1980s² and primarily work in the factories of small and medium-sized Japanese companies in the manufacturing sector. Although

they are relatively well-educated and mostly of middle class background in Brazil, they still earn five to ten times their Brazilian salaries in Japan as factory workers. Because almost all of them initially migrate to Japan with intentions to work only for a couple of years and then quickly return home with their savings, they have been called *dekasegi*, the Japanese word for temporary migrant worker.³ However, many have already brought their families to Japan and the process of long-term immigrant settlement has begun (see Tsuda 1999b). Most of the Japanese-Brazilian “return” migrants are of the second and third generations (*nisei* and *sansei*) who were born and raised in Brazil, do not speak Japanese very well, and have become culturally Brazilianized to various degrees. Therefore, despite their Japanese descent, they are ethnically marginalized and treated as foreigners in Japan because of narrow definitions of what constitutes being Japanese and have become the country's newest ethnic minority, joining the ranks of the Korean-Japanese, Burakumin, Ainu, and Okinawans.⁴

In order to understand how nikkeijin immigrants are ethnically perceived in Japan and their possible future impact on Japanese society, we must analyze the manner in which they are portrayed by the Japanese media, which has considerable influence on Japanese public opinion and attitudes. An analysis of television media images is an especially appropriate way of assessing the general impact of Japanese-Brazilians on Japanese ethnic perceptions and social attitudes. Especially in low immigration countries like Japan, where the public does not have immediate personal contact with immigrants, most information and impressions about them are obtained from the media. As a result, the manner in which it portrays immigrants has a significant, if not determinative effect on public opinion and ethnic attitudes. To what extent do media representations of Japanese-Brazilians reinforce or change current Japanese ethnic perceptions and prejudices, as well as broader social attitudes and values? The increasing transnational movement of peoples across national borders is one of the major sources of sociocultural change in the modern world, disrupting the traditional

social order by producing new immigrant minorities and ethnic encounters. As traditional beliefs and identities are supposedly challenged by such transnational flows and border crossings, some scholars have argued that new hybrid forms of culture as well as transnational communities and identities emerge, even eroding the sovereign power of nation-states (e.g., Appadurai 1996, Gilroy 1993, Malkki 1992, Miyoshi 1996). Japanese society and culture has in fact been constantly affected over the centuries by intensive contact with foreign countries (first China, then the West). The recent arrival of the foreign on Japanese shores in the form of transnational labor migration is undoubtedly another historical moment in which many traditional Japanese values and beliefs will be challenged. In fact, because nikkeijin immigrants are ethnically similar to the Japanese, they are capable of modifying Japanese ethnic attitudes and cultural values much more than non-nikkeijin migrants who have nothing in common with the Japanese and therefore have no personal relevance for them. In this sense, television media coverage of Japanese-Brazilian return migrants can become a considerable catalyst for change by showing how they challenge and even defy Japanese ethnic assumptions and traditional social attitudes.

The media studies literature itself has been ambivalent about the impact of the media on public attitudes and opinions. On the one hand, it is argued that the media reinforces the status quo, supports and spreads dominant ideologies, and even acts as a servant of the state (see Pharr 1996a,b, Freeman 2000, White and White 1983 for a summary). In contrast, other scholars have emphasized how the media functions as a watchdog that provides self-reflexive commentary and actively criticizes and questions the status quo, thus becoming a serious agent for cultural, sociopolitical, and institutional change (see Pharr 1996b for a summary). In most cases, however, the position of the media is not so clear-cut. As Susan Pharr (1996b) argues, the media frequently acts as a “trickster” that provides contradictory and competing images to the public that seemingly supports dominant ideologies, stereotypes, and beliefs while also undermining them (cf. McQuail 1994:381-382).

Based on a close content analysis of 16 Japanese television programs and shows (recorded on videotape) that featured the Japanese-Brazilians and aired in the early 1990s,⁵ I argue that Japanese media coverage of nikkeijin migrants can become a catalyst for change to a limited extent by challenging some engrained Japanese ethnic perceptions and providing self-reflexive criticism of Japanese society while at the same time rather unreflexively and implicitly reinforcing these traditional attitudes and prejudices. For instance, although the programs and shows I examined made a serious effort to discredit some ethnic prejudices about nikkeijin migrants, it also included material that perpetuated them. Likewise, while Japanese-Brazilian immigrants are shown disrupting the traditional Japanese cultural values of filial piety and family obligation for instrumental, economic purposes, they are also portrayed as eventually reaffirming such traditional beliefs in their behavior and decisions.

The Media and Ethnic Prejudice

As various studies have indicated, the media can play a crucial role in promoting or combating racial prejudice and thus have a considerable influence on ethnic relations (see Braham 1982). Although the news and television media are generally progressive in advanced industrialized countries and usually do not directly incite anti-immigrant sentiment, it frequently reinforces or even exacerbates majority ethnic prejudices toward immigrants through implicitly or explicitly unfavorable coverage of them. In fact, most studies have found many more negative than positive representations of immigrant minorities in the mass media (e.g., Greenberg and Brand 1994, Greenberg, et. al. 1983, Hall 1996, White and White 1983). However, because of the ethnic affinity that most Japanese feel toward nikkeijin immigrants as people of shared descent, there is a notable lack of negative and prejudiced images about the Japanese-Brazilians in the television programs I

examined. Instead, they are portrayed in a rather positive and sympathetic manner that stresses their cultural and ethnic commonalities with the Japanese.⁶ The media also represents them as an economic asset to Japan (i.e., alleviating the serious labor shortage plaguing Japanese companies) and some of their Brazilian activities (soccer, samba, food) are presented in a cheerful light.⁷ Although the difficulties they have in Japan are sometimes emphasized, this is done in a sympathetic manner and never is it implied that they are a burden, problem, or negative influence on Japanese society. At worst, the tone is simply neutral and “objective.”

