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The Benefits of Being Minority: The Ethnic Status of the Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil

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Introduction

Japanese emigration to Brazil began in 1908 and continued in significant numbers until the early 1960s. Like the Japanese who came to the United States, the emigrants to Brazil originated from all parts of Japan, ranging from Hokkaido to Okinawa. During the pre-war period from 1908 to 1941, approximately 190,000 Japanese entered Brazil. Many of the emigrants were farmers suffering from difficult conditions in Japan's rural areas, which were plagued by overpopulation, declining agricultural prices, increasing debt and unemployment, as well as harsh climatic conditions in the northern regions. In addition to such factors that "pushed" the Japanese out of Japan, the expanding and labor-deficient Brazilian coffee plantation economy served as the necessary "pull" factor which drew them to Brazil. New immigrant workers were needed in Brazil because of the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the decline of immigration from Europe (especially Italy). Japanese emigration was also encouraged by active recruitment and propaganda efforts, which was concerned with overpopulation and poverty in rural areas, and by the establishment of "emigration companies" to recruit and transport emigrants to Brazil. In addition, the discriminatory closing of the United States to further Japanese immigration starting with the "Gentlemen's Agreement" in 1908 and culminating in the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 diverted the migrant flow to Brazil. Although most of the Japanese emigrants went to Brazil as temporary migrant workers with dreams of returning to Japan in several years with considerable wealth, reality proved to be more difficult. They earned much less than expected as contract laborers, suffered harsh conditions on the coffee plantations, and initially found it difficult to receive their own land to cultivate. Eventually, many became small land proprietors in Japanese *colônias*, rural agricultural enclave communities established on land set aside with the assistance of the Japanese government. As the years wore on, the possibility of returning to Japan with significant personal wealth became increasingly unlikely and a vast majority of them settled permanently in Brazil with their families. However, many of them remained unassimilated and relatively isolated in their ethnic enclaves and continued to dream of eventual repatriation.

The outbreak of World War II led to some repressive measures against the Japanese in Brazil, although nowhere as severe as those against the Japanese-Americans. Most importantly, however, the war eliminated any remaining hope of an eventual return to Japan. In contrast to their unassimilated parents, many of the Brazilian-born, second generation nisei began serious and active efforts to integrate themselves in Brazilian society (see Cardoso 1973). Another wave of Japanese immigrants arrived after World War II (this time, mainly because of economic difficulties in a war-torn Japan), some of whom

were better educated and of higher social status than previous immigrants. From 1953 to 1962, 50,000 Japanese emigrated to Brazil. Generally, these post-war emigrants went to Brazil with the intention of settling permanently, and many became small landholders in agricultural enclaves from the very beginning.

Currently, there are about 1,228,000 Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil, the largest community of Japanese descendants (*nikkeijin*) outside of Japan. Almost all of the population (91 percent) is concentrated in the most developed southwest and southern regions of Brazil, most notably the states of São Paulo and Paraná. Most of the Brazilian nikkeijin are now second generation *nisei* (30.9 percent) or third generation *sansei* (41 percent), with a small, but increasing population of *yonsei* (fourth generation) (São Paulo Humanities Research Center 1987-1988).

As Brazil's oldest and by far largest Asian minority, the Japanese-Brazilians are now generally well-integrated in Brazilian society, both socioeconomically and culturally. Most of them are urbanized and live in large cities, with only a small minority residing in the rural colônias. Socioeconomically, they are predominantly middle class and well-educated. The intermarriage rate is reported to be around 40 percent, and as a result, six percent of the nisei and 42 percent of the sansei are of mixed descent. Because of this high level of social integration, a considerable amount of cultural assimilation has also occurred among the nisei and sansei.

Despite their socioeconomic and cultural integration in mainstream Brazilian society, however, the Japanese-Brazilians continue to assert a rather prominent "Japanese" ethnic minority identity, which remains considerably stronger than their identification with majority Brazilians or the Brazilian nation (cf. Maeyama 1996:398). Because of a strong consciousness of their distinctive ethnic attributes that constitute their "Japaneseness" in Brazil, the Japanese-Brazilians continue to emphasize their minority identities despite a growing realization that they have become considerably Brazilianized. Many of my nikkeijin informants privileged the Japanese side of their dual ethnic identity, claiming that they feel more "Japanese" than "Brazilian." Only a relatively small proportion of them had fully adopted a majority Brazilian identity. This paper examines the various components of this continued experience of Japanese ethnic distinctiveness and identity among the nikkeijin in Brazil.

Primordial Ethnicity: Racial Visibility and the Essentialization of a Japanese Ethnic Identity

Race is the most prominent marker that differentiates the Japanese-Brazilians as ethnically "Japanese" in Brazil. In fact, the experience of being racially identified as "*japonês*" is undoubtedly familiar to anyone of Japanese descent who has lived in Brazil, and it can be rather disorienting for those who come from a society where less overt emphasis is placed on racial phenotype. It happened to me for the first time a few days after I had arrived in Brazil. I was walking innocently down the street in downtown Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul), when suddenly:
"*Oi, japonês!* (Hey, Japanese!)"
Startled, I turned around to find a Brazilian street vendor beckoning to me, trying to interest me in his goods.
"*Só três mil cruzeiros, japonês,*" he was holding up a bag of apples. "*Mais barato do que nas lojas.*" Realizing that he had caught my attention, he continued his upbeat sales pitch, telling me how fresh and delicious his apples were. I hesitated before the proper words in Portuguese came out.
"*Não obrigado* (no thank you)."
My hesitation was less the result of my still inadequate Portuguese than the way I had been addressed directly by my ethnicity. It was the first time in my life that I had been greeted by a stranger in such a manner.

I reached the downtown bus station where a row of buses waited, the open doors beckoning passengers inside. I checked the signs designating the various routes. My bus had not yet arrived. However, because I was still unfamiliar with the bus system, I wanted to confirm that I was waiting at the right spot (and also to practice my Portuguese). After mentally rehearsing my question many times, I approached an attendant who stood near one of the benches on the bus platform. The friendly attendant quickly confirmed that I had the correct bus stop. Then he gestured toward the bench.

"*Senta aqui,* japonês (Sit here, Japanese)."

There it was again. I was beginning to realize that this would be a common occurrence in Brazil. In the following days, I would experience it numerous times--strangers calling me *japonês* in public (sometimes for no apparent reason), store clerks referring to me as *japonês*, a pedestrian muttering "*japonês*" as I walk past, questions ending with the ethnic designation, *japonês*. "You might as well get used to it," one of my nisei friends told me. "There are so few Japanese living in Rio Grande do Sul that you have Brazilians who have hardly ever seen a Japanese person."

