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Reweaving the Enemy Language into *Nikkei* Canadian and Brazilian Histories

Naoko Kato, St. Mark's College, naozra@gmail.com

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Abstract

This working paper focuses on the deliberate destruction of Japanese-language spaces that has led to the silencing of *Nikkei* history and to profound cultural and linguistic loss. While material loss has been widely documented, very little attention has been given to the loss of Japanese language and culture, and the Japanese-language records and histories that disappeared along with it. My aim is to recover the undocumented loss of the pre-war Japanese-language reading and writing in Canada and Brazil.

In Canada, *The New Canadian* played a crucial role due to its introduction of a Japanese-language column. It acted as an information source - a way for Japanese Canadians to correspond with each other and let each other know people's whereabouts. This included information about Japan's current status (e.g., for those who planned to repatriate), as correspondence with civilians in Japan was limited. In addition, it played a role as a literary production outlet, for instance, through *haiku* clubs, which was important during a time of oppression. In addition, it used moral suasion, guiding the community's behaviours to conform to certain moral values, as did many pre-war Japanese language newspapers.

In Brazil's case on the other hand, all Japanese-language newspapers were completely banned during the war. This has resulted in limiting the ability to document wartime *Nikkei* history from the *Nikkei* community's perspective, as Japanese-language speakers had no venue. The only remnants of 1940s Japanese-Brazilian written culture are in the private realm - diaries, oral histories, and memoirs. Immediately after the war, in 1946, educator and editor Kishimoto attempted to tell the story of *Nikkei* suppression and persecution during WWII based on his recollection, but his book was banned in 1947, and only published in Portuguese in 2022.

A content analysis of *The New Canadian's* Japanese-language section will allow me to tell war-time experiences of *Issei* which will add to the currently known stories of the *Nisei* through *The New Canadian's* English-language pages. By contrasting with *The New Canadian's* Japanese-language pages' crucial role, I hope to highlight how significant it was for *Nikkei* Brazilians to be deprived of any Japanese-language newspapers during the war. I will then analyze the content of the censored book in Brazil as a way to recover wartime memories that have been suppressed.

Introduction

The loss of pre-war and wartime Japanese-language literary spaces in Canada has been neglected. The richness of pre-war Japanese-language activities in Japanese Canadian communities has been acknowledged and researched.¹ However, with the onset of World War II, there is a sudden rupture. The story of Japanese-language culture is lost, and our understanding of the wartime and postwar rely upon English-language archival material and non-*Issei* Japanese Canadian narratives.² Scholars have noted that the internment process played a role in empowering *Nisei* to take on a leadership role, due to the political climate that urged English-language acquisition and assimilation.³ This shift has not been sufficiently questioned and analyzed, however, but instead has been largely accepted as a natural transition that occurs with the shift in generations from the Japanese-speaking *Issei* to the English-speaking *Nisei*.

¹ Scholars based in Japan who have utilized Japanese-language sources, such as Shinpo Mitsuru and Tamura Norio have written extensively on this topic, particularly on pre-war Japanese-language newspapers.

² Government records in English, such as by the Custodian of Enemy Properties, proliferate on Japanese Canadians due to the need to manage their incarceration. Recent efforts to document the incarceration of Japanese Canadians, such as the Landscapes of Injustices project, have unearthed the understudied process, but have primarily relied on English-language sources.

³ An example is *Nisei* Canadian writer Muriel Kitagawa's work, *This is My Own: Letters to Wes and Other Writings on Japanese Canadians* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985) where the articles she wrote in English for *The New Canadian* are introduced.

The deliberate displacement and dispersal of the Japanese Canadian communities across Canada and the selling of their properties resulted in an abundance of English-language archival records that were produced to administer the displacement and dispossessions. On the other hand, these acts deprived community members of the ability to preserve and archive Japanese-language archival records. Many British Columbia residents burned all of the Japanese-language material they possessed for fear of spying accusations during their forced removal.⁴ Moreover, with Canada's entry into the Pacific War, Japanese-language schools were closed, newspapers and magazine publications banned, and correspondences censored. There were no Japanese-language literary magazines published during the war, nor were there Japanese-language libraries in the internment sites. Hence, as vibrant as was the *Issei* Japanese-language literary culture prior to the outbreak of the war, the Second World War marked a severe rupture and was overtaken by English-language literary production by *Nisei* writers as Japanese-language output was effectively shut down.

In Brazil, during the “empty years (1941-1945)” (referring to the years where Japanese language was forbidden and history erased),⁵ children would still sometimes continue to write diaries in Japanese, and would have somebody in the family correct it, as part of maintaining Japanese language education within the private realm.⁶ Japanese educational institutions were shuttered, much of their records burned, hidden, or lost. There are no remaining records of the Taishō Shōgakkō for instance, which was the oldest Japanese school, founded around 1915. No annual reports, memory books, financial records, report cards, teachers' diaries, attendance, or

⁴ Kanada Iju Hyakunenshi Inkaï, *Kanada iju hyakunenshi*, Wakayama-ken Mihama-chō Mio-ku: Mihama-chō Kanada Ijū 100-shūnen Kinen Jigyō Jikkō Inkaï, 1989, 271.

⁵ *Imin shijunenshi* (40 Years of Immigration) and the *Burajiru nihon imin 80-nenshi* (80 Years of Japanese in Brazil) refer to the war-time years as “empty years.”

⁶ Sachio Negawa, “Senzen senchūki burajiru ni okeru nikkei imin shitei kyōiku no shiteki kenkyū.” (PhD diss., Sogokenkyu daigakuin, 2013), 81.

student records exist.⁷ Hence, historians need to dig deeper into the archives to find material in private collections, such as diaries, notes, letters, *haiku*, and hand-written newsletters to gain some understanding of the pre-war and wartime Japanese-language literary spaces that existed.