Indeed, there is much less ethnic prejudice toward the Japanese-Brazilians than other immigrants in Japan. However, it does clearly exist and is quite pervasive, as revealed by numerous in-depth interviews I did with Japanese workers and local residents when I conducted fieldwork in Japan. Although Japanese prejudice toward the nikkeijin is a multi-faceted and complicated issue,⁸ one aspect that is very relevant to their representation in the Japanese media are unfavorable perceptions of their migration legacy. Especially the older Japanese informants I interviewed saw the Brazilian nikkeijin as descendants of originally poor and uneducated Japanese of low social background who could not endure economic difficulties in Japan and thus abandoned their own country and emigrated to Brazil. Likewise, the current Japanese-Brazilians return migrating to Japan are also seen as poor people who did not have the ability to survive economically in Brazil and were thus forced to come to Japan to earn money. Therefore, nikkeijin immigrants in Japan are subjected to a double stigma—the descendants of those who initially fled to Brazil because they supposedly could not survive in Japan have now returned to Japan because they could not survive economically in Brazil either.

Combating Prejudice: Explanations for Migration

When speaking about such prejudices, what was most notable in my Japanese informants' comments was a strong tendency to blame the nikkeijin and their supposed personal inadequacies for

what is seen as their miserable migrant plight. Among the many expressions of disparagement directed toward the first generation nikkeijin (the original Japanese emigrants), the following statement by an older Tokyo resident was quite representative:

The Japanese do not perceive the nikkeijin well. They are seen as people who were from Japanese rural villages and were poor. They were the type of low level people who couldn't survive in Japan, so they had to discard Japan and go abroad. They are seen as *nihonjin shikkaku* (not worthy of being Japanese)--people who didn't have much ability.

A middle-aged housewife in Oizumi-town in Gunma-prefecture was even more explicit:

The nikkeijin are low level people. They were Japanese social dropouts who were poor and uneducated. These were people who had nothing in Japan, so said to themselves, 'regardless of how horrible things are overseas, they can't be worse than my life in Japan.' Therefore, they abandoned their own country and fled abroad.

Likewise, this tendency to attribute migration to individual inadequacy was also quite evident among my Japanese informants' attitudes about the Japanese-Brazilians currently return migrating to Japan.

Just as with the original Japanese emigrants to Brazil, the migration of their descendants to Japan was blamed on the individual poverty and personal failure of the nikkeijin in Brazil instead of the country's economic collapse in the late 1980s or wage disparities between Brazil and Japan.

Consider the following typical comment:

Our attitude toward the nikkeijin is an image of poverty--they are people who suffered economically and couldn't eat in Brazil, so have returned to Japan. It is sad. So our prejudice toward them is not because they are nikkeijin, but because they are of a low social level. It is the same prejudice we have toward anyone who is poor.

"I think the nikkeijin are no good, poor people," one resident of Oizumi was the most explicit about

his feelings. "They went to Brazil as poor immigrants, but couldn't succeed in Brazil, so they come back to Japan now. If they worked hard, they would not be so poor."

Although some of my Japanese informants seemingly realized that the nikkeijin were migrating to Japan because of Brazil's economic troubles and not necessary because of any personal deficiency of their own, there was a belief that those who go to Japan are generally the poor ones who did not have the ability to succeed economically in Brazil. Few of my Japanese interviewees were aware that the Japanese-Brazilians migrated to Japan because the Brazilian economic crisis in the 1980s made it difficult to maintain their middle class standard of living and not because they are incompetent, low class people escaping poverty. Although Japanese culture does not generally espouse ideologies of individualism and the self-made man, such attitudes resemble the American tendency to blame individuals for their economic difficulties and failures instead of seeing them as victims of a merciless capitalist system (see Greider 1997: Chapter 16, Newman 1998).

The Japanese media, however, seems to consciously go out of its way to *avoid* portraying nikkeijin immigrants in this type of prejudiced manner. When explaining their return migration, news reports and documentaries consistently emphasize structural economic factors that are beyond their control, namely the economic crisis in South American countries and sharp wage differentials between them and Japan. A typical example is a documentary entitled *A Peruvian Nikkeijin*, which personally follows the travails of a young Japanese-Peruvian named Jesus in Japan. As with other documentaries of this type, it is immediately mentioned that he lost his job as a government official in Peru because he was a victim of administrative reforms caused by the country's economic crisis. Because of uncontrollable hyperinflation in Peru, Jesus could not maintain his income and therefore went to Japan because he could earn much more money there. Therefore, the documentary quickly dismisses two popular Japanese prejudices--the nikkeijin are poor and impoverished in South America (Jesus was a governmental official) and that they migrate because of personal failings or

lack of diligence.