Of course, children are merciless in this regard since they react with an unrefined spontaneity that adults have politely learned to hide in public. I will never forget the little Brazilian boy who grabbed his mother's skirt as he pointed to me and said, "Mommy, Mommy. Look! A japonês!" Nor will I ever forget the group of smiling Brazilian children who surrounded me on the street and greeted me with every Japanese word they knew. *Sayonara, arigato ...*

The other experience that remains vividly in my mind was a particular bus ride I took from downtown Porto Alegre. A little girl who sat next to her mother on the opposite bench spent most of the bus ride staring at me, her large and cute eyes studying my features intently. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat, averted my eyes for awhile, then glanced back at her. The stare continued. After a few minutes, I realized that it was hopeless--there was no way I could shake her probing eyes off of me. My Japanese ethnicity was being located and essentialized by the silent gaze of a mere child! Yet, the gaze was more powerful and meaningful for me than any utterance. I could easily fill the absence of words with my own imagination: "So, this is how a japonês looks like. The slanted eyes, the flat face, the small nose. How intriguing." Even after I got off the bus, the gaze seemed to follow me relentlessly. In contrast to children, the ethnic curiosity is expressed in a more muted form among adults as concerns for decorum intervene and the novelty wears off after numerous ethnic encounters. Yet, the gaze was always there, making me acutely aware of my peculiar Japanese appearance that clearly differentiated me from the surrounding blend of Brazilian faces.

In fact, this racial designation as japonês is not simply confined to places like Porto Alegre where the sight of a Japanese descendant is quite rare. It prevails throughout Brazil, including the city of São Paulo, which has the highest concentration of Japanese-Brazilians in the country. Of course, in such areas, it is less frequent and more of a confirmation of ethnic difference than a reaction to ethnic novelty. Nonetheless, when ethnic appellations are based on physiognomy instead of visible cultural differences, it inscribes a racially constituted ethnic awareness (cf. Fanon 1957:109-112). Although my distinctive Asian appearance had never been a focus of attention in the United States, either for me or for those around me, my race was suddenly thrust into my self-consciousness in Brazil, becoming a prominent component of my "Japanese" ethnic identity.

Was it ethnic prejudice? For a moment, I was reminded of Frantz Fanon's experience in France as a black man from Martinique:
'Look, a Negro!' It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

'Look, a Negro!' It was true. It amused me.
'Look, a Negro!' The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!'...Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up
my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.
...I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic
characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency,
fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships...
...What was it? Color prejudice (1967:111-112, 118).

Of course, the issue is one of subjective interpretation. The external ethnic stimulus I received in
Brazil was somewhat similar, but unlike Fanon, I was not ethnically burdened by a historical legacy of
colonialism, exploitation, and slavery at the hands of the Brazilians. Even during my first week in Brazil,
I had fully realized that Japaneseness did not have the negative connotations that blackness had in France
for Fanon. For me, the Brazilian insistence on racially inscribing me as japonês was simply a recognition
of *diferença* and not a prejudicial reaction in which difference is negatively perceived. At worst, there
may have been a tint of ridicule or banter at times, but never denigration or dislike. In general, I was
much more amused than offended. After awhile, it became routine, expected.

Yet, the emphasis placed on racial difference by Brazilians is not always this subtle. I soon
realized that certain Brazilians pull their eyes upwards with their fingers to indicate the *olhos puxados*
(slanted eyes, or literally "pulled eyes") of the Japanese-Brazilians. However, this ethnic gesture is not
intended as an affront directed at the nikkeijin, but as simply an amusing commentary on their different
physiognomy. In contrast to the United States, where this gesture is considered to be an ethnic insult,
when it was used in Brazil to refer to people or things Japanese, the context was either neutral or even
positive. One of the most typical examples I observed was when my landlady in Riberão Preto (São
Paulo) described the children of her Japanese-Brazilian friend to an acquaintance. "Their father is
Brazilian, but they still look very Japanese," she remarked, pulling her eyes up with her fingers for
emphasis. I have also seen the gesture used when referring to products made by the Japanese.

The peculiar Japanese physiognomy has even been conveniently appropriated in Brazilian
commercials. A television ad for Toshiba products ends with a magnifying glass passing over the eyes of
a Japanese face. "*Abre os olhos* (Open the eyes)," the ad exhorts. The statement seemingly has a double
connotation which asks consumers to open their eyes to the quality of Toshiba products. Again, local
context is everything, making an unmitigated ethnic insult in one society a good-humored advertising
gimmick in another.

My Japanese-Brazilian informants seemed to generally share my interpretation of such ethnic
experiences in Brazil. In fact, very few of them were bothered by their constant racial designation as
japonês in Brazil, whether by ethnic appellation or gesture. A few mentioned that they would be offended
if they were called "Jap," but most claimed it did not happen.

Others even read positive meanings into the experience. "My kids came home from school one
day somewhat bothered that they are always called japonês by the other kids," one Japanese-Brazilian
mother remarked. "I told them that the Brazilians are not making fun of them. I told them that being
Japanese is a source of pride. The Japanese are respected and admired in Brazil."

Even the slanted eyes gesture was taken in stride as simply ethnic humor. It was quite remarkable
that only one informant was personally offended by the gesture, claiming that behind the jovial exterior
was a serious attempt to ridicule the funny appearance of the Japanese. Yet even she admitted that the
tendency to express ethnic prejudice in a jocular manner takes much of the bite out of Brazilian "ethnic
discrimination."

Despite the general lack of pejorative connotations, the attention given to the racial phenotype of the nikkeijin in Brazilian society has a significant impact on their ethnicity since ethnic identity is constituted not only by the experience of an unique cultural heritage, but also by an awareness of common racial descent, which differentiates a certain group from the rest of society.

For the Japanese-Brazilians, racial phenotype has become the most fundamental factor that ethnically identifies them as a "Japanese" minority and clearly distinguishes them from other Brazilians (cf. Saito 1976:196-7). In Brazilian society, the Brazilian nikkeijin are immediately recognizable because of their distinctive "oriental" appearance (*traços orientais*), which is seen as markedly different from whites (brancos), blacks (pretos), and mixed blood mestiços of all types (including *mulatos*, *morenos*, and *pardos*) (cf. Maeyama 1984:455). Much attention is given by Brazilians to these phenotypic differences because of the high Brazilian sensitivity to racial characteristics, including slight differences in skin color.[1] The Japanese-Brazilians are always referred to as "japonês" by other Brazilians simply because of their facial features, not only in unfamiliar contexts when names are not known (such as in the streets, stores, and public areas) (cf. Maeyama 1984:448), but also when they are talked about among familiar acquaintances.