In the U.S., War Relocation Authorities (WRA) allowed Japanese-language literary production because they were more fearful of the frustrations and tensions that were rising in the camps, particularly among *Issei*. Reports from WRA and the Red Cross suggested that the lack of Japanese-language newspapers encouraged the spread of rumours that were a cause for unrest.⁸ The Red Cross reported that language restrictions exacerbated prisoner isolation and emotional distress. The loss of access to Japanese language books led to a sense of despair and hopelessness, as some *Issei*, lost the ability to read the only language they were capable of understanding. The loss of an outlet that provided solace, comfort, and relaxation was extremely painful, as distractions were much needed in the face of hardship.⁹ In Canada's case, *The New Canadian* provided a small outlet, but in Brazil's case there were none available.

Canada

As soon as the war started, the three Japanese-language newspapers were banned, and 51 Japanese-language schools were closed. In May 1942, the Japanese Embassy closed; it remained closed until May 1952. Long-distance phone calls were forbidden, and local phone calls were

7

Ibid., 12.

⁸ Takeya Mizuno, *Yūshi tessennai no shiminteki jiyū: Nikkeijin senji shūgōsho to genron, hōdō tōsei* (Tōkyō: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppanyoku, 2019), 158.

⁹ Ibid., 175.

limited to English.¹⁰ The British Columbia Security Commission banned the use of the Japanese language by pupils or teachers on school facilities.¹¹ Although all Japanese-language newspapers were banned, the *Issei* continued to be informed through *The New Canadian*, which created a Japanese-language column in addition to the English section. This also provided space for *Issei* to express themselves creatively and to inform others of their whereabouts or wellbeing.

Throughout the 1940s, the newspaper published important notices, regulations, and data in Japanese and English so that both the first and second generation could understand unfolding events.¹² *The New Canadian* acted as an information hub, where *Nikkei* across Canada could find out their friends', relatives', and loved ones' whereabouts and well-being. For example, there was a column on "people's whereabouts" under which announcements such as engagement, marriage, and relocation fell. An interesting item under this category was "letters," which announced letters addressed to individuals which were stored at the office of *The New Canadian*.¹³ There was also a section which updated readers on circumstances surrounding a loved one's death. This section went beyond obituaries to include details about medical treatment prior to death, in addition to publishing memorials and thanks from the families of the deceased, expressing gratitude to visitors and well-wishers.¹⁴

An *Issei*, Takaichi Umezuki joined *The New Canadian* staff as the Japanese-language section editor. From 1924 to 1941, Umezuki had been the chief editor of *The Daily People* (*Nikkan Minshū*), a Japanese-language labour activism newspaper for the Camp and Mill

¹⁰ Mitsuru Shinpo, *Kanada no nihongo shinbun: Minzoku ido no shakaishi*, Tōkyō: PMC Shuppan, 1991, 148.

¹¹ Frank Moritsugu, *Teaching in Canadian Exile*, Toronto: Ghost-Town Teachers Historical Society, 2001, 103.

¹² *The New Canadian*, April 21, 1942. Note that from April 21, 1942 to the end of June, *The New Canadian* served primarily as the noticeboard for the BC Security Commission, which seized control of the paper to disseminate government information to *Nikkei* Canadians. It was otherwise controlled by members of the community, though censored.

¹³ *The New Canadian*. September 9, 1944. These announcements would include the names of the letter receivers and their last known addresses such as on Powell Street in Vancouver.

¹⁴ *The New Canadian*. July 15, 1944.

Workers Union (known initially as the Canada Japanese Labour Union). Umezuki's *Issei* networks from *The Daily People* carried through to *The New Canadian*. Tanetsugu Sada, Tokuhei Masuda, and Issaku Uchida, who were relocated to Alberta, Yasutaro Yamaga in interior BC, and Shikanosuke Utsunomiya in Ontario were frequent contributors to *The New Canadian*.¹⁵ The Japanese section had separate journalists from the English section. A significant portion of *The New Canadian* relied on contributions from the readers. As Umezuki's camp and Mill Workers' network were dispersed throughout BC and beyond, they informally acted like correspondents.¹⁶

Umezuki wrote his first Japanese-language editorial on April 15, 1942, intending to alleviate the *Nikkei* concerns pertaining to the uprooting. This was a period when younger men were being sent to road camps, separated from the women, children, and the elderly, which caused distress. There were a number of *Nikkei* (particularly the *Kika-Nisei*, who were educated in Japan) who were reluctant to relocate due to their worries about their families' health, education, and livelihood.¹⁷ *The New Canadian* updated readers on the current situation facing those who were at the road camps, including housing, treatment of women and children, and the payment the families would receive.¹⁸ In addition to the BC Security Commission's messages, Umezuki featured information on movements, negotiations with the BC government, and relocation camps from each of the *Nikkei* groups representing *Issei*, *Nisei*, and the naturalized (*Issei* Japanese Liaison Committee (BC Security Commission), the *Nisei* Japanese Canadian Citizens' Council, and the Naturalized Japanese Canadian Association).¹⁹ Articles also appear,

¹⁵ Norio Tamura, *Esunikku jānarizum: Nikkei Kanadajin, sono genron no shōri* (Tōkyō : Kashiwa Shobō, 2003, 207.

¹⁶ Norio Tamura, *Imin rodosha ha teichaku suru*, Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 2019, 182.

¹⁷ Norio Tamura, *Nihonjin imin wa kōshite "kanadjin" ni natta: "Nikkan minshū" o buki to shita Nihonjin nettowāku*, Tōkyō: Fuyō Shobō Shuppan, 2014, 275.

¹⁸ Norio Tamura, *Nihonjin imin wa kōshite "kanadjin" ni natta: "Nikkan minshū" o buki to shita Nihonjin nettowāku*, Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō Shuppan, 2014, 276.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

representing views of each of the Japanese Committees from the various internment camps such as Lemon Creek, Bayfarm, New Denver, Roseberry, Sandon, and Popoff.²⁰

From the onset to the end of World War II, the Department of National War Service's Directorate of Censorship reviewed and censored all Japanese-language materials produced by Japanese Canadians, including private letters and the columns and poems published in *The New Canadian*.²¹ The April 21, 1942 issue included a notice to strongly suggest that letters addressed to relatives and friends in road camps be written in English, in order to avoid the delay that would be caused by censorship on Japanese-language material.²² Nisei Roy Ito²³ was responsible for translating *The New Canadian* Japanese articles into English for censorship purposes.²⁴ The Vancouver Regional Censor of Publications was in charge of examining and clearing *The New Canadian* throughout the wartime period, and the Japanese-language censorship would be performed by the assistant censor. Assistant censors were students, researchers, missionaries, teachers, pastors, and government administrators who had returned from Japan.²⁵ One was a pastor who was fluent in Japanese, who had been previously stationed in Japan, and had returned to Canada before the war. He was knowledgeable on *haiku* and other forms of poetry, which allowed him to not only censor editorials and articles but to extend his work to poems that readers would submit.²⁶

²⁰ *The New Canadian*, September 25, 1943.