Likewise, documentary and news programs about Japanese-Brazilian immigrants constantly emphasize that they are university educated and are middle class white collar and professional workers in Brazil, but are forced to return migrate to Japan because of Brazil's economic crisis and hyperinflation (up to 2000 percent annually). The huge wage differential is also frequently mentioned (even as unskilled factory workers in Japan, the Japanese-Brazilians earn up to ten times their salaries in Brazil) as well as the severe Japanese labor shortage, which provides them with an abundance of high-paying jobs in Japan. It is often emphasized that the nikkeijin were, for instance, doctors and engineers in Brazil, but end up as unskilled workers in Japanese factories. These same facts are consistently repeated in almost every television program about them almost ad nauseam, as if to drive home the basic point. Individual Brazilian nikkeijin interviewed in these programs about the reasons for their return migration also emphasize how they had been economically successful back home, only to have their efforts ruined by the collapse of the Brazilian economy, which regrettably left them no choice but to come to Japan as unskilled migrant laborers. Such sympathetic media representations directly challenge commonly-held Japanese prejudices about Japanese-Brazilian return migrants by emphasizing that they are actually well-off and very respectable individuals in Brazil who have merely become unfortunate victims of economic bad fate and are thus dominated by forces beyond their individual control.

In fact, in some programs, the entire migration legacy of the nikkeijin (their emigration from Japan and their eventual return migration) is justified in this manner. For example, at the end of *A Peruvian Nikkeijin*, one of the reporters concludes: "When the Japanese first emigrated to Peru, Japan was really poor, so they looked for a better life in Peru. Now that Japan is richer, they [their descendants] have obviously come back to Japan. It is simply a matter of differences in national strength." In other words, nikkeijin migration is a product of unfortunate macro-economic

vicissitudes. In fact, in the television programs I analyzed, no mention was ever made of individual failures and personal inadequacies or anything that would even remotely hint that the migrational difficulties of the nikkeijin may be partly their personal responsibility.

Undoubtedly, the media tendency to shift the migratory blame from individuals to structural economic forces represents a responsible reporting of the facts, but such emphasis also probably is an attempt to interest viewers by the sheer irony and novelty of nikkeijin return migration--in South America, even doctors and engineers sometimes have to work abroad as unskilled factory workers because of economic instability in the region. Indeed, many of the personal examples used in these programs are individuals who were doctors, lawyers, engineers, bankers, and pharmacists in Brazil, although only a very small number of Japanese-Brazilians in Japan are from such high prestige professional occupations and only a minority are university educated.⁹ Undoubtedly, the media's need to report stories and cases that attract attention causes them to frequently emphasize the sheer irony of a doctor from Brazil, for instance, working in a car factory earning five times his salary back home and living in a cramped company dormitory with other nikkeijin migrant workers. In fact, one news program about the Japanese-Brazilians in Japan is even entitled *Highly Educated Unskilled Factory Workers*. Despite such overemphasis by the Japanese media on the high educational and occupational level of the nikkeijin in Brazil, sometimes exaggeration is needed to combat and ultimately change engrained Japanese prejudices about the poverty, low social status, and personal incompetence of nikkeijin return migrants.

Nikkeijin as Poor Folk: Condescension as Prejudice

However, while apparently fighting some common Japanese ethnic stereotypes about nikkeijin in this manner, the media also implicitly reinforces other prejudices, thus ultimately acting as a "trickster." In other words, precisely because of the media's unprejudiced and sympathetic disposition toward the Japanese-Brazilians, which tends to blame macro-economic forces instead of

personal incompetence for their immigrant plight, they are sometimes portrayed as helpless, pitiful, and unfortunate victims of bad fate. Such a condescending, patronizing attitude is also a type of majority ethnic prejudice which views immigrant minorities as innately inferior, miserable people deserving the pity of their supposedly superior hosts. Such attitudes were quite prevalent among my Japanese informants, as illustrated by the following two comments by a local resident and factory worker:

The Brazilian nikkeijin are people who are really *kawaiso* (deserving pity) because they suffered in both Japan and Brazil. They had to leave Japan because they couldn't live here, but since the economic and political situation is so bad in Brazil, they have to come back to Japan because they couldn't survive there either. There is nothing so *nasakenai* (miserable, lamentable).

We feel really sorry for the nikkeijin because they have suffered a lot in Brazil. Since I feel bad for them, I try to treat them nicely in Japan and help them at the factory.

In fact, a few of my nikkeijin informants in Japan who spoke Japanese fluently and had close contact with the Japanese were bothered by this type of condescending attitude on the part of the Japanese.

According to a Japanese-Brazilian graduate student:

I don't know if I sometimes imagine this, but I feel we are looked down upon because we are the descendants of poor and unfortunate emigrant people who had to leave Japan and go abroad to Brazil. They look down on us from a position of superiority and a sense that they were fortunate for not having had to leave Japan.

Another nikkeijin student in Japan once shared similar feelings with me: "It annoys me how the Japanese always see us as people deserving pity. Sometimes I feel like telling them, 'We aren't that miserable. We don't need your pity.'"