The tendency among Brazilians to single the nikkeijin out as "japonês" constantly reminds them of their Japanese descent and ancestral roots. In this manner, an awareness of their "Japanese" ethnic ancestry is externally ascribed imposed on the Brazilian nikkeijin by mainstream Brazilians. In fact, few Japanese-Brazilians, regardless of their cultural orientation, can escape the externally imposed consciousness of their Japanese racial features. As some of them mention, they have no choice but to be seen as "japonês" by other Brazilians because of their appearance.

"Because of our faces, we can't deny that we are japonês, even if we wanted to," a middle-aged nisei woman remarked. "We are reminded of this whenever we walk down the street." Others spoke about how their racial visibility is a clearly evident and immutable feature that forever marks them as a distinctive "Japanese" ethnic minority, even if their cultural differences with majority Brazilians weaken and eventually disappear due to assimilation (see also Reichl 1995:47).

"Even if we become completely Brazilian and act as Brazilian as possible, we will always be seen by Brazilians as Japanese because of our faces. There's no way to avoid this," a young Japanese-Brazilian student said, a hint of resignation in his voice. "We can go to a soccer game and cheer on our favorite São Paulo team, or even dance samba in the streets, and in the midst of it, someone will say, 'Hey, japonês.'"

In this sense, the Japanese-Brazilians experience their racially inscribed "Japaneseness" as a primordial ethnic identity based on innate characteristics acquired by birth which cannot be denied or changed.[2] In a society where minority identities are essentialized by racial phenotype, they seemingly cannot be actively contested, resisted, and modified (cf. Mason 1986:6) in contrast to culturally constructed ethnic identities which can be subject to constant negotiation.

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[11] Because of the considerable racial intermixture in Brazil, Brazilians (unlike Americans) have a wide array of racial categories, showing their sensitivity to slight phenotypic differences. Harris and Kottak (1963), in their study of racial categories among Brazilians in a fishing village in coastal Bahia, uncovered 40 categories used to describe phenotypic differences.

[2] The primordial aspect of ethnicity has been analyzed by many researchers, but the classic articles that have dealt with it most directly are Geertz (1963), Isaacs (1974), and Shils (1957).

Among Japanese-Brazilians of mixed descent (*mestiços*), racial difference is considerably more open to negotiation and manipulation, making their "Japanese" ethnicity less essentialized. Yet despite their greater racial ambiguity, it seems that even they are sometimes unable to escape the primordial nature of their ethnicity in Brazilian society. Many of my mestiço informants were ethnically categorized as "japonês" by both their acquaintances and in public because of their still lingering "Japanese" physiognomy. As will be discussed later, almost none of my mestiço informants actively contested the imposition of such hegemonic racial constructs. Instead, they willingly complied, if not actively encouraged their racial categorization as "japonês" in Brazilian society.

Since minority identities always imply a certain amount of ethnic marginalization, by constantly categorizing the Japanese-Brazilians as japonês solely because of racial phenotype, many Brazilians partake in a discourse of racial exclusion (whether inadvertently or not). Although most Brazilian nikkeijin have no problem with being singled out as "japonês" by their racial features, those who wish to be fully accepted as majority Brazilians and do not want to be treated as an ethnic minority sometimes say, "*a cara não ajuda*" (the face does not help). Yet, there were indications that those Brazilians who develop close relationships with culturally assimilated Japanese-Brazilians are eventually able to see beyond the racial surface and do not continue to designate them as "Japanese." For instance, consider these remarks by a Brazilian woman:

> When I first met Fábio [a Japanese-Brazilian sansei], I thought he would act very Japanese. But he didn't fit the stereotype. I eventually realized that he is very Brazilian--the way he talks, the way he greets you, his open hospitality. If it weren't for his appearance, I would think he was a true Brazilian. In fact, I don't see him as Japanese that much anymore. His appearance has become less important now.

In a heterogeneous and inclusive society where the definition of a dominant "majority group" remains perpetually indefinite and racially diffuse, it seems that sociocultural assimilation will enable the Japanese-Brazilians to participate in a majority Brazilian ethnicity, despite perceptions of racial difference. However, as we will see in the next section, most of them do not wish to discard their minority ethnicity in favor of a Brazilian national identity. In fact, their "Japaneseness" is less of an ethnic stigma to be avoided than a positive asset to be maintained.

The Japanese-Brazilians as Positive Minorities and the Sociocultural Construction of Japanese Ethnicity

The ethnic differences among the Brazilian nikkeijin that constitute their prominent "Japanese" ethnic identity are not simply limited to their perceived racial characteristics, but also extend to their experience of sociocultural distinctiveness, which are regarded as a product of their Japanese heritage and upbringing. However, their "Japaneseness" becomes the locus of ethnic identification not only because of the recognition of difference, but also because they are "positive minorities" whose ethnic qualities are favorably regarded in Brazilian society. Although they are numerically smaller and are not the dominant power holders in a society, they enjoy a significantly higher socioeconomic status than the majority populace and their distinctive cultural qualities and social position are respected, if not admired.[3] This contrasts with usual definitions of minorities as social groups which occupy low socio-occupational status and suffer from discrimination, prejudice, and social exclusion (e.g., see Giddens 1989:245, Ogbu

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[3] Other examples of positive minorities include the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland and possibly certain socially successful Asian groups (i.e., "model minorities") in the United States. Well-known historical examples of positive minorities are Western colonists in previous colonial societies, who were ethnic "minorities" that not only had superior technological and military power but were frequently seen by certain sectors of the "majority" native populace as possessing superior cultural qualities.

1978:21-25, Simpson and Yinger 1972:11). Unlike such "negative minorities," the Japanese-Brazilians are well-regarded by mainstream Brazilians for their relatively high socioeconomic and educational status, their affiliation with Japan as a respected First World country, and their positive "Japanese" cultural attributes. This encourages the nikkeijin to identify rather strongly with their Japaneseness and take pride in their ethnic heritage while generally distancing themselves from what they perceive negatively as "Brazilian."