²¹ Norio Tamura, *Esunikku jānarizumu: Nikkei Kanadajin, sono genron no shōri*, Tōkyō: Kashiwa Shobō, 2003, 287-292.

²² *The New Canadian*, April 21, 1942.

²³ Roy Ito would later serve in the S-20 Intelligence Corps and become the author of *We Went to War: The Story of the Japanese Canadians Who Served During the First and Second World Wars* (Belleville, Ontario: Canada's Wings, 1984).

²⁴ Norio Tamura, *Esunikku jānarizumu: Nikkei Kanadajin, sono genron no shōri*, Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2003, 216.

²⁵ Norio Tamur, *Imin rodosha ha teichaku suru*, Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 2019), 172.

²⁶ Norio Tamura. *Esunikku jānarizumu : Nikkei Kanadajin, sono genron no shōri* (Tokyo : Kashiwa Shobō, 2003, 291.

The New Canadian often carried articles in Japanese that promoted the use of English instead of Japanese. An example is an editorial from June 19, 1943 entitled, “the negative effects of using Japanese unnecessarily.”²⁷ The article begins with quotes from a female missionary who was visiting Kaslo from Alberta, who points out that the deliberate use of the Japanese language is leading to negative sentiments against resident Japanese Canadians among the Albertan farmers.²⁸ One example given is of a bus full of Japanese traveling from Turin to Lethbridge, openly speaking Japanese, which purportedly offended others, particularly Caucasians. The editorial criticizes the Japanese Canadians’ lack of awareness, without thought to the effect that large numbers of Japanese talking in the enemy language in a small Albertan town would have. The editorial urges the *Nisei* to always and solely use English for their own good: They have an obligation to speak English, which they should regard as a privilege they are given. Unlike their parents who may not have the opportunities or capabilities of acquiring English, *Nisei* have no excuse. Here, the editorial’s reference targets the bilingual *Nisei*, presumably the *Kika-Nisei* who were born in Canada but educated in Japan before returning to Canada. The message to condemn the use of Japanese needed to be conveyed in Japanese, in order to reach not only the *Issei* native Japanese-language speakers, but the *Kika-Nisei*, in the hopes that they would practice self-restraint. These *Kika-Nisei* had a choice in the language they spoke and read and were the ones reading the Japanese section of *The New Canadian*, and the ones choosing to speak Japanese in public whom the editorial attempted to reach.

Another article dated December 18, 1943, claims that *Nikkei* students’ inability to fully function in English was preventing them from making progress in their general education. Many

²⁷ *The New Canadian*, June 19, 1943.

²⁸ *The New Canadian*, June 19, 1943.

of the students' grades were lowered due to their poor English.²⁹ A similar article dated June 3, 1944 specifically talks about the improvement seen at Kaslo High School's student population with assistance from the parents. In contrast, the Kootenay Lake School students, the author claims, spoke in Japanese on the playground, so much so that visitors thought the school taught Japanese.³⁰

Principal Sato of the Vancouver Japanese Language School, who was forcibly uprooted to Lacombe Alberta, used *The New Canadian* to publish a series entitled "letters" addressed to his former students who had been dispersed across the country. In his first letter, dated February 12, 1944, Sato tells his readers to imagine listening to him on the second floor of the Japanese language school on Alexander Street, or visiting him at his home on Pandora Street in Vancouver.³¹ He mentions that some students contacted *The New Canadian* in order to find his mailing address, reporting that eighty percent of former students who write to him are *Nisei* and range from those who graduated 25 years ago to recent graduates. Sato sees the letters as records of his students' experiences and feels that it is a pity they are only read by him and his wife. This is why Sato utilized *The New Canadian* as a platform where his students could continue to share their experiences in Japanese. For instance, one of his students who worked at an internment camp in the BC interior wrote a piece called "Observations from the Interior," noting a pervasive sense of hopelessness. In contrast, the students on the East Coast describe their determination to study and work, with a sense of enthusiasm for the future.³²

²⁹ *The New Canadian*, December 18, 1943.

³⁰ *The New Canadian*, June 03, 1944.

³¹ *The New Canadian*, February 12, 1944.

³² *The New Canadian*, February 12, 1944.

From July 1942, the Japanese column began including *tanka* and *haiku*.³³ Sandon Internment Camp, located in Slocan Valley in the West Kootenays had an active *haiku* group which regularly contributed to the newspaper from the first months of 1943.³⁴ The group would have a “season word” assigned each time to create their poems. These words were drawn from the landscapes of British Columbia, differing from words that would be used in Japan. For example, “robin” was the season word in February, referring to the bird prevalent across North America. Internees at the Rosebery Internment Camp, also in Slocan Valley, created a *haiku* group in May 1943, starting with fewer than ten members. By June 1944, *haiku* clubs across Canada including Greenwood and Salmon Arm BC, Manitoba, Southern Ontario, and Toronto were submitting poetry to the newspaper.³⁵

The prominence of *haiku* and *tanka* was explained by Umezuki’s February 24, 1945 article on the topic of literature. He quotes one of the readers who wrote a letter to the editor, critical of *The New Canadian* for featuring numerous literary works. The writer suggests that, “general readers are currently in desperate frenzy, searching for every word or phrase they can find in the newspaper that would help deepen their understanding of what they ought to do in order to move towards a future path.”³⁶ Although Umezuki acknowledges the letter-writer’s concern, he speaks of the power that literature has to offer comfort by way of feelings and sense, in contrast to logic and wisdom.³⁷ He points out that people are craving for ways to feel touched, inspired, and be moved, as they have lost these senses that need to be revived. *The New Canadian* dedicates a relatively large portion of its space to literature, because the strength to

³³ Mitsuru Shinpo, *Kanada Nihonjin imin monogatari*, Tokyo: Tsukiji Shokan, 1986, 212.