In its conscious attempt to present the nikkeijin and their migration legacy in an "unprejudiced"

and compassionate manner, the media sometimes crosses the fine line into a similar type of implicit condescension. Documentaries repeatedly provide personal or group background on the nikkeijin that emphasizes how much the original Japanese emigrants suffered under difficult and distressful conditions in South America, thus presenting them as people who are *kawaiso* (deserving of pity). For instance, *A Peruvian Nikkeijin* not only documents Jesus' trials and tribulations as a migrant worker in Japan, it contains a narrative story of the misery endured by Jesus' grandfather, who escaped very poor rural conditions in Japan for a better life in Peru. Not only did he suffer considerably under tough working conditions in Peru, he earned so little that he could not remit money back to his family in Japan even once and eventually died in a work accident at the young age of 43. The fact that Jesus, like his grandfather before him, is now struggling as a migrant worker in Japan in order to make a living reinforces the image of the nikkeijin as forever miserable and unfortunate folk. Likewise, a NHK documentary entitled *Nippon Dekasegi: Burajiru Nikkeijin no Sorezore no Sentaku* (Dekasegi Migrant Workers: The Various Choices Faced by Brazilian Nikkeijin) that focuses on a Japanese-Brazilian community in Asai (Paraná state), Brazil, begins with a historical story of nikkeijin misery. The narrative emphasizes how much trouble the Japanese *issei* (first generation) immigrants in Asai endured as they were forced to toil long days on small plots of land cultivating cotton and coffee while battling malaria. As if to emphasize this point, a group of current Brazilian nikkeijin are shown still toiling away in the agricultural fields of Asai while the narrative of suffering continues. An older *issei* man speaks at length of how he came from a very poor agricultural area in Niigata prefecture, Japan, and how much difficulty he had in Brazil, especially with family members who got sick with malaria and died.

Although these are factual representations, the tendency of certain Japanese television programs to emphasize these facts instead of others (such as the current prosperity of Japanese-Brazilian communities in Brazil) is quite significant since bias in the media is generally a result of selective

reporting of facts rather than their outright distortion. However, as shown by the above documentary, even Japanese television programs that examine current nikkeijin communities in Brazil tend to emphasize their past suffering and misery more than their current success and middle-class status. In a TBS talk show program appropriately entitled *Kaigai Engei Imondan* (Group Providing Entertainment Consolation to Those [Japanese] Overseas), a Japanese singer goes to Brazil to entertain the nikkeijin community and reports back on her experiences to a group of talk show commentators. However, all she talks about is how the nikkeijin suffered through difficult and painful times in the past before they attained their current middle class status in Brazil. The singer relates how the Japanese emigrants left everything behind in Japan, went to Brazil as really poor people intending to work hard for their families back home in Japan, but could not speak the language and basically had to jump blindfolded into Brazilian society with nowhere to start. They were forced to develop settlements in remote places where no one else lived, endured horrible conditions, and eventually regretted their decision to emigrate because they did not know Japan would develop into such a rich country. After much difficulty and suffering, they were able to gradually emerge from such a miserable state to their current social status. The singer goes on to state (with tears almost appearing in her eyes) that her hard work and personal difficulties (and the sufferings of the Japanese people in the immediate postwar period) are nothing compared to what the nikkeijin endured, which truly embody what it means to suffer and persist.

The ensuing discussion among the talk show commentators is almost equally sympathetic, emphasizing how much Japanese immigrants suffered in Brazil and how difficult it was for them. One notes that the suffering of the nikkeijin continues—because of high Brazilian inflation, they are again finding it hard to make a living and are migrating to Japan as *dekasegi* migrant workers. Another commentator jokingly remarks that the facial wrinkles (symbolizing suffering) of the nikkeijin are so deep, it is like they were cut into their faces with a knife. As with the above

examples, the tone in this TV show is so highly compassionate and understanding that it borders on patronizing condescension (as if the unfortunate nikkeijin in Brazil need and deserve the pity and “consolation” of the Japanese in Japan for their past suffering and misery).

Japan’s supposedly benevolent willingness to allow hundreds of thousands of Japanese-Brazilians to now return migrate and work in rich, prosperous Japan is undoubtedly another form of such “consolation” for a poor and miserable people who continue to suffer from economic difficulty in Third World Brazil. In fact, even television programs about current nikkeijin migrant workers in Japan sometimes portray them as miserable, wretched, and pitiful as well. This seems to be the tone throughout most of *A Peruvian Nikkeijin*, which follows Jesus around Japan, documenting the difficulty and suffering he must endure as he attempts to make a living for himself as a migrant worker in a completely alien land. After a very difficult trip finding his way to far-off Kagoshima (Jesus speaks very little Japanese), he has a tearful reunion with his Japanese relatives only to embarrass himself and risk rejection when he has to beg them to support him for a work visa in Japan. Although he does eventually secure a visa (after much trouble with the Immigration Bureau) and find a temporary job with the benevolent assistance of his relatives, he eventually ends up jobless and homeless on the streets of Tokyo. In fact, the immediate reaction of many Japanese when they hear about the nikkeijin dekasegi is how hard it must be for them (in both Brazil and Japan). For instance, in one television drama entitled *Sayonara Japon* (Good Bye Japan), a Japanese woman moves into a new apartment and meets her Japanese-Brazilian neighbors. When she hears they are dekasegi migrant workers from Brazil, she immediately responds in a tone of strong sympathetic pity and says, “Oh my, how difficult that must be for all of you!”