The postwar socioeconomic success of the Japanese-Brazilians is one reason for the social prestige they enjoy as a positive "Japanese" minority in Brazil. Despite their humble origins as contract workers on Brazilian plantations, they went on to distinguish themselves in agriculture, creating very successful, agricultural cooperatives and introducing various fruits and vegetables into the standard Brazilian diet (see Andô 1973, Saito 1973, 1976, 1978:21-27, Utsumi 1986). Since urbanizing, they have experienced considerable social mobility (see Maeyama 1983, 1989, Miyao 1980, Saito 1961:131-157, 1976:189-192) and currently occupy a middle class socioeconomic position that is significantly higher than the Brazilian average. According to a census of Brazilian nikkeijin, 43.3 percent are professionals, managers, or office workers, and another 20.9 percent were in private business (São Paulo Humanities Research Center 1987-1988). As a result, most earn salaries considerably above the Brazilian average.[4] As a result, some of my informants even mentioned a general ethnic perception among Brazilians that the Japanese-Brazilians are generally rich. A marriage with a nikkeijin man is understood in Brazilian society to be *garantido* (guaranteed), that is, economically secure. The higher educational status of the Japanese-Brazilians is also frequently a focus of attention. About 20 percent are university educated (Centro de Estudos 1992), which is over three times the Brazilian average. As a result, like Asians in the U.S., they are overrepresented at top Brazilian universities such as the most prestigious Universidade de São Paulo (see Maeyama 1983:69, Miyao 1980, Saito 1978:206-7, Smith 1979:64). The most popular ethnic joke in Brazil about the Japanese-Brazilians is undoubtedly the following: "If you want to enter the University of São Paulo, kill a Japanese."

Indeed, many Brazilian nikkeijin are quite consciousness of their relatively high socioeconomic status in Brazilian society and sometimes express considerable pride in their past ethnic accomplishments and current social position, claiming that most Japanese-Brazilians are well-off and few are poor. Urban middle class status has by now become a defining ethnic feature for them especially because of the strong class consciousness in Brazil. Like their distinctive Japanese racial features, their relatively high socioeconomic position has become an ethnic "emblem of contrast" (see De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1982b) differentiating them from other Brazilians as a "Japanese" minority in Brazil.

Ethnic Identity and Global Flows: Positive Images of Japan

The positive minority status of the Brazilian nikkeijin is not simply a product of their respected socioeconomic position. It is also based on favorable Brazilian perceptions of Japaneseness, which are undoubtedly a product of Japan's prominent and respected position in the global order as an economic superpower. Although Japanese direct foreign investment and trade with Brazil has been relatively low, the global flow of images about Japan's industrial development, prosperity, and advanced technology has affected Brazilian society. Despite the smaller presence and lower visibility of the usual agents of Japanese globalization in Brazil (Japanese multinational firms, business people, and products), plenty of information about Japan has been transmitted to Brazil through mass media and telecommunications networks. Reports and stories about Japan in Brazilian newspapers, magazines, television programs, and

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[4] Thirty-one percent of them earn less than $400 per month, 48.2 percent earn between $400 and $1,600, and 21.4 percent earn over $1,600. In contrast, wage levels for the general Brazilian populace are as follows: 61.9 percent earn less than $400, 30 percent earn between $400 and $800, and only 5.7 percent earn over $1,600 (São Paulo Humanities Research Center 1987-1988).

commercials have saturated Brazilian society with positive images and impressions. In addition to current news, there are plenty of stories featuring Japan's economic accomplishments and prosperity[5] as well as new Japanese products and technological innovations. The effectiveness of these images is further enhanced by the limited but increasing availability of high quality Japanese products in Brazil (video/electronic equipment as well as automobiles), which are admired for their reliability and technological superiority. Even such mundane products as Panasonic batteries are prominently labeled "*technologia japonesa*" to make them more appealing and marketable. Because Brazilian import and tariff restrictions have limited the availability and raised the price of Japanese imports in Brazil, they have been more effective for their positive commodified images and cultural meanings than for their utility as consumer products. Not only are they embodiments of Japanese economic and technological prowess, their commodified value and desirability is increased as they have become high-priced luxury items.

The positive Brazilian perception of Japan is based not only on specific globalized knowledge and commodified images about the country but also on general impressions of the First World (*primeiro mundo*) which have been transmitted to Brazil through the global ecumene. This perception of the primeiro mundo is based on Euro-American countries and especially the United States, which dominates the global flow of information. In fact, when specific knowledge about Japan is lacking, rather idealistic images about First World Euro-American countries are quickly substituted as if they were synonymous with Japan. For instance, in contrast to their considerable exposure to news and information about Japanese industry, technology, economics, and even politics, very few of the educated Brazilians I spoke with had a clear idea of the actual living conditions in Japan. However, since images of relatively privileged and luxurious Euro-American living standards are readily available through American movies and TV shows, they were directly applied to Japan by virtue of the country's First World status. This type of thought process is illustrated by the comments of a Brazilian university student who expressed considerable interest in Japan:

> We don't see much on TV about the actual living conditions of ordinary people in Japan, so we don't have a good idea. But through American television and movies, we see how well people live in the United States. Since Japan is also the First World, we assume that living conditions in Japan should be more or less comparable.

This global dissemination of positive impressions about Japan as a techno-economic power and First World nation has greatly enhanced the ethnic esteem and status that the Japanese-Brazilians enjoy in Brazil. In fact, the nikkeijin were not held in high ethnic regard in the past when Japan's global status was unfavorable and negative images of Japaneseness prevailed. In the early twentieth century, when Japan was still a backward Asian nation attempting to catch up with the West, Japanese immigrants were perceived by the Brazilian political elite as an "inferior race" who would have negative effects on Brazilian racial composition and were unassimilable. During the period of Japanese imperialist expansion, the Japanese in Brazil were seen as a serious threat to Brazilian national security (the "yellow peril") and were subject to considerable ethnic repression.[6] Indeed, a few of the older Japanese-Brazilians who experienced (or are consciousness) of this earlier period were still sensitive to possible negative Brazilian perceptions of them. However, even for such individuals, their negative past experiences have long faded and they also have experienced the positive changes in the Brazilian perception of the nikkeijin because of Japan's global emergence as a preeminent First World nation in the postwar period. Although the postwar change in the ethnic status of the Japanese-Brazilians from a previously negative to a currently positive minority is partly due to their notable success as a socially mobile immigrant group,

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[5] When the author was in Brazil, Japan's serious and prolonged recession did not receive prominent media coverage.

[6] See Lesser (1999), Maeyama (1982), Nogueira (1973), Saito (1961:126-130, 1978:223-4), T. Saito (1986:200), Smith (1979), and Tsuda (forthcoming) for discussions of past ethnic perceptions of the Japanese-Brazilians.

virtually all of my older informants agreed that their ethnic image and the amount of respect they receive in Brazil has increased considerably with Japan's dramatic rise in their global hierarchy of nations. The observations of an *issei* (first generation) woman were representative of her contemporaries:

Although we were not involved in Japan's postwar growth, we have certainly benefited from it. Japan's great success has always reflected well on us and as a result, our standing in Brazil has improved dramatically. Indeed, some act as if we actually participated in Japan's economic miracle.
The influence of Japan's global status on the Japanese-Brazilians is especially strong because of the Brazilian tendency to closely associate them with Japan.

