

Through Seas Never Sailed Before: From Japan to Brazil

A Report on Postgraduate Japanese Studies in Brazil

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The present symposium was conceived as part of the centennial celebration of Japanese immigration in Brazil. To maintain a tradition, a culture, in a place so distant from the native country required great perseverance and determination on the part of the immigrants. The transmission of this tradition to the following generations demanded enormous effort.

Institutional Japanese studies in Brazil began with the creation of the first undergraduate course in Japanese language and literature at the University of São Paulo in 1963. The first years were given to building a local critical mass and elaborating the first teaching material directed to Brazilian students. The implementation of the first postgraduate programme, in 1996, further developed academic research in Japanese studies. Up to now thirty students have obtained Master of Arts degrees in Japanese Language, Literature and Culture by the programme. A number of them work today in other Brazilian universities or private institutions.

At the symposium, three students who had completed their MA and one current student presented studies of fundamental importance, opening up themes that can open new fields of research, contributing to the academic interchange between Brazil and Japan with the study of the Japanese language, culture and literature from a Brazilian perspective.

The researches presented:

1. Gustavo Fukuyama (Master of Arts in Japanese Culture), "Manga and the Transmission of Culture: The Example of Rurouni Kenshin"
2. Mina Isotani (Master of Arts in Japanese literature), "*Narratives of America: The Confrontation with the Unknown*"
3. Valderson Cuiabano Silvério de Souza (Master of Arts in Japanese Culture), "Presence of Ikebana Ikenobo in Brazil"
4. Patrícia Tamiko Izumi (postgraduate student, Japanese Culture), "Ethnicity and Aging: A Study of Newspaper Articles in the Nippo-Brazilian Community"

The manga, very popular among the Japanese, arrived in Brazil with the first immigrants. Several of them, eager to get their children closer to reading material in Japanese, spared no efforts to buy Japanese manga, imported by specialized bookshops. In this sense, it is possible to say that manga, albeit as leisure reading, had a fundamental role in the relationship between young immigrant descendants and the learning of Japanese.

This proximity of immigrants' descendants and manga may have contributed to keep the latter as leisure reading for many years. The first academic studies of manga were carried out by non-descendants who, able to read it with a certain detachment, saw in the manga the possibility of a

vast field of research, like Professor Sonia Maria Bibe Luyten, who, in the 1970s, founded the first manga center of studies at University of São Paulo.

Since then, the successful trajectory of manga had mixed with the anime, a Japanese cartoon, and both of them have become Japanese pop culture phenomena.

In “Manga and the Transmission of Culture: The Example of *Rurouni Kenshin*,” the researcher analyses manga as an instrument of transmission of Japanese culture by Watsuki Nobuhiro’s work *Rurouni Kenshin*, known in Brazil as *Samurai X*. At the time of Meiji Restoration (1868), when the shogunate was abolished and modern Japan begins, Himura Kenshin, a gifted swordsman, wanders around the country looking for his fate in a world he doesn’t belong anymore. In this struggle, he has to even up things with old enemies, but this is not a solitary fight, as he finds support in those with whom he shares new life (his future wife Kaoru).

“*Narratives of America: The Confrontation with the Unknown*” is a study based on the book *Narratives of America*, by Nagai Kafū (1879–1959), also focused on the Meiji Era. While in *Rurouni Kenshin* the protagonist finds himself in the middle of a battle in which the sword does not rule anymore and is forced to look for other weapons, in *Narratives of America* we find a man who, belonging to the first generations of the Modern Era of Japan, goes after a distant and unknown world. As a foreign observer of a different culture, he’s able to see America with the eyes of the “other,” while the distancing allows him to see Japan and the Japanese immigrants trying a new life in foreign lands from a more objective point of view. The narratives are based on the author’s experiences while living as a student in United States, from 1903 to 1907.

“Presence of Ikebana Ikenobo in Brazil” makes a chronological sketch of Ikebana and is the first systematized history of the presence of this Japanese floral art in Brazil. The paper traces the history of the origins, development and establishment of Ikebana until its introduction in the West, especially in Brazil. Brought by the immigrants, Ikebana was spread by individual work. It followed and got mixed with the history of Japanese community, where it is developed and established. As an ancient art, Ikebana is not only a decorative object; its essence only can be apprehended after years of practice, because it has a long history and a profound philosophy as it bases.

The “Flower Path” is a long path that always leads to other paths, in the search for what sometimes seems impossible: Ikebana must express harmony and sharp balance between the “weight” (*omomi*) of its origins, based on rigid rules and philosophies, and the “lightness” (*karumi*) of its refined and subtle beauty.

“Ethnicity and Aging: A Study of Newspaper Articles in the Nippo-Brazilian Community” deals with aging inside the community and is based on Japanese articles published in *Jornal Paulista*. A large number of immigrants reached an advanced age or are already buried in the land they adopted, and the first generation of Brazilians also face matters related to aging. What are the biggest problems endured by elderly immigrants? Are there assistance programmes for the elderly? What are their leisure activities? These are questions considered in order to trace a profile of the Japanese Brazilian elderly based on the relation between ethnicity and aging.

Thus, apparently disconnected themes cross each other, passing through reality and fiction. What always links these themes is concern with immigrants and their descendants. Men, women

and children, lost like Kenshin, crossed oceans towards the unknown and arrived here. They rooted their customs and traditions, and they got old and chose to wait for the eternal rest here.

Their stories, dreams and successes will be handed down from generation to generation, not only by their descendants, but from them to all those who together will continue their history, inherit their dreams and multiply their successes.