

Ethnicity and Aging: A Study of Newspaper Articles in the Nippo-Brazilian Community

Patrícia Tamiko Izumi

Translated by Mauricy de Oliveira Marcondes

The aim of this chapter is to describe briefly the community institutions that address issues involving the Nippo-Brazilian elders, and the main social assistance activities of these institutions in the São Paulo State. In addition I comment on the image of the elderly and on concerns about the phenomenon of the aging of Nippo-Brazilian community, which has emerged since the decade of the 1950s. Here I offer some of the results of an analysis of articles published in the *Jornal Paulista* (one of the newspapers published in Japanese) during the period from 1952 to 1997.

In the post-war period, there was a decline in the Japanese migratory movement, and otherwise, an increase in the problems that resulted from the former immigrants aging. In São Paulo, the *Beneficência Nipo-Brasileira de São Paulo*, the *Enkyô*, is the main institution that focuses on the aging question. The *Enkyô* has founded the following institutions that provide geriatric assistance:

1. Casa de Reabilitação Social de Santos (Santosu Kōsei Hōmu) was created by conversion of a predecessor organization, the Casa do Imigrante de Santos (Santos Immigrant Home). An asylum for aged persons, founded in 1971, with an orphanage regimen and capacity for 60 residents. It offers social, medical and odontological assistance, besides recreational and occupational activities.
2. Recanto de Repouso Sakura Home began to attend elders in an orphanage regimen in 1965. Situated in Campos do Jordão, with capacity for 40 residents, the institution offers occupational and leisure activities. The residents receive social and medical assistance.
3. Casa de Repouso Suzano (Suzano Ipelândia Home) was founded in 1983 in the Fukuhaku colony, about 10 kilometers from the city of Santos. It has capacity to offer social and medical assistance, and activities for 30 elders, in individual and double suites;
4. Casa de Repouso Akebono started its activities in 2000, with the aim of rendering attendance in the dependent elders daily activities, in a residence/shelter regimen, with a capacity for 50 residents. It offers social and medical assistance with adequate activities for this public.

Besides the asylums, long permanence institutions, the *Enkyô* dedicates to a differentiated attendance on the elders in its hospital; it also promotes, with others institutions, courses for caretakers and elders, lectures with the participation of health professionals, gerontologists, and JICA volunteers.

Another very important institution is the oldest assistance organization of the colony, As-

sistência Social Dom José Gaspar, that was run by Margarida Vatanabe, and has supported the asylum Jardim de Idosos São Francisco Xavier (Ikoi no Sono) since 1958.

Ikoi no Sono has two rows: the row for independents and semi-dependents, composed of 54 individual rooms, and the row for dependents, with capacity for 56 residents; a 24-hour nursing team, a physiotherapy room, a refectory and other facilities adapted to the residents who have special care needs. The institution has technical-professional activities, such as medical and odontological assistance, nursing, elders caretakers, nutrition, physiotherapy, social service, psychology, and geriatric assistance specialists sent from Japan by JICA. Besides, there are recreation activities with the residents, like ceramics, musicotherapy, karaoke, shodô, gardening, and joyful events.

Besides these institutions, many others which belong to the Nikkei colony have activities for the elders or with the aim at collecting funds to help the Nikkei asylums.

Before analyzing the *Jornal Paulista* articles, it is important to take note of some important events which have occurred in this studied period. For this purpose, the *Cronologia da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* (Japanese Immigration Chronology in Brazil)—Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1996 (Nippo-Brazilian Studies Center, 1996) has been consulted:

04/25/1958—The inauguration of Jardim Repouso São Francisco (Ikoi no Sono). The first elder received was Jingoro Yonamine (71 years old), an immigrant who had come on the *Kasato-maru*.

02/28/1967—The Federação das Associações de Províncias do Japão no Brasil (Japan Provinces Associations Federation in Brazil) and the Federação da Migração Ultramarina do Japão (Japan Ultramarine Migration Federation) sent to Japan 9 immigrants, from 62 to 81 years old, who had come on the *Kasato-maru*.

09/26/1972—With the advance of the pre-war immigrants' ages, Elders Week was instituted.

09/06/1973—Miyagi prefecture, by way of supporting its *kenjinkai*, began paying an aging allowance to persons over 77 years old.

10/15/1973—Fukuoka prefecture instituted an invitation mechanism for immigrants from this province who are over 70 years old and have lived more than 30 years in Brazil.

08/08/1975—The Associação Brasileira dos Idosos Nikkeis (Nikkei Elders Brazilian Association) was founded.

08/15/1979—The *Enkyô* decided to attend, free of charge, the elders in its clinic.

07/31/1980—14 elderly immigrants left for Japan at the invitation of Miyagi prefecture, inaugurating the program instituted by this prefectural government.

01/16/1983—A rest home for the elderly, Suzano Ipelândia Home, was inaugurated. It is the first Nikkei institution of this kind payable.