"Some Brazilians don't clearly differentiate the Japanese in Brazil from the Japanese in Japan," one informant observed. "For them, a Japanese is a Japanese, regardless of whether he lives in Brazil or Japan. Therefore, what the Japanese [in Japan] do instantly becomes a reflection of who we [Japanese-Brazilians] are."

Indeed, the Japanese-Brazilians have capitalized on this pro-Japanese climate by asserting and embracing their "Japaneseness" in contrast to their previous attempts to assimilate to Brazilian society in the immediate postwar period. The prestige of being associated with First World Japan has encouraged them to develop a strong transnational ethnic identification as "Japanese" at the expense of their consciousness as Brazilian nationals (cf. Reichl 1995, J. Saito 1986:246). Second generation immigrant minority groups frequently use positive images of their ethnic homelands to construct transnational identities based on an affiliation with more than one nation-state.

Benedict Anderson (1991) describes how the development of print technology in early modern Europe allowed people to imagine a national community beyond the limited group of individuals with whom they interacted. Undoubtedly, with the development modern communications and mass media which reach out to people across national borders, it is now possible to imagine transnational ethnic communities (cf. Appadurai 1996:8, 21-22) that become the basis for transnational minority identities. In this manner, meaningful and coherent ethnic identities can be formed without the physical presence of the object of identification since ethnic "encounters" have become increasingly possible over large geographical distances. Identities in the modern world are increasingly imagined through the global production and circulation of images and information and are becoming less dependent on actual interaction and experiences with other people (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10-11, Harvey 1989:289). As Arjun Appadurai observes (1996:53-54), the globalization of images, communications, and media has increased the power and possibilities of the social imagination among ordinary people.

Ethnic Stereotypes and Positive Perceptions of Cultural Difference

The favorable understandings of Japan in Brazilian society have also enhanced the perception of the *cultural* differences of the Japanese-Brazilians. This is another important component of their positive minority status that conditions their ethnic consciousness, causing them to emphasize their "Japaneseness" instead of their Brazilian identities. The dissemination of positive images of Japan in Brazil has been accompanied by favorable portrayals of Japanese culture based on hard work, diligence, intelligence, endurance, and dedication. For instance, when I was in Brazil, the main Brazilian television network, Globo, ran a documentary series about *O Milagre Japonês* (the Japanese miracle). In addition to outlining Japan's economic miracle, the documentary also highlighted traditional Japanese cultural values as a necessary context for understanding the country's economic competitiveness, efficiency, and technological success.

This has led to considerable interest among some non-nikkeijin Brazilians in Japanese culture (cf. Maeyama 1996:491, Reichl 1995:45). Although many of these Brazilians are introduced to Japanese culture by their Japanese-Brazilian friends, much of their interest is also generated by their exposure to

Japanese cultural images through television, films, magazines, travel brochures, and books. When I lived in Porto Alegre (which has only a minute Japanese-Brazilian population), the local catholic university held a series of demonstration classes on Japanese culture, including tea ceremonies and flower arrangement. I was surprised to find not only that these classes were well-attended but consisted overwhelmingly of non-nikkeijin Brazilians. Japanese language classes offered both at the university and in more informal contexts consist not only of nikkeijin, but a good contingent of Brazilian students as well.

"It's amazing how many Brazilians want to learn Japanese," one Japanese-Brazilian university student remarked. "It has no practical value for them--they just do it out of personal interest in Japanese culture. I am frequently asked by my [Brazilian] friends how long it will take them to learn the language."

Japanese cuisine has also received a certain amount of popularity in Brazil and I have known a number of Brazilians who profess a personal love for sushi (eaten properly with chopsticks, of course). I have also been amused to find Brazilians who have learned to sing traditional Japanese songs (*enka*) and participate in karaoke contests held by the local Japanese-Brazilian community.

Because of such positive connotations of Japanese culture, the cultural differences of the Japanese-Brazilians--which are associated with their Japanese ancestry--are regarded in an overwhelmingly positive manner in Brazil. There is notable consensus among Brazilians that the japonês are hard-working, honest, intelligent, trustworthy, and responsible (see J. Saito 1986 and T. Saito 1986). The Japanese-Brazilians are also sometimes seen as more timid, reserved, and calm than Brazilians, characteristics which have positive connotations. Such positive attitudes were quite evident not only in my conversations with mainstream Brazilians but even in brief exchanges with Brazilian strangers which resulted in unsolicited ethnic comments about the Japanese-Brazilians.

"The japonês are very respected. They do the work of ten Brazilians," a Brazilian waiter told me, when he found out that I had interviewed a Japanese-Brazilian woman in his restaurant. "Japonês, eh?" an agent at a Brazilian bus terminal confirmed when I gave him my name, mistaking me for a Japanese-Brazilian. "They are good people. Very intelligent, hard-working." "We trust the japonês very much, much more than Brazilians," an old Brazilian lady told me. "I have many japonês friends and they are always honest, responsible."

In fact, the only notable negative image of the Japanese-Brazilians that I encountered in Brazil was a sense that the japonês are somewhat unreceptive toward ethnic outsiders. Although much of Brazilian ethnic prejudice is expressed through joking behavior, the jokes about the "japonês" that I actively collected from Brazilians either emphasized the positive aspects of the Japanese-Brazilians such as their academic achievements or poked fun at either their facial features or strange and complicated last names (although my own "Japanese" ethnic status undoubtedly made complete access to any nasty jokes difficult). Also the stereotype of Asians in the United States as "geeks" or "nerds" seems to be much less prominent in Brazil.

In addition to such general understandings of the nikkeijin as a positive minority, many Brazilians further emphasize the "Japanese" cultural qualities of the nikkeijin by explaining their behavior ethnically (cf. Maeyama 1984:448, 1996:312). There is a strong tendency among a good number of Brazilians to automatically interpret many of the distinctive aspects and behaviors of the Japanese-Brazilians (such as their high academic achievement, politeness, less inclination to talk and joke, greater social reserve, cleanliness, etc.) in favorable terms as positive "Japanese" cultural qualities which are a product of their ethnic heritage. A Japanese-Brazilian mother gave a typical example of this type of Brazilian ethnic reasoning in regards to her son:

> When my son gets good grades in school, they say, 'Of course, it's because he's Japanese. He is intelligent.' When he does a really careful and neat job on a class assignment, they say, 'Of course, it's because he's Japanese.' When he completes his classroom duties in a responsible manner, they say, 'Of course, he is Japanese.'

