

A Story Connecting Japan and Brazil



Introduction: Across a Century On July 23, 1925, a 13-year-old boy said his final goodbye to Japan. As the ship slowly left the harbor, he kept his eyes fixed on the Japanese archipelago as it grew smaller and smaller. His memories, the people he had met, the familiar landscapes, everything gradually faded into the distance. Exactly 100 years later. On August 2, 2025, his great granddaughter stands at that very place, searching for her roots. As the same sea breeze brushes against her, just as it did her great grandfather a century ago, she begins to trace that history.

Greetings Hello everyone, I'm Marina Hashimoto, a Coordinator for International Relations from Brazil. In this month's Maruchi Mie, I would like to talk about "Japanese immigration" which is also part of my own life story. In fact, the 13-year-old boy in the opening story was my great grandfather. Last summer, I visited the port from which he departed for Brazil and was able to find his name in the immigration records. He did not cross the ocean of his own will, but rather it was a family decision that led him and his older brother to Brazil. Even so, that single step back then eventually led to who I am today 100 years later. Through my family's story, I would like to introduce the history of immigration that connects Japan and Brazil.

The History of Japanese Immigration

In 1908, the Kasato Maru, the first ship carrying Japanese immigrants, arrived at the Port of Santos in Brazil with 781 people on board. At the time, Brazil's coffee plantations faced a labor shortage, while Japan struggled with rapid population growth and food shortages. People living in difficult conditions decided to emigrate to Brazil, driven by the heartfelt wish to provide a better life for their families. However, life in Brazil was far harsher than expected. Harsh working conditions, unfamiliar food, language barriers, and low wages made daily life extremely difficult. According to my grandmother, they often had no money to buy food, so they grew vegetables and soybeans themselves to survive. They even made their own soy sauce and miso from those soybeans.



Building a Life Through Hard Work

Working long hours on plantations from early morning until late at night in the heat, many Japanese immigrants were eventually able to become independent and moved to urban areas, where they were able to live a stable life. My great grandfather also grew up in Brazil, got married, and started a business in Campinas. The whole family worked together, selling bread, vegetables, sweets, and alcohol from early morning until late at night. Even now, more than 50 years later, my grandmother continues to run that shop every day. When I was little, I often helped at the store, played with my cousins, and received sweets as a reward. As their lives stabilized, Japanese Brazilians began to place greater importance on education for their children. Their efforts have paid off, and today many Japanese Brazilians are active in a wide range of fields, including politics, economics, and medicine, contributing greatly to society.

Japanese Culture Living in Brazil

My great grandfather, who moved to Brazil as a boy, continued to cherish Japanese culture throughout his life, just like many other immigrants. In the Hashimoto household, soy sauce was always on the table, and alongside Brazilian dishes, we ate pickles, curry, rice balls, and miso soup. At the shop, enka music always played on the radio, and people spoke a unique mix of Portuguese and Japanese. This is not unique to my family and is a shared culture among the approximately two million people of Japanese descent living in Brazil. Even far from Japan, they always carried Japan in their hearts. While embracing Brazilian culture, they also passed on the richness of Japanese traditions to the next generation. As a result, Japanese culture has taken deep root in Brazil today. Japanese cultural associations across the country preserve traditions such as taiko drumming and Soran Bushi, and the annual "Japan Festival" in Sao Paulo attracts nearly 200,000 visitors over three days. Japanese food is also widely loved, with many Japanese restaurants throughout Brazil.

In this way, even far from Japan, culture continues to live on while being shaped and sustained by