³⁴ *The New Canadian*, February 13, 1943.

³⁵ *The New Canadian*, June 10, 1944.

³⁶ *The New Canadian*, February 24, 1945.

³⁷ *The New Canadian*, February 24, 1945.

take action derives from these emotions. *Haiku* for instance, allows the poet to objectify life circumstances by expressing them in words, putting all the emotions into artistic form.

One of the major issues repeatedly featured in the Japanese-language *New Canadian* was the problem of education, a major concern for *Issei* parents. In the May 13, 1944 issue, both the Japanese and English articles refer to the same parent-teacher meeting, held in Roseberry with representatives from all the internment camps, but are written from different perspectives. In the English-language *New Canadian*, there is an article entitled, “*Nisei* Teachers Will Go To School Again This Year,” condemning the mounting criticism directed at teachers by discontented parents, with an emphasis on the workload and efforts made by the teachers, represented by Hide Hyodo, a *Nisei* supervisor for schools.³⁸ A subsection of the English-article reads, “stop criticism,” urging parents to cooperate with the teachers through the PTA. By contrast, the Japanese-language version is entitled “P.T.A. Meeting and Adult Education (parental training),” written from the parents’ perspective, emphasizing the important role of the PTA and the promising future of parental training to promote student learning and moral education.³⁹ It is written by Umezuki, who attended the PTA meeting in Roseberry as a representative from Kaslo, making additional stops at Popoff and New Denver to visit friends. Umezuki quotes his friends, who recount that everything they are doing (including relocation) is for their children’s future. Umezuki reminds the readers of the role that *Issei* parents can play in their *Nisei* children’s education, through supporting the activities of the P.T.A. When we put the English and Japanese articles together, we can see that *The New Canadian* successfully reaches the *Nisei* through their English edition and *Issei* through their Japanese edition, in order to achieve the goal of better teacher (*Nisei*) - parent (*Issei*) relations.

³⁸ *The New Canadian*, May 13, 1944.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

The New Canadian, the sole Japanese-language newspaper that was allowed to continue throughout the war, served its community in innumerable ways beyond its original intent, which was to serve the needs of the BC Security Commission. The paper, above all, served as a hub for communication and information exchange for the Japanese-speaking residents, alleviating the sense of isolation, fear, and uncertainty. Not only did the editor, Umezuki, utilize his own *issei* networks to disseminate information and help create a sense of community among the dispersed *Nikkei*, but its readers who contributed poems and essays were able to use the paper as an outlet to share their experiences in their native language.

Brazil

In Brazil, suppression of Japanese immigrant communities and the Japanese language began prior to the Pacific War. In 1934, quotas drastically reduced the number of immigrants, restricting the number of immigrants from each country to two percent of the total numbers settled between 1884 and 1933. This was remarkably similar to the US Immigration Act of 1924, which set a similar two percent quota based on the 1890 census. In particular, efforts to reduce immigration were directed at the Japanese who came to Brazil in great numbers in the early 1930s,⁴⁰ as a result of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 which effectively closed off immigration to the United States. By 1940, there were approximately 200,000 to 250,000 Japanese immigrants,⁴¹ one million German immigrants⁴² and 1.5 million Italian immigrants.⁴³

⁴⁰ Monica Raisa Schpun, "The Japanese Community of Sao Paulo, Liberdade, and Brazilian State Persecution (1937-45), *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 5, No. 1 (Spring 2019), 212. 141,732 Japanese came to Brazil between 1924 and 1935.

⁴¹ Edward Mak, *Acquired Alterity: Migration, Identity, and Literary Nationalism*, Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2022, 35.

⁴² Thomas Schoonover, *Hitler's Man in Havana: Heinz Luning and Nazi Espionage in Latin America*, Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008, 35.

⁴³ Negawa, "Senzen senchūki burajiru ni okeru nikkei imin shitei kyōiku no shiteki kenkyū,, 18. The figure of 1.5 million is from 1947.

President Vargas' authoritarian regime (1937-1945) promoted "Brazilianization," by imposing restrictions on language, immigration, and education in order to assimilate non-Brazilian communities.⁴⁴ The Japanese-Brazilians' *colonias* that physically, culturally, and linguistically separated themselves from the larger Brazilians society were among its key targets, as they functioned to maintain a distinct *Nikkei* identity, thwarting the aim of creating a homogeneous Brazilian society.⁴⁵ Hence, through cultural institutions and policies, *Nikkei* Brazilians were stripped of their cultural identity, and they also lost their cultural repositories that kept records of their language and traditions, affecting how they would collectively remember their past.⁴⁶

In 1938, new restrictions carried implications for the use of the Japanese language both in the public and private spheres. Speaking in foreign languages, distributing material in foreign languages, and "excessive active cultivation" of foreign languages, traditions, and habits were outlawed.⁴⁷ Affected Japanese-language material would include any printed material, such as books, letters, diaries, newspapers, magazines, or notes. What the Brazilian authorities meant by "excessive active cultivation" was left to the discretion of law enforcement officers. These measures heightened fear among *Nikkei*, as even reading or possessing Japanese books could potentially be grounds for arrest.

These restrictions amounted to the degradation of one's humanity.⁴⁸ Japanese Brazilians and other foreign language communities were denied their own culture and lived under constant fear of arrest. These circumstances increased the sense of nostalgia and homesickness. Rhetoric promoting Japan, as well as migration to Japanese territories in South-East Asia, began to grow

⁴⁴ Zelideth Maria Rivas, "Narrating Japaneseness through World War II: The Brazilianization, Peruvianization, and US Americanization of Immigrants," *Expanding Latinidad: An Inter-American Perspective*, ed. Luz Angelica Kirschner, Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press, 2012, 110.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Doss, Tanya, "Writing German in the Time of Brasilidade (1937-1945)," PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2020, 51.