As one stage of the present research project, we are collecting and analyzing the *Jornal Paulista* articles in the period from 1952 to 1997 that are in the collection of the Biblioteca do Museu Histórico da Imigração Japonesa (Japanese Immigration Historical Museum Library). The search is being conducted by screening for keywords related to the theme of aging that are included in news article titles. As this search is not yet complete, it is not possible in the present chapter to demon-

strate quantitative data, nor the kinds of the news that were searched, but it is already possible to comment on some of them. But, before this, we will quote an extract of the book *A reinvenção da velhice; socialização e processos de reprivatização do envelhecimento* (1999) (The reinvention of old age: socialization and aging reprivatization processes), by Debert, one of the main aging specialists in Brazil:

The tendency, generally, is to see the ethnicity as an element that changes the aging in a successful experience, or at least as a mitigating factor of the difficulties faced by the elders. The ethnicity would have advantages for diverse reasons. It's a factor that congregates elders who share the same ethnic and/or religious identity, for it offers a net of formal and informal relationships and associations independent of family relationships (pp. 91–92).

It is possible to notice this aspect of the ethnicity in the colony newspapers news. What appears in the newspaper is the image of a society that worries about the aging of its community, making known the existent residential facilities, their material structures, their residents, and scheduled events. In the case of the *Iko no Sono*, there are still news about Margarida Vatanabe, important figure of the Nikkei social assistance. The elders image is stated as a positive image, being possible to notice through the many news about the well-succeed elders, the centenaries or almost centenaries, the events, called *keirōkai*, that pay homage to the Nikkei elders, the news about the elder Nikkeis in another countries and in Japan.

Aging is a worldwide concern, and the *Jornal Paulista* also shows this concern, not only with the Nippo-Brazilian community, but also with the Nikkeis from other countries. In 1997, the newspaper devoted a series of articles to the theme *Nikkei kōreisha to sono keā* (Elderly Nikkei and Their Care). There were eleven articles, treating places such as Hawaii, Argentina, Paraguay, Chicago, Seattle, Mexico, California, San Francisco, Los Angeles. Questions about care for the elderly, social welfare, hospitals, asylums, volunteer work, and family were broached.

By way of example, we will comment on an item that appeared in a Miyao Susumu column called *Doyōrondan* (Saturday's criticism), with the title *Kōreika shakai ichijirushii Nikkei shakai* (Nikkei Society—Remarkable as a Society that Is Aging) on July 19, 1997.

The author shows data that validate the idea that, lately, the aging of the Nikkey society has increased. He analyses the São Paulo statistics of the 1991 census, where the statistics about the age divided by race had the yellow race, which unites, besides Nikkeis, the Korean and Chinese people. The age with the biggest number of yellow race inhabitants is between 35–44 years old. When the inhabitants over 65 years old exceeds 7% of the whole population, this society is commonly called aged. In the case of Brazil, this percentage is 4.82%. The state of São Paulo is with 4.95%. The Nikkei population with more than 65 years old is 9.26%. In the urban sector is 9.11%, and in the rural sector, the percentage corresponds to 11.96%. This percentage says how much the rural sector is sheltering more aged persons. The Japan, that is called the aged society, has 15% of inhabitants over 65 years old. The situation of Nikkeis in rural zones of Brazil is much like the situation of their counterparts in Japan. Concern for the elderly in the Nikkei community is enormous. Who will take care of these elders, if they do not have younger persons to do so? Besides issei, the number of old

nisei has increased. The author proposes that the members of the colony should have subsidies to take care of their elders, through social assistance to them, and the co-operation of another institutions of the Nikkei community.

This article shows, by presenting quantitative data, the situation of elderly Nikkei citizens in São Paulo, making the reader to reflect about this question, which has become very serious for the Nikkei community. As Debert has said, ethnicity is an element which offers a net of formal and informal relationships and associations independent of family relations, and that. For this reason, their ethnicity prompts members of the community descended from Japanese immigrants to study and to do something to improve their situation, independently of the actions of Brazilian society directed at all the elderly residents of Brazil.

REFERENCES

- ASSISTÊNCIA Social Dom José Gaspar. *Relatório da Diretoria: Exercício de 2005* (Management Report). Guarulhos: Assistência Social Dom José Gaspar, 2005.
- ASSOCIAÇÃO Brasil-Japão de Pesquisadores; Casa de Repouso Akebono. *Ciclo de Palestras—Atuação da Equipe Multiprofissional na Quarta Idade*. Caderno de Resumos. São Paulo: Associação Miyagi Kenjin-Kai do Brasil, 14/02/2007.
- CENTRO de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros. *Cronologia da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* (Japanese Immigration Chronology in Brazil)—Expanded edition of the work originally done by Tomoo Honda. São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1996.
- DEBERT, Guita Grin. *A reinvenção da velhice: socialização e processos de reprivatização do envelhecimento* (The Old Age Reinvention: Socialization and Aging Reprivatization Processes) São Paulo: EDUSP, FAPESP, 1999.
- JORNAL Paulista*. São Paulo, 1952–1997.
- JORNAL Paulista*. São Paulo, Sábado, 19 de julho de 1997 (Saturday, July 19, 1997); Ano 50; no. 12.072, p. 1.