Whether the majority populace views minority individuals in a disparaging manner as personally incompetent, low class, and poor or in an overly sympathetic, patronizing manner as miserable and pitiful, the basis for ethnic prejudice is the same—a condescending derogation of the

immigrant minority as inferior people. In terms of Japanese-Brazilian immigrants, because the media actively refutes the former type of prejudice by portraying them as hapless victims of unfortunate macro-economic circumstances, it ends up clearly promoting the latter (undoubtedly a more “acceptable” type of prejudice). And, since both types of prejudice are based on the assumption that the nikkeijin are poor and inferior, by espousing the later type of prejudice, the media also partly supports the former. This undoubtedly illustrates the media as a trickster at work—by explicitly attempting to discredit a certain prejudiced attitude toward immigrants by representing them in a benign, excessively sympathetic manner, the media ends up reinforcing the original prejudice it meant to undermine. In this manner, despite its apparently forward-looking stance that challenges traditional ethnic prejudices, the media ultimately reveals itself to be a conservative force that reproduces them.

Nikkeijin Immigration and Japanese Tradition

Despite the potential of nikkeijin immigration to challenge and transform traditional Japanese ethnic attitudes, the selective nature of Japanese media coverage about the Japanese-Brazilians tends to perpetuate more than disrupt established ethnic prejudices and preconceptions. However, this seems to be true not only in terms of ethnic prejudice, but also for more broader cultural values. On the surface, it certainly appears that the individualistic migrant motives of the Japanese-Brazilians (to leave Brazil and earn as much money as possible in Japan) are at odds with certain traditional “Japanese” values such as filial piety, loyalty toward nation and company, and other obligations to family members and relatives. While the media again faithfully shows how nikkeijin migrants in Japan do not conform to such standard Japanese expectations and thus briefly highlights their potential for cultural disruption, it also portrays them in a way that eventually encompasses them within traditional cultural frameworks, thus precluding true change.

For instance, in *A Peruvian Nikkeijin*, the documentary makes clear that the immigrant

motives of Jesus conflicts with certain traditional cultural norms about relationships with relatives. In order for Jesus to work legally in Japan, he must change his visa status by obtaining the formal sponsorship of his Japanese relatives (who must agree to take responsibility for his well-being in Japan). As a result, he searches out his relatives and travels to distant Kagoshima to meet them and ask them to support his stay in Japan, which is a direct violation of the cultural norm of *enryo* (deference, reserve, not imposing oneself on others) and concerns that one should not be a nuisance (*meiwaku*) for others (words used in the documentary itself). Incidentally, Jesus is also violating norms of reciprocity. When his grandfather emigrated to Peru, he left behind a huge debt that caused much suffering for his relatives in Japan, especially since he was unable to remit any money from Peru back home (a fact that the documentary properly notes). As a result, it is very inappropriate for Jesus to now ask these same relatives for assistance.

In accordance with traditional cultural expectations, Jesus' relatives assume that he has come to visit his place of ancestral origin to become acquainted with his long-lost relatives and not to ask them for assistance as a migrant worker. As a result, his grandfather's son greets him warmly with a tearful hug at the train station, takes him for a visit to the ancestral grave, and then drives him home where his relatives await with a sumptuous feast and kindly thank him for returning to his ancestral home after all these years. Thus, when Jesus finally and reluctantly takes out a legal form and asks his relatives to sponsor him for a work visa, they are quite dismayed and ask him whether he has returned to see his ancestral relatives or simply to work. "*Shigoto* (work)," Jesus replies shamefully and then says in broken Japanese that he really needs their help. Although the relatives respond rather coldly at first, they eventually agree not only to sponsor him, but also to assist him in obtaining a visa, provide him with housing, and help him find a job at a local construction factory. Jesus is clearly aware of his inappropriate behavior especially from traditional Japanese standards and talks about how he has really imposed himself on his relatives and troubled them for his own

personal benefit.

However, despite Jesus' initial and blatant violations of the cultural expectations of restraint, reciprocity, and return to ancestral origins, the documentary eventually shows him seemingly conforming to such traditional standards of proper behavior. Several months later, we find Jesus homeless and looking for a job on the streets of Tokyo, having moved away from his relatives in Kagoshima. In order to explain his drastic decision, Jesus cites (very Japanese) concerns about *meiwaku* and *enryo* (words included in the Japanese subtitle translation of Jesus' Spanish). He says he decided to work and live independently because he did not want to rely further on his Japanese relatives and become even more obligated to them. Especially if he brings his Peruvian family to Japan, he does not want to live with his relatives and bother them any more than he already had.

Sayonara Japon (Good Bye Japan), a television romance drama that aired on October 10, 1990 on Nihon TV, is another perfect example of how the media represents *nikkeijin* immigration within the framework of tradition. The drama, which is about a Japanese mother, *Kitazawa-san*, and her son and the close relationship they develop with a Japanese-Brazilian immigrant family in Japan, is well-written and acted and probably one of the best I have ever seen on Japanese television. It is also based on a surprising amount of accurate and detailed knowledge about the Japanese-Brazilians and their migration legacy, both in Japan and Brazil, making it quite realistic and believable. Even the formulaic, ill-fated romance is rather compelling because it occurs under unusual cross-cultural and "transnational" circumstances.