⁴⁷ The target language was not only Japanese but all foreign languages.

⁴⁸ Tomoo Handa, *Imin no seikatsu no rekishi: burajiru Nikkeijin no ayunda michi*, São Paulo: Sanpauro Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, 1970, 208.

in the 1930s, led by *Issei* journalist Kayama Rokurō of the *Seishu Shinpō* (São Paulo Reporter).⁴⁹ Many *Nikkei* turned to the hope of eventually returning to their homeland, as they faced rejection from Brazil. In 1938, in São Paulo's Pauru district, 85% expressed their willingness to return to Japan.⁵⁰

The 1938 “Brazilianization” regulations included a ban on all foreign-language instruction of children under the age of fourteen and was enacted in rural areas. In Santos and São Paulo City, which were considered non-rural, this edict would apply to children under the age of ten. In December 1938, details of the edict were released, which laid out a complete obliteration of foreign-language education in any form, including after-school, unofficial classes.⁵¹ These regulations shuttered approximately six hundred Japanese language schools in Brazil.⁵² For Brazilian journalist Fernando Morais, the inability to teach Japanese, which is connected to passing down cultural values and cultural identity, was especially damaging during this period, when Japanese were facing persecution: “None of the measures, however, wounded the Japanese soul as much as the order to close down their children's schools.”⁵³

Artist, writer, and *Issei* intellectual, Tomoo Handa (1906-1996), elaborated on this issue in his 1970 book, entitled *History of Immigrant Living*. Handa based his book upon historical research as well as on his own lived experiences as an *Issei*. Handa's publication was part of the movement to preserve and collect histories of *Nikkei* Brazilians, which resulted in the

⁴⁹ Takashi Maeyama, *Imin no Nihon kaiki undō*, Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1982, 119.

⁵⁰ “Japanese community situations before and after the outbreak of the war between Japan and the U.S” *Japanese Emigration to Brazil*, National Diet Library Japan, https://www.ndl.go.jp/brasil/e/s5/s5_2.html accessed July 30, 2023.

⁵¹ Takashi Maeyama. *Imin no Nihon kaiki undō*, 90.

⁵² Sachio Negawa and Inoue Shoichi eds., *Ekkyō to rendō no Nikkei imin kyōikushi: fukusū bunka taiken no shiza*, Kyoto: Minerva Shobo, 2016.

⁵³ Fernando Morais, *Dirty Hearts: The History of Shindo Renmei*, trans. Seth Jacobowitz, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2021, 70.

establishment of the Historical Museum of Japanese Immigration in Brazil in 1978.⁵⁴ Handa likens the combination of Brazilianization and the ban on foreign-language teaching to a process drawing *Nikkei* Brazilians towards “ethnic suicide.”⁵⁵ Here, Handa uses the term “ethnic suicide” to convey the magnitude of the psychological shock experienced by the *Nikkei* Brazilians. The fact that they had lost the opportunity to teach their children Japanese led their children to “become like foreigners,” disconnected from their unassimilated *Issei* parents.⁵⁶ This also closed off many of the *Issei*’s eventual dream of returning to Japan with their children after the war.⁵⁷

As formal Japanese language instruction was forbidden from 1938, attempts were made to continue teaching; switching to oral instruction without using textbooks.⁵⁸ From 1939, some Japanese language teaching continued secretly under the disguise of “boarding schools.”⁵⁹ The Japanese Education Committee suggested the use of ‘patrol teachers,’ whereby teachers would teach Japanese to a group of four to five children. In Bastos, the Education Committee decided to adopt this approach for students fourteen and under, and to introduce spiritual training via martial arts and sports for youth above fourteen years old.⁶⁰ As the maximum number of students was set at five, patrol teachers visited over ten locations to cover their students. Teachers would resort to using wooden sheds or storage rooms as classrooms and would take turns on lookout. They hid textbooks, and pretended to be cultivating nearby fields, and the children would carry on by playing in the sheds.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Felipe Motta, *Imin ga imin o kangaeru: Handa Tomoo to nikkei burajiru shakai no rekishi jojutsu*. Ōsaka: Ōsaka Daigaku Shuppankai, 2022, 107.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵⁸ Sachio Negawa, “Senzen senchūki burajiru ni okeru nikkei imin shitei kyōiku no shiteki kenkyū,” 129.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁰ Isao Terakata ed. *Paenchosen kyoikushi*, Paenchosen kyoikushi kankōiinkai, 1941, 172.

⁶¹ Tomoo Handa, *Imin no seikatsu no rekishi: burajiru Nikkeijin no ayunda michi*, São Paulo: Sanpauro Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, 1970, 159.

The regulations in Brazil killed a thriving Japanese-language print culture.⁶² In 1938, the Japanese-language newspaper *Nippaku Shinbun* circulated 19,500 copies, and *Brazil Jihō* published 17,000 copies.⁶³ In 1939, restrictions began to be applied to all foreign newspapers and magazines, which were now obliged to add Portuguese sections. Even so, Japanese Brazilians soon began to experience hostility toward the continued circulation of their newspapers. “Somebody on the street snatched away my Japanese-language newspaper while I was reading on my walk,” reported one Japanese Brazilian in March 1940.⁶⁴

A new regulation soon banned all foreign-language newspapers, effective August 31, 1941. According to 1939 a survey of 15,000 Japanese Brazilian families who had on average resided in the country for eleven years, ninety percent subscribed to Japanese-language newspapers. The number of subscribers to Portuguese-language newspapers was negligible (0.005%, approximately one hundred copies).⁶⁵ Pre-war newspapers featured creative works such as *haiku*, *tanka*, travelogues, essays, as well as news from Japan. The banning of Japanese-language newspapers effectively cut off means of communication, literary expression, and information retrieval. The only source of information in Japanese were short-wave radios that some still managed to hide (as they were officially banned).

In January 1942, Brazil entered the war against the Axis powers.⁶⁶ Brazil severed diplomatic ties with Japan, closing its Embassy down, and correspondence with Japan was banned. The Superintendent for Political Social Security in São Paulo issued twelve orders to

⁶² Atsuhiko Wada, *An Inquiry into the History of Reading* (Tokyo: Bungaku Tsushi, 2020), 135.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Handa, *Imin no seikatsu no rekishi: burajiru Nikkeijin no ayunda michi*, 175.