The process at work can be called "ethnic attribution"--the propensity to simplistically explain and interpret the behavior of those from a different ethnic group that corresponds to standard stereotypes as a collective ethnic trait while ignoring other possible explanations (cf. Hagendoorn 1993:35, Verkuyten 1997). Because one is not directly familiar with the members of other ethnic groups, it becomes easier to attribute their behavior directly to ethnic causes without considering possible individual or situational determinants of behavior.

In fact, as a Japanese descendant in Brazil, I experienced this type of positive ethnic attribution a number of times. My "Japanese" intelligence was credited for my relatively quick mastery of Portuguese more than a few times. On the day I left Porto Alegre, I told my Brazilian friends who drove me to the bus terminal that I had spent much of the previous night cleaning my apartment before I moved out. Again, the inevitable ethnic conclusion: "*Ele é japonês* (He is Japanese)."

Because of the Brazilian tendency to impose positive cultural stereotypes on the Japanese-Brazilians through the ethnic attribution of their behavior, most of my informants continued to retain a strong consciousness that they are culturally "Japanese" to a certain extent and are significantly different from other Brazilians. As was the case with their racial designation, an ethnic identity emerges in a hegemonic context that externally defines them as "Japanese." In fact, because the Brazilians expect them to behave in a respectable "Japanese" manner, some of my informants felt that they could not act in inappropriate (i.e., "un-Japanese") ways as members of the Japanese community or do anything that would embarrass or tarnish their favorable reputation. It is possible that even those individuals (especially some sansei) who do not initially feel their "Japaneseness" very strongly eventually develop a consciousness of ethnic difference because they are constantly designated as culturally "Japanese" by other Brazilians (cf. J. Saito 1986:241). This is one reason why even the sansei, who are generally more culturally assimilated than the nisei continue to have stronger Japanese than Brazilian ethnic sentiments.

However, these cultural definitions of "Japanese" ethnicity are not only hegemonic constructs which are simply imposed on the self-consciousness of the Japanese-Brazilians. Because of their positive connotations, they are actively asserted by the Japanese-Brazilians as well. When talking about their cultural differences, my nikkeijin informants agreed with the ethnic characterizations prevalent in Brazilian society and claimed that they are indeed more hard-working, diligent, honest, educated, intelligent, and responsible than most Brazilians, who they stereotypically portrayed as lazy, easy-going, irresponsible, immature, and dishonest (see also Flores 1975:95, Reichl 1995:49, 51, 55, T. Saito 1986, Smith 1979:58). It was remarkable how the comments that they made about their cultural distinctiveness were frequently accompanied by negative images of majority Brazilians. For example, consider the reflections of one young nisei man:

> We feel lots of cultural differences in relation to other Brazilians. Lots. Our cultural level is higher. We work harder, are more diligent, and intelligent. Brazilians like the beach too much and spend too much time partying and enjoying themselves. If you ask a Japanese[-Brazilian] to do something, you can be assured it will be done. If you ask a Brazilian...who knows what will happen? They aren't serious about work and are unreliable.

The comments of an older Japanese-Brazilian storeowner emphasized some of the same themes from a different perspective:

> Living in Brazil, we see lots of things we don't like. Brazilians are laid-back and never show up on time and sometimes don't even keep their appointments. I always have problems with this when I hire Brazilians at my store. Lots of them are lazy and irresponsible and are out to deceive others. In contrast, Japanese[-Brazilian] employees can be trusted--you can always expect them to be honest and efficient.

It should also be noted that some of these prevalent ethnic comparisons were more neutral in tone. For instance, the Japanese-Brazilians often characterized the Brazilians as talkative, merry, happy, and sociable (cf. T. Saito 1986, Smith 1979:58) in contrast to which they saw themselves as more restrained, shy, formal, and less emotional and outgoing in demeanor.

Of course, the Brazilian nikkeijin do not always use such negative stereotypes when interacting with individual Brazilians and obviously acknowledge that there are well-educated Brazilians who have positive qualities. However, ethnic identity is frequently experienced through such ethnic stereotypes (e.g., see Bun and Kiong 1993:157-158, Hagendoorn 1993:31, Verkuyten 1997) since it is based on perceptions about collective group differences. Frequently, the cultural distinctiveness and value of one's own ethnicity emerges by representing the ethnic other in a simplistic and demeaning manner (Hagendoorn 1993).

In general, therefore, the discourse of ethnic difference among the Japanese-Brazilians invoked negative characterizations and stereotypes of majority Brazilians, which enables them to define themselves in a more favorable manner through the use of positive ethnic stereotypes about "Japaneseness." This increases their awareness and appreciation of the cultural qualities which differentiate them from other Brazilians and identify them as ethnically "Japanese." This type of ethno-cultural differentiation is symbolized by their ethnic terminology. The Japanese-Brazilians refer to themselves exclusively as "japonês" and almost never use the more ambiguous and ethnically inclusive terms of "nipo-brasileiro" or "japonês-brasileiro" (see also Maeyama 1996:398). In contrast, non-nikkeijin Brazilians are usually called "gaijin" ("foreigners" in Japanese), a custom passed down through the generations from the issei which has now become completely habitual among most Japanese-Brazilians, including sansei who do not understand any Japanese (see also Maeyama 1984:448, 1996:313-314, Saito 1978:179).

In fact, even my informants of *mixed descent* tended to identify more strongly with the Japanese side of their ethnic identities and de-emphasized their Brazilianness. Although most mestiços are racially classified as "japonês" in Brazilian society as mentioned earlier, they do not challenge or contest this hegemonic imposition of ethnic categories because of the predominantly favorable connotations of Japaneseness. Instead of regarding these essentialist assumptions about their ethnicity as an act of symbolic violence to be resisted, most were more than willingly to comply with such external ethnic definitions.

Symbolic Ethnicity: The Construction of Cultural Distinctiveness

For most of my informants, therefore, the cultural benefits of being a Japanese minority were quite clear (cf. Ferreira and Asari 1986). Supposedly, there are few negatives to being "Japanese" in Brazil. In fact, to my initial surprise, virtually everyone from the younger generations claimed they had

never experienced any ethnic discrimination and exclusion[7] and generally reported very positive ethnic experiences. However, the cultural differentiation that makes such distinct ethnic identities possible cannot simply be asserted by ethnic decree--it must be actively developed and maintained through family socialization processes and the internal dynamics of the ethnic community.