The drama wastes no time debunking standard Japanese prejudices about the Brazilian *nikkeijin* in a manner that is much more convincing and less problematic than other television shows. The drama quickly dispels any notion that the Japanese-Brazilians are impoverished people who desperately migrate to Japan because they are incapable of economically sustaining themselves in Brazil. Early in the story, it is revealed that the husband of the *nikkeijin* family is university-

educated, owned an eyeglass store in Brazil, and used to be a school teacher. His daughter is a student at the Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil's best university) and eventually wants to pursue a career as a fashion designer. Therefore, Kitazawa-san and her son discover to their surprise that the Brazilian nikkeijin are well-educated, well-to-do individuals who migrate from Brazil as unskilled workers simply because of astronomical Brazilian inflation and a huge wage differential with Japan and not because they are jobless and poor. "Brazil is certainly a strange country," they conclude. By solely blaming Brazil and its economic problems for forcing the Japanese-Brazilians to migrate, any lingering ethnic prejudices about the personal inadequacy of the nikkeijin are dismissed. Later, the documentary goes further and explicitly undermines the notion itself of Brazil as a poor, backward, Third World country by challenging the audience's self-smugness about Japan's First World superiority. When given a tour of the impressive skyscrapers of Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward, the daughter of the nikkeijin family is clearly unimpressed and when asked about her own country, states that São Paulo has more skyscrapers than Tokyo, which is too crowded and congested for her liking. In case there is any lingering doubt in the viewer's mind, when the story's action shifts to Brazil, the São Paulo skyline is shown, as well as the huge and well-developed agricultural plantations in the countryside.

In contrast to other programs about the Japanese-Brazilians, the drama successfully attributes the migration of nikkeijin to larger structural economic forces without making them appear unfortunate victims of bad fate who warrant the sympathetic pity of the Japanese. Although Kitazawa-san and her son initially view the nikkeijin family as *ki no doku* (unfortunate, miserable) people, they realize that the nikkeijin are earning large sums of money in Japan, live in decent housing (with their company paying half the rent), and look forward to buying a huge house in Brazil and returning to their comfortable middle-class lives. As a result, they even become a bit jealous and decide not to sympathize with the nikkeijin family. There is an emotional scene where

the nikkeijin father recounts to Kitazawa-san the hardships he faced when he first emigrated to Brazil, but the scene is intended for dramatic purposes only and not to elicit her pity (which she does not express). In this manner, *Sayonara Japon* is much more effective than other Japanese television programs in its attempts to dismiss negative preconceptions about the Japanese-Brazilians without inadvertently reinforcing other common prejudices. Yet, despite its seemingly “radical” stance, I argue that the narrative ultimately attempts to contain the culturally disruptive effects of nikkeijin immigrants in a way that reinforces the traditional values of loyalty to family and country. Therefore, the media in this case again functions more as a conservative force than as an agent of change.

This is most evident in the ill-fated romance that develops between the Kitazawa-san’s son, Toru, the one of the daughters of the nikkeijin immigrant family. Although he does display the independent-mindedness of youth, Toru is a dutiful and loyal son and very close to his mother, who is widowed. Not only does he stay over at her apartment a lot (and sleeps in his futon right next to her at night), the implicit assumption is that he will always live near his mother and watch over her. Upon hearing about the arrival from Brazil of the eldest daughter of the nikkeijin family (Yoko), he reluctantly agrees (at his mother’s strong urging) to pick her up at the airport. However, when he meets Yoko, he is pleasantly surprised to find that she speaks Japanese like a native (and also bows and dresses like one to boot!) and is instantly attracted to her. He decides to take her on a tour of Tokyo, helps her find a job in Japan, and the romance begins. Even at this early stage however, his mother is clearly worried that Toru might fall in love with Yoko, move to Brazil, and leave her behind in Japan.

Meanwhile, Yoko decides to return to Brazil. Toru tries to convince her otherwise but is unsuccessful. A few months after Yoko repatriates, Toru suddenly decides to visit her in Brazil, giving his shocked mother only a terse phone call before leaving. He finds her in Belém (state of

Amazônia) visiting her uncle's plantation and is finally able to meet her. The issue of their relationship quickly comes up and Yoko tells Toru that she likes him, but does not want to live in Japan because of her desire to be at her father's side when he returns to Brazil (he is still working in Japan). After seeing how much her father suffered working as a migrant laborer in Japan, she feels bad for him and knows he can only live in Brazil.

Toru then impulsively claims that if she cannot live in Japan, he will live in Brazil. Suddenly, there is a glimmer of hope in Yoko's eyes, but then she concludes he cannot do such a thing and abandon his mother, who suffered so much to raise him. His mother will not let him, and he should not do it. Toru argues strongly that they should think about their own personal happiness and should not sacrifice themselves for parental obligations and become slaves to such old-fashioned, traditional values. However, Yoko is adamant—she cannot leave her father and he cannot leave his mother. Therefore, she must stay in Brazil, and he must return to Japan.

Therefore, *Sayonara Japon* is based on a conflict between “modern” values (self-centered happiness enabled by migration) and “traditional” values (loyalty to family, which requires one to stay home). According to the story however, tradition clearly wins out over modernity, as both Toru and Yoko decide that their loyalties to their parents are more important than their romantic self-interests and therefore stay home instead of pursuing a migrant marriage. Even under the new and potentially disruptive conditions of migration, tradition still should and does prevail over modernity. Therefore, despite all the questioning and challenging of old-fashioned values that goes on in *Sayonara Japon*, the message that this drama about Japanese-Brazilian migration is attempting to deliver could not be clearer. In fact, the only romantic relationship in the entire story that is approved and works well is between two Brazilian nikkeijin (the woman is Sasaki-san's second daughter). And even they plan to properly return to Brazil after they marry to live together. In this manner, the drama implies that nikkeijin should marry nikkeijin and Japanese should marry Japanese

and the former should remain in Brazil with their families and the later in Japan with theirs. If individuals defy these traditional commitments by crossing national and ethnic boundaries through migration in pursuit of personal romantic interests, they will ultimately sacrifice their families in way that they will come to seriously regret. Therefore, by promoting tradition, *Sayonara Japon* seems to even implicitly advocate continued ethnic segregation and argue against multi-ethnicity. Although it deals effectively with a radically new and potentially unsettling topic (nikkeijin immigration), it ends up delivering a very conservative message that promotes the status quo.