⁶⁵ Imin 80nen Sai-saiten-iinkai, *Burajiru nihon imin hachijūnenshi*, São Paulo, 1991, 398.

⁶⁶ Jeff H. Lesser, “Continuity and Change within an Immigrant Community: The Jews of São Paulo, 1924-1945,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 25 No. 2, 1998, 51. Although anti-foreign laws targeted communities of the Axis power, they could easily be applied to other groups such foreign-born and refugee Jews.

regulate activities of subjects of Japan, Italy, and Germany.⁶⁷ Speaking in Japanese was forbidden in public, or where there were groups of Japanese,⁶⁸ and could lead to police arrests.⁶⁹ For many, it was both natural and a matter of good etiquette to greet one another and to converse in Japanese, but even uttering greetings such as “see you later” outside a restaurant, or “oh, it’s you” upon meeting a friend who came out of a movie theatre resulted in arrests.⁷⁰ This was particularly damaging to the Japanese, as the vast majority of *Nikkei* spoke Japanese at home,⁷¹ in comparison to Italians and Germans, who had settled in Brazil earlier and spoke more Portuguese at home.⁷²

Nikkei Brazilians navigated their way through these severe restrictions in various manners. Giving religious homilies in Japanese was forbidden, as was gathering in private homes for the purpose of celebrations,⁷³ though some resorted to illegally holding religious meetings for family members within their private homes.⁷⁴ Teaching Japanese went against the ban on disseminating anything written in Japanese, as did using Japanese in groups and gathering in private homes, but many *Nikkei* still attempted to pass on the Japanese language, even as they knew the risks they were taking. One teacher disassembled his textbooks and hid each page in his trouser belt.⁷⁵ He visited different houses each time instead of teaching at a designated place,

⁶⁷ Morais, *Dirty Hearts*, 67-68.

⁶⁸ Imin 80nen Sai-saiten-iinkai. *Burajiru nihon imin hachijūnenshi*, 400.

⁶⁹ Monica Raisa Schpun, “The Japanese Community of Sao Paulo, Liberdade, and Brazilian State Persecution (1937-45),” *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 5, No. 1 (Spring 2019), 220.

⁷⁰ Sachio Negawa, *Imin ga tsukutta machi San Pauro Tōyōgai: Chikyū no hantaigawa no Nihon kindai*. Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2020, 146.

⁷¹ Mak, *Acquired Alterity*, 103. According to a 1940 Brazilian census, between 72 to 86 percent of *Nikkei* (including Brazilian-born, naturalized citizens, and Japanese nationals) spoke Japanese rather than Portuguese at home (Negawa, *Imin ga tsukutta machi San Pauro Tōyōgai*, 156). This is understandable, given that three quarters of the pre-war *Nikkei* arrived in Brazil between 1925 and 1935.

⁷² Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Recenseamento Geral do Brasil*, 19. 192,698 Japanese spoke Japanese at home, 458,054 spoke Italian, and 644,458 spoke German at home rather than Portuguese.

⁷³ Morais, *Dirty Hearts*, 68.

⁷⁴ Kōichi Kishimoto, *Nanbei no senya ni koritsushite*, Tokyo: Tōfūsha, 2002, 95.

⁷⁵ Sachio Negawa, “Senzen senchūki burajiru ni okeru nikkei imin shitei kyōiku no shiteki kenkyū,” PhD diss., Sogokenkyu daigakuin, 2013, 80.

and pretended to be on a walk, ensuring he had nothing in hand when interrogated by police. The children would hide textbooks under the floor, and would practice writing characters in the air. Informants were ubiquitous and constantly reported teachers, leading to arrests.⁷⁶ Many hid, burned, or buried books in secrecy, without documenting this process. Some oral history interviewees recall Japanese Brazilians packing books in boxes to bury them in the mountains or teachers digging holes to bury textbooks. In one instance, textbooks were placed in forty tomato boxes and moved a few kilometers to a farm, where they were hidden under empty tomato boxes in a shed.⁷⁷

Shortly after Brazil's declared war on Japan, in February 1942, the Conde district (*Nikkei colonia*) in São Paulo was ordered to evict, for security reasons, followed by another eviction order in September. In March 1942, all assets of Axis nationals, including bank savings and credits, were frozen. In July, the port city of Santos became another target for eviction. The *Nikkei* community was no longer under the protection of the Japanese government, as all diplomats returned to Japan by July 1942.⁷⁸

May 23, 1942 the São Paulo Japanese community was in shock, as all of Endo Shoten's books were confiscated by the police. It amounted to four truck-fulls' worth. The bookstores carrying Japanese-language books and magazines were in violation of the law prohibiting the circulation of foreign-language material. A crowd had gathered. Although the police urged all the *Nikkei* to go back home, people only backed up a few steps and would not move away. The day before, the same had happened to Tōyō Shobō and Toyokitsu Shoten, and the day after was

⁷⁶ Morais, *Dirty Hearts*, 71. For example, three makeshift teachers were arrested during a police raid that shut down a school. Odilon Martins Cruz, who was a teacher in the public school system, was responsible for the closure of over a hundred schools in the Alta Paulista region. One was in the city of Fazenda Jacutinga, where there were fifty-six students. Along with the three Japanese teachers, a fifteen-year-old boy was taken into custody, and two trunks full of evidence were confiscated from the building.

⁷⁷ Negawa, "Senzen senchūki burajiru ni okeru nikkei imin shitei kyōiku no shiteki kenkyū," 80.

⁷⁸ Negawa, *Imin ga tsukutta machi San Pauro Tōyōgai*, 145.

rumored to be Nanbeidō.⁷⁹ Once a week, Public Security trucks would park at the door of one of the bookstores and seize boxes of magazines and books printed in Japanese.⁸⁰

A decade of disruption had devastating consequences in Brazil, where, by the end of the war, the community was deprived of information and internally divided. Violent conflicts arose within the *Nikkei* community between “*Makegumi*” (defeatist group) made up of pre-war leaders who promoted *Nikkei* assimilation and recognition of defeat, and “*Kachigumi*” (victor group) who wished to hold onto the idea that Japan had won the war, unable to accept the defeat. An extreme faction of the victor group (Shindō-Renmei) carried out a series of terrorist attacks against the defeatist group from March 1946 to January 1947.