The family environment within which the Japanese-Brazilians are raised is quite different from other Brazilian families, which creates certain enduring differences in cultural and behavioral orientation (cf. Handa 1987:720-721, J. Saito 1986:241). Despite strong influences from Brazilian society later in life (especially through education in Brazilian schools), the effects of such early family socialization remain and continue to exert a substantial influence on thinking and behavior throughout the life course (cf. Saito 1978:129-131).

Despite the continued influence of primary socialization, however, the Japanese-Brazilians are considerably assimilated and have lost many of their "Japanese" cultural differences through their substantially greater exposure to Brazilian society. Unlike earlier generations who lived predominantly in isolated Japanese colônias, a majority of the Brazilian nikkeijin are currently raised, educated, and work in close contact with other Brazilians and socialize with Brazilian friends. As a result of their higher level of social integration, a considerable amount of cultural assimilation has occurred among the current generation of nisei and sansei. Many nisei feel a significant generation gap with their Japanese parents in terms of attitudes, demeanor, and orientation toward Brazil (cf. Maeyama 1982: 37-49, Saito 1978: 125-126). Although their issei parents initially view the cultural assimilation of their children in Brazil as undesirable (cf. Saito 1976:195), they eventually come to accept it as an inevitable consequence. One issei mother in Porto Alegre spoke about her experiences in this regard:

> At first, we see our children becoming more and more Brazilianized and try to prevent it. We try to make them speak Japanese at home and insist that they not to lose their Japanese ways of thinking. Then we find that it is useless and begin to see the loss of Japanese culture as inevitable. Eventually, we realize that it's probably better this way.
>
> Therefore, except for a minority who are still from the rural colônias, most younger Japanese-Brazilians no longer maintain Japanese traditions or customs and do not speak proficient Japanese, communicating in Portuguese even at home (see also Saito 1976:196-7). In general, it can be said with confidence that they are more culturally Brazilian than Japanese.

Therefore, because of their cultural assimilation, many Japanese-Brazilians have lost the cultural distinctiveness necessary to maintain a separate "Japanese" ethnic identity. However, because of the prestige associated with "Japaneseness" in Brazilian society, they construct a sense of "Japanese" cultural difference through symbolic ethnicity--the recreation of ethnic traditions and symbols such as festivals, rituals, food, music, and dress (see Gans 1979, 1994). For positive minorities, a complete loss of ethnic identity and minority status is equivalent to a decline in social status and a loss of cultural virtue. In this manner, tradition (including ethnic tradition) becomes an object of nostalgic longing to be regained in a reconstituted form precisely when it is in danger of vanishing (Ivy 1995).

The construction of symbolic cultural differences occurs within the Japanese-Brazilian ethnic community. Although the Japanese-Brazilians are now dispersed in the cities, their ethnic community remains socially cohesive and consists of very active associations and clubs, which run a multitude of ethnic activities and events, ranging from festivals, dinners, and performances featuring Japanese karaoke,

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[7] Even in the 1970s, Saito (1976:197) observed that the Japanese-Brazilians no longer encountered any resistance or barriers to social mobility in the cities. His informants (even older issei) felt they were not subject to ethnic prejudice (1976:192). However, Smith (1979:58) suspects that latent ethnic prejudice still existed during this period but was not overtly expressed in the form of discrimination.

theater, and dance to various sporting events and Miss Nikkei beauty pageants (see also Cardoso 1973). Instruction in the Japanese language or culture is also available either through Japanese schools or more informal classes. In larger and better established nikkeijin communities (especially in the city of São Paulo and certain cities in Paraná state), there are half-day Japanese schools, many Japanese restaurants and food stores, and large ethnic festivals. However, even in cities with very small populations of nikkeijin, well-integrated social networks of Japanese-Brazilians exist along with active Japanese associations and clubs.

A good number of the Brazilian nikkeijin still actively participate in these ethnic associations,[8] which provide them with constant opportunities to participate in symbolic ethnic activities that are understood to represent a distinctive "Japanese" culture (see also Ferreira and Asari 1986:217-218, Saito 1976:195). These include learning the Japanese language at community schools, cooking, eating, and selling Japanese food, conducting Japanese festivals and wearing traditional Japanese dress, and performing Japanese plays, songs, traditional dances, and music. When such symbolic ethnic activities and performances are directed toward people outside the ethnic community, they become opportunities for them to publicly demonstrate and affirm their Japanese cultural differences in front of majority Brazilians, some of whom express an active interest in such displays of "Japanese culture." In addition to such formal activities, there are many informal social gatherings among nikkeijin families and friends for dinners and parties which provide opportunities to cook Japanese food, speak Japanese (when possible), and sing Japanese songs (Japanese karaoke is the favorite activity at these gatherings). In this manner, because of the absence of sufficient cultural differences in their everyday behavior or language necessary to maintain an ethnic minority identity, the Japanese-Brazilians find special occasions in which to symbolically reenact and reconstruct their distinctive cultural heritage and traditions. These "Japanese" activities and behaviors then become distinctive ethnic "emblems of contrast" and "boundary markers" (Barth 1969) which differentiate the Japanese-Brazilians from non-nikkeijin Brazilians, allowing them to symbolically reaffirm their unique "Japanese" cultural qualities by active participation in an exclusive ethnic community.

Ethnicity becomes "symbolic" precisely when a well-integrated and culturally assimilated positive minority finds it beneficial to continue asserting their ethnic distinctiveness instead of becoming subsumed in the majority. Therefore, the symbolic invention of Japanese tradition by the Japanese-Brazilians helps them preserve the social integrity of their minority group (see Hobsbawm 1983:9). Even if the cultural characteristics which initially defined an ethnic group continue to weaken through assimilation, a strong ethnic identity can persist among its members on a subjective level (see Yinger 1981:258-59).

The symbolic maintenance of a separate identity by an ethnic community frequently involves the exclusion of other ethnic groups which threaten to "dilute" its cultural distinctiveness. In the case of the Japanese-Brazilians, this involves the marginalization of the majority. In contrast to their open social acceptance in Brazilian society, the Japanese-Brazilians did not admit "gaijin" (i.e., Brazilian "foreigners") into their ethnic associations until relatively recently (cf. Smith 1979:67). In addition, a certain amount of ethnic self-segregation among the nikkeijin in their personal relationships continues to persist. Some of them (including sansei) associate and socialize predominantly, if not exclusively, with their ethnic fellows in closed social groups and sometimes do not have very active social relationships with mainstream Brazilians (Saito 1978:151-2).[9] Even those who relate more openly with Brazilians

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[8] Survey research shows that 35 percent to over half of the Japanese-Brazilians are active participants (Centro de Estudos 1992, Ferreira and Asari 1986:217-218, Reichl 1995:45).