This is precisely why the media is a trickster. While *Sayonara Japon* so effectively debunks traditional prejudices and apparently celebrates the modern potential of individual aspiration, transnational mobility, internationalization, multi-ethnicity, and cross-cultural marriage, it simultaneously insists upon the virtue and primacy of tradition over modernity by espousing loyalty to family, nation, mono-ethnicity, ethnic endogamy, and one's native homeland. In fact, the drama shows that modern migration is precisely what allows individuals to realize the importance of traditional values and loyalties.

Conclusion: Media Images, Immigrant Reality

Although the media is known to be one of the principal agents of social critique and change in many societies, the manner in which nikkeijin migrants are portrayed on Japanese television does more to perpetuate rather than challenge traditional Japanese ethnic and cultural perceptions. On the surface, the media does seem to seriously problematize simplistic ethnic prejudices as well as old-fashioned notions of cultural tradition in the context of Japanese-Brazilian return migration. However, while doing so, it simply reinforces them in another form. In this manner, the media reveals itself to be a trickster at heart that reproduces the status quo while seeming to undermine it.

While the media clearly debunks ethnic prejudices toward the Brazilian nikkeijin as impoverished, inadequate people trapped in a cycle of migration by representing them as

victims dominated by macro-economic forces, it ends up portraying them in an over-sympathetic manner as miserable people deserving pity, thus promoting the same image of nikkeijin inferiority that is the basis for prejudice. Likewise, although the media apparently seems to celebrate the possibilities of internationalism, multi-ethnicity, hybridity, and transnationalism that nikkeijin immigrants represent, it again implicitly demonstrates how their disruptive effects can be contained and subsumed within traditional cultural values and loyalties to family and nation. Since the story of nikkeijin migration is used so convincingly to make a statement about the moral validity and fundamental importance of such traditional commitments, it leaves little room for the audience to actively consider how such loyalties are now being seriously tested and even undermined by the exigencies of modern migration.

In this manner, instead of seizing the immigrant moment to become an effective advocate of cultural change, the Japanese media remains a conservative force that re-affirms and promotes prevailing understandings of Japanese ethnicity and traditional cultural values. However, by presenting nikkeijin immigrants through commonly-held, dominant cultural frameworks, the media makes them much more comprehensible and understandable for its audience. Since the Japanese public can relate to media images of immigrants that apparently confirm prevailing ethnic expectations and cultural traditions more than to those that directly contradict them, this enhances the power of the media over the public. Therefore, the influence and effectiveness of media representations should not be simply measured by their ability to change public attitudes but also by their ability to reinforce and strengthen them (cf. McQuail 1977:71). This is another irony of the media as trickster—it has a much greater effect on the public when it passively reinforces pre-existing cultural understandings than when it actively questions and challenges them.

Of course, it is rather easy to dismiss such serious ethnic implications by arguing that we are dealing with media representations (mere stories if you will) that do not faithfully reflect immigrant

reality and the true impact that immigrants will have on Japanese society. However, I argue that an analysis of media images is extremely important because in the Japanese case, it is the primary determinant of ethnic attitudes and public opinions about Japanese-Brazilian immigrants. The Japanese media's influence is quite strong because of its general prominence, prevalence, and respected reputation in Japanese society, making it perhaps one of the most powerful in the world. The average Japanese watches 3 hours 23 minutes of television a day (Pharr 1996a:5), a hour more than even the American average (2 hours, 26 minutes daily), making Japan the only advanced industrialized country that watches more television than the U.S (Schor 1992:161).¹⁰ Just as notable as the public attention that the television media receives is the amount of respect it has among the Japanese public. For instance, a Research Institute of Japan survey found that 56 per cent of the public has strong confidence in the credibility of television programming (compared to less than 20 per cent in the U.S. according to Gallup/Harris polls) and only 20 per cent see partisan bias in the news media (Pharr 1996a:15).¹¹ As McQuail (1994:333) notes, media messages coming from respected and authoritative sources have a much greater effect on the public.

However, the power of the Japanese media over public attitudes cannot be deduced simply from its sheer pervasiveness. This was one of the problems of earlier media studies, which assumed that since the media had become so prominent, it was having a highly influential, if not all-powerful effect over the public (see Halloran 1996, McQuail 1977:72). However, it is quite apparent that even if the media is pervasive, prominent, and popular, it will still have a limited effect if the audience (the viewing public) simply rejects its messages and representations or construes them in a completely unintended manner. Active audience and resistance theories in media studies have argued that instead of passively accepting and internalizing media images and ideologies, the audience actively contests, resists, subverts, and even rejects such representations (see Cobleby 1994, Roach 1997, Seaman 1992, and Spitulnik 1993 for assessments). In addition, since the effect of the

media on the public is mediated by such audience receptions and reactions, a mere content analysis of media representations is insufficient to understand their exact influence—researchers must also directly study how the audience interprets and responds to actual media programming and messages in varied ways according to their own structures of understanding and meaning.