The *kachi-make* (victor-defeated) conflict arose due in part because of the severe lack of reliable information and means of information exchange over the course of the war. This was exacerbated by the fact that there were no official Japanese governmental channels to communicate Japan’s unconditional surrender to the *Nikkei* Brazilians. With the onset of war, the Consul General in São Paulo closed, and Japanese-language spaces stopped functioning, closing off all communication channels for *Issei* who did not possess Portuguese language fluency. Some held onto the hopes of returning to Japan, listening to the illegal Japanese short-wave radio stations. The Emperor’s surrender speech heard through short-wave radio stations was difficult to hear and comprehend, which opened room for various interpretations regarding Japan’s defeat. The vast majority of *Nikkei* Brazilians only heard the news of Japan’s surrender indirectly, through rumours running rampant in the community. Many dismissed Portuguese-language news as propaganda by the Allied powers. From October 1945, *Makegumi* leaders began collecting Japanese government messages that would demonstrate Japan’s surrender, through the Red Cross

⁷⁹ Handa, *Imin no seikatsu no rekishi*, 191.

⁸⁰ Morias. *Dirty Hearts*, 73.

in Brazil.⁸¹ The *Makegumi* intellectuals' efforts to propagate Japan's defeat to the rest of the population was met with a backlash, and contributed to the *kachi-make* conflict.

The postwar *kachi-make* conflict is still taboo, as it contributes to anti-Japanese sentiments in Brazilian society through perpetuating images of Japanese, including *Nikkei* as fanatics. Wartime injustices, such as the suppression of Japanese language and culture and the forced uprooting of *Nikkei* Brazilians, have also been left intentionally untouched, in part because it is seen in conjunction with the postwar conflict, which resulted in the arrest of the *Kachigumi* leaders. Morais' 2000 book⁸² portrays the *Kachigumi*, represented by Shindō-Renmei, as a fanatical terrorist group, based on Portuguese-language papers' reporting from the time. This prompted responses from a number of *Nikkei* Brazilians to write their own accounts that differed from Morais' version. *Nisei* journalist Jorge Okubaro, for instance, wrote a historical piece based on his memories of his father who was of Okinawan descent and a member of Shindō-Renmei.⁸³ Okubaro's story is told as family history that shows the evolution and complexity of *Nikkei* experiences, in contrast to Morais' simplistic narrative of a *Kachigumi* fanatical terrorist group. Mario Jun Okuhara produced a film, *Yami no ichinichi*, portraying the *kachi-make* conflict from the perspective of *Kachigumi* who were imprisoned at Anchieta Island Prison by the Brazilian authorities.⁸⁴ This convicted group had been silenced by the dominant narratives led by the *Makegumi*, who were seen as victims of the *kachi-make* conflict in the postwar years.

⁸¹ Koji Sasaki, *The Immigrants and their Virtues: A Historical Ethnography on Japanese-Brazilian Intellectuals / Imin to toku : nikkei Burajiru chishikijin no rekishi*, Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2020, 71.

⁸² Originally published as *Corações sujos: a história da Shindo Renmei* in Portuguese, made into a movie in 2012. Translated into English twenty years later and published in 2021 as *Dirty Hearts: The History of Shindo Renmei*.

⁸³ Jorge J. Okubaro, *O Sudito: Banzai, Massateru!* São Paulo: Editora Terceiro Nome, 2006.

⁸⁴ Mario Jun Okuhara, *Yami no Ichinichi*, 2012, Accessed July 31, 2023.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDf_egB3MG4

The sole Japanese-language book which was individually banned in Brazil epitomizes the silencing of *Nikkei* Brazilians' wartime history. The book was originally published in Japanese by Kishimoto Kōichi in 1947 and banned the following year. It was over 550 pages long, with an emphasis on the ordeals that *Nikkei* Brazilian suffered from pre-war to wartime. Kishimoto was an *Issei* Christian, an educator, and a journalist who was imprisoned during the war for teaching children in Japanese. Kishimoto was inspired to write his book when he witnessed fellow *Nikkei* being persecuted during the war, both inside and outside of prison.⁸⁵ The book was intended as a testament or a way to preserve the wartime memories of fellow *Nikkei*, as Kishimoto was acutely aware of how their histories were being suppressed and obliterated. Kishimoto likens his work documenting *Nikkei* Brazilians' lives to the biblical Exodus; as a record of a persecuted population marked by tears and bloodshed.⁸⁶

Kishimoto's book became an immediate bestseller within the Japanese community, the first run of two thousand copies selling out within ten days of its publication in 1947, along with another 3,500 copies printed in a second run from January to March 1948. The book was banned on March 3, 1948, less than six months after publication, and Kishimoto was imprisoned for a month. The *Nikkei* owners of the bookstores Taiyodō, Heiwadō, and Casa Nakaya were questioned for distributing Kishimoto's books, and all remaining copies were confiscated on 10 and 11 March, 1948.⁸⁷ Kishimoto was accused of offending Brazil, exacerbating racial conflict, and publishing a book that encouraged Japanese isolation, to the detriment of Brazilian national

⁸⁵ Felipe Motta, "Recording the War as Experienced in a Foreign Land: On Mário Botelho de Miranda and Kishimoto Kōichi," *Journal of the Japanese Overseas Migration Museum* 16 (2021), 153-170.

⁸⁶ Shohei Hosokawa, "Kaisetsu kokugo no junan, minzoku no tatakai" in *Nanbei no senya ni koritsushite*, ed. Kishimoto Koichi, Tokyo: Tōfūsha, 2002, 475.