[9] This strong tendency to socially cluster with ethnic peers is also documented in research surveys (J. Saito 1986:245), although the Centro de Estudos study (1992:278) indicates greater interaction between the Japanese-Brazilians and mainstream Brazilians..

outside the Japanese community claim that they are more comfortable and get along better with their fellow japonês because of cultural similarities. Although attitudes toward intermarriage have become considerably more tolerant in recent decades (see Butsugan 1980, Saito 1978:182-184, Smith 1979:65-6, Willems and Baldus 1942:532-533) and intermarriage is now quite frequent, it is still notably lower than among Japanese-Americans. A number of nikkeijin families (including those in which the parents are nisei) still strongly encourage their children to marry another "japonês" instead of a "gaijin" (cf. Reichl 1995:45). As a result of such ethnic exclusiveness, nikkeijin communities and groups have a reputation among Brazilians for being *fechado* (closed) and unreceptive. In fact, most Japanese-Brazilians feel that they practice much more discrimination toward mainstream Brazilians than vice versa. This situation in which there is more exclusionary discrimination from the minority than the majority may be a characteristic of positive minority groups in general.

In this manner, a strong ethnic consciousness of their "Japaneseness" is developed through differential family socialization and then enhanced through the communal performance of symbolic ethnicity and the exclusion of ethnic "gaijin." Since many of the Japanese-Brazilians believe that the positive "Japanese" cultural qualities they have acquired from their parents and grandparents have been maintained within their ethnic communities, this sense of generational continuity creates feelings of transnational ethnic affinity with the Japanese of Japan. Indeed, a number of Japanese-Brazilians feel they are cultural similar to the Japanese (cf. Ferreira and Asari 1986:218).

Positive Minorities but Uncertain Futures

Despite the potential inclusiveness of a dominant Brazilian ethnicity, few Japanese-Brazilians have taken advantage of this ethnically tolerant social environment. Instead of fully adopting a Brazilian national consciousness, they have asserted, if not insisted on their Japanese ethnic distinctiveness. Their ethnicity is based on an awareness of racial, social, and cultural contrasts that identify them as a positive "Japanese" minority group.

Being Japanese in Brazil has many advantages since it is associated not only with high socioeconomic status, but also involves a positive contrast between First World (Japan) and Third World (Brazil) and between Japanese and Brazilian culture. In this manner, the maintenance of a "Japanese" ethnic identity becomes a way of differentiating themselves from the negative aspects of Brazilianness while affiliating themselves with the contrasting positive aspects of Japaneseness. For many Japanese-Brazilians, their ethnic minority status is a source of much pride and self-esteem[10] and for some, it even leads to a sense of superiority over what is considered Brazilian. The result is a transnational ethnic identification with Japan which continues to take precedence over their identities as Brazilian nationals. Indeed, many of them are reluctant to fully adopt a majority Brazilian identity. Even as some of them unwittingly become assimilated, they continue to emphasize their remaining cultural differences (even if they are only symbolic) in an attempt to hold on to the last vestiges of a respected minority status. In this sense, the persisting minority status of the Japanese-Brazilians is not so much imposed upon them by ethnic exclusion from mainstream Brazilians as Vieira (1973) argues but is voluntarily maintained through ethnic self-assertion to a considerable extent (cf. Reichl 1995). The construction of a distinctive ethnic identity among the Japanese-Brazilians is based more on *their* ethnic exclusion of majority Brazilians than their marginalization in Brazilian society.

Nonetheless, the development of identity is always embedded within dominant contexts of power and inequality (cf. Comaroff 1987, Kondo 1990). Ethnic and migrant identities are constructed as

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[10] Studies have shown very high levels of self-confidence and esteem among the Japanese-Brazilians (J. Saito 1986:249-250).

individuals actively contest, appropriate, and subvert the hegemonic cultural meanings and categories which are imposed on them (e.g.,. Basch et. al. 1994, Charles 1992, Hall 1990, Ong 1996) . However, as the Japanese-Brazilian case demonstrates, the negotiation of identity does not always involve such struggles since externally imposed identities may be consonant with the individual's subjective experiences. Instead of resistance and subversion, the assertion of an ethnic self-consciousness among the Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil involves acquiescence, if not active promotion of their ethnicity as hegemonically constituted. Perhaps most of them have been so successfully co-opted by the system that an assertion of an independent self-consciousness has no longer become possible. Yet, as a positive minority, there may be no need to challenge dominant ethnic perceptions of their "Japaneseness" when it is so favorably construed. In fact, discrepant inner voices emphasizing one's Brazilianness may be actively suppressed in favor of hegemonic understandings of their Japanese ethnicity.

Regardless of the external and internal dialectics of identity, because the status of a minority group is ultimately negotiated within power inequalities, it is subject to unpredictable shifts in dominant attitudes and perceptions, leaving minority individuals vulnerable to historical vicissitudes. This is true even for the socioeconomically secure and well-regarded Japanese-Brazilians, whose positive minority status has been dependent on the relatively recent change in Japan's global position and therefore remains fundamentally insecure. As noted earlier, a few of the older nikkeijin still remember the past experiences of prejudice and discrimination against the Japanese-Brazilians caused by Japan's wartime status as an imperialist menace and are less enthusiastic than the younger generations about their dramatic postwar rise to positive minority status. Perhaps, they are aware that a negative turn of historical events in the future could just as quickly erode the ethnic gains they have recently made, possibly returning them to their former, *negative* minority status. In fact, such lingering ethnic unease is occasionally shared by younger Japanese-Brazilians as well. Mario, a prominent nisei businessman in São Paulo spoke about such feelings as follows:

The status of the Japanese-Brazilians is closely linked to Japan, although most of us have had nothing to do with the country. How Japan is perceived directly influences how we are perceived here in Brazil. I am bothered by this. If Japan does something bad, or its status in the world declines, it will have a negative effect on us in Brazil as well. I think the Japanese-Brazilians should be judged independently on their own merits and not simply in reference to Japan. This vulnerability of immigrant minorities to constantly changing and unpredictable global conditions is undoubtedly one of the characteristics of ethnicity in the modern world.[11]

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[11] This is illustrated by what has happened in recent years to the status of ethnic Serbs who reside outside of the former Yugoslavia because of the atrocities committed by the Serbian regime. According to one personal account, although the Serbs were once welcomed throughout Europe as heroes of World War II, they are now seen as Europe's pariahs and ambassadors of intolerance, ethnic cleansing, and genocide (*Newsweek*, October 19, 1998, p.16).

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