Even without conducting an extensive audience analysis, I contend that Japanese ethnic and cultural attitudes are being strongly influenced by media portrayals of Japanese-Brazilian immigrants because of the prominence of what I call “non-contiguous ethnic encounters” over “contiguous ethnic encounters,” which enhances the media’s power over public perceptions of immigrants. Non-contiguous encounters occur in what Manuel Castells (1989) calls the “space of flows,” the non-contiguous space of telecommunications and media networks which makes the exchange of information and images possible over long distances without direct fact-to-face interaction. In contrast, contiguous social encounters are actual face-to-face interactions that occur in physical proximity in contiguous space. Since the Japanese-Brazilians remain only a minute fraction of Japan’s total population and are a small minority even in communities in which they are highly concentrated, very few Japanese have contiguous ethnic encounters with them. Therefore, the influence of nikkeijin immigrants on Japanese perceptions and attitudes is based almost exclusively on non-contiguous media encounters on television (or in newspapers), greatly increasing the power of the media over the public. Indeed, the impact of the media tends to be greater in regions where the immigrant population is small (Hartmann and Husband 1974). In addition, as a number of researchers have shown (see McQuail 1977:72, 79-80, McQuail 1994:333, 339), the *intended effect* of ethnic images disseminated by the media is also much greater when the audience does not have any personal experience with the ethnic or immigrant group itself. Because the Japanese-Brazilians remain distant from the daily experience of most Japanese, they can not critically evaluate media portrayals of nikkeijin immigrants based on their own independent personal

experiences and are therefore more likely to accept such representations at face value.

This preponderance of non-contiguous media encounters over actual contiguous encounters with the nikkeijin has probably made the Japanese populace dependent on the media for information and impressions about nikkeijin immigrants. As a result, the Japanese television media has considerable public power and undoubtedly plays a major role in shaping Japanese ethnic perceptions and social attitudes toward them. In fact, the media is most likely having a *greater* impact on Japanese ethnic perceptions than the actual Japanese-Brazilian immigrants themselves. Undoubtedly, the global expansion of telecommunications and mass media not only enables individuals to imagine relationships and communities across national borders (Appadurai 1996), it increases the prevalence of non-contiguous, “imagined” ethnic encounters with locally-situated immigrant groups with which they do not actually interact, making the media the primary agent that structures ethnic and social attitudes toward immigrants today.

Notes

¹ There are approximately 650,000 Korean-Japanese who are still registered in Japan as "foreigners." Although 90 percent of them have been born and raised in Japan (Ryang 1997:3), they are not granted Japanese citizenship and many have not naturalized. The population of Chinese in Japan remains slightly higher than the Brazilian nikkeijin. In 1995, there were 222,991 Chinese registered as foreigners in Japan. In addition, there are a good number of illegal visa overstayers (38,296 according to 1997 figures).

² See Tsuda (1999a) for an analysis of the socioeconomic causes of Japanese-Brazilian return migration.

³ Dekasegi literally means one who "goes out" to earn money. The word originally referred to Japanese workers from rural agricultural areas who migrate within Japan in search of work.

⁴ The Burakumin are a former outcaste group and the Ainu are aboriginals who are mainly found in Hokkaido. The Okinawans inhabit the Ryukyu islands south of the main Japanese islands and are not only seen as an ethnic minority by mainland Japanese, but maintain a separate ethnic identity and historical consciousness.

⁵ Some of these were programs devoted exclusively to the Japanese-Brazilians while others contained segments featuring them. Although my sample is by no means representative, it does include various types of TV programs, including documentaries, news features, game and talk shows, and dramas. I also conducted one year of fieldwork in two Japanese cities with relatively large immigrant populations and worked in a factory with Japanese-Brazilian and Japanese laborers as a participant observer for four intensive months. Close to 100 in-depth interviews were conducted with Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese workers, residents, employers, and officials. Some of this interview material is included here. See Tsuda (1998a) for an analysis of my field experiences.

⁶ As White and White (1983:51-53) note in the Australian case, most positive portrayals of immigrants in the media emphasize how their customs and culture are not that different from mainstream society or how they have assimilated.

⁷ The Japanese themselves have become quite interested in such "Brazilian" activities. Soccer has become very popular in Japan, especially with the development of the professional J-League and the participation of the national team in the World Cup. There is some limited interest in Brazilian food with some Brazilian restaurants (for Japanese) opening up in Tokyo. Samba has also taken somewhat of a foothold in Japan with serious Japanese samba schools.

⁸ See Tsuda (1998b) for a detailed analysis of Japanese prejudices and discrimination toward nikkeijin immigrants.

⁹ According to survey data, only about 5 percent of Japanese-Brazilians return migrants were professionals in Brazil (JICA 1992) and only 23 percent of them are university educated (Japan Statistics Research Institute 1993, Kitagawa 1992).

¹⁰ Schor, in her book, *The Overworked American*, notes that the two countries which watch the most television in the world also happen to be the two with the longest working hours. This may indicate that when a country is "overworked," it tends to engage in "passive" leisure (watching TV) instead of active leisure.

¹¹ This public perception is partly created by active, conscious efforts by the media itself. For instance, in terms of political campaigns, the media attempts to avoid any partisan bias by providing equal coverage on both sides, not endorsing candidates, and maintaining standards of impartiality in reporting. Industry codes and Japanese law require strict neutrality (Pharr 1996a:7-8).

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