⁸⁷ Masayuki Fukazawa, "Shusen nanajunenkinen nanbei senya ni koritsu shite hyogen no jiyu to senchu no torauma dainikai shusen chokugo no besutosera," *Nikkei Shimbun*, September 29, 2015, <https://www.nikkeishimbun.jp/2015/150929-72colonia.html>.

interests. He faced potential deportation, but won his case in 1957, after a ten-year legal battle.⁸⁸

The book was only republished in Japanese in 2002 and published in Portuguese for the first time in 2022.

Kishimoto was generally regarded as *Kachigumi*, because his writings were filled with Japanese patriotic sentiments, and this factor contributed to the continued suppression of his book.⁸⁹ One important source that Kishimoto uses to tell his story is the collection of poems called *Colonia Manyōshū*⁹⁰ written by 1,300 *Issei tanka* poets, spanning from the pre-war to the postwar period.⁹¹ Some of the topics of the poems from the war-time era include children holding Japanese textbooks in a dimly lit room, hiding readers from the police, going to evening school, thankfulness that another day had ended without Japanese patrol teachers being caught and teachers engaged in illegal acts being fearful of empty cars.⁹²

Kishimoto describes how adamant *Nikkei* were in hiding radios, despite the risk of confiscation and imprisonment. Radios are likened to the mother country's breath and the lifeline that would act as the mother country's blood vessels, pouring into *Nikkei* bodies. By knowing where Japan stood in the world, even in the midst of hardship, one could still move forward towards an ideal.⁹³ Kishimoto placed utmost importance on Japanese language education. To him, Japanese education was not purely imparting words or the language, but was connected to

⁸⁸ Masakyuki Fukazawa, "Nanbei no senya ni koritsu shite burajiru de kinsho ni sareta yuitsu no nihongo shoseki fukutsu no janarisuto kishimoto koichi sono ichi," *Discover Nikkei*, October 15, 2015
<https://discovernikkei.org/ja/journal/2015/10/15/kishimoto-koichi-1/>.

⁸⁹ On the other hand, his work also promoted permanent settlement in Brazil, rather than re-immigration to Southeast Asia or return to Japan, so Kishimoto could arguable be placed in the *Makegumi* camp. This is an example of the inadequacy of the *Kachigumi vs Makegumi* binary to capture the complexity of views actually held and expressed at the time. See Filipe Motta's *Imin ga imin o kangaeru* (2022) on his discussion of Tomoo Handa's treatment *Kachigumi* and *Makegumi*. Handa seeks to draw out the commonalities between the two groups and questions the binary treatment.

⁹⁰ Colonia manyōshū kanko iinkai, *Colonia Manyoshu*, 1981.

⁹¹ Motta, *Imin ga imin o kangaeru*, 198. The term 'manyōshū' refers to an anthology of Japanese classical poems.

⁹² Hosokawa, "Kaisetsu kokugo no junan, minzoku no tatakai, 474.

⁹³ Kishimoto, *Nanbei no senya ni koritsushite*, 56.

building the spiritual foundation of the people, based on Japanese history.⁹⁴ The Japanese language, Kishimoto therefore purported, was the earth, the sun, the water, and the air for Japanese people.

Kishimoto has a chapter in his book on a mother and daughter burying a Japanese language textbook. It begins with an eight-year-old boy, a fifteen-year-old girl, and a twelve-year-old girl discussing the frequent police raids targeting *Nikkei* households, what the police confiscate, and what item would be the most important to them.⁹⁵ The Twelve-year-old girl says that Japanese books would be the most important item.⁹⁶ The older sister elaborates, noting that other items can be bought, but with no ships from Japan arriving and the war extending indefinitely, Japanese-language books are a treasure: The children will no longer be able to study Japanese if they are confiscated. The family, according to Kishimoto, was willing to split up in order to continue the children's Japanese-language education. They ran a family business in Marilia, which the older son and father stayed home to run. However, the mother moved to São Paulo with the daughter so that she could continue her Japanese language education. When the Japanese schools in São Paulo also closed down, the mother and daughter put all their textbooks into a small oil storage tank with a wooden lid and buried them. Even this tactic failed, as the police found and confiscated the books.

Epilogue

The practice of creating thread from paper
 Paper thread weaving it into cloth
 Weaving paper with printed paper to imbed text⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Hosokawa, “Kaisetsu kokugo no junan, minzoku no tatakai,” 468.

⁹⁵ Kishimoto, *Nanbei no senya ni koritsushite*, 7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹⁷ Sachiko Sabrina Niebler, <https://www.sabrinasachiko.com/about>, Accessed July 31, 2023.

The above is Vancouver *Nikkei* artist Sachiko Niebler's rendition of the art of paper thread-making and weaving it into cloth. She wove a portrait of her grandmother, encountered the traditional Japanese practice of creating paper thread (*kami-ito*) and weaving it into cloth (*shi-fu*), and now sees this as a way to deepen her connection with her heritage. Inspired by Niebler's life story and her engagement with *kami-ito* and *shi-fu*, I saw parallels with my work as a historian, attempting to reweave the Japanese language into *Nikkei* Canadian and Brazilian histories.

Kami-ito and *shi-fu*, were practices developed in the Edo period (1600-1868). At that time, these practices were employed in order to recycle used paper, such as ledgers, that were written on Japanese *washi* paper with black ink. The process involves shredding the used paper, which would first be made into thread. The paper thread would then be woven into cloth, which would be white with black dots dispersed, reminding us of the original words and ink. The attention Niebler gives to the natural bumps that appear on the cloth and the remnants of the original material is similar to how I attempt to recover the Japanese words and language that has been erased by tracing what remains. Niebler further describes the process in the following manner:

Beyond the physical task of creating,
my practice is about showing up with humility,
and finding paths back to my centre over and over again.
It is about recording this process.

The way that thread and cloth communicate intimately in their own language
is a beautiful thing to be privy to.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Sachiko Sabrina Niebler. Accessed July 31, 2023. <https://www.sabrinasachiko.com/practice>.

Here, I am struck by what she describes as a process of recording, that it goes back to her center, over and over again. Wartime *Nikkei* histories had lost this center, and the ability to record the process. By weaving it back into cloth, there is a sense of regaining the ability to communicate, through one's own language, and so of recovering the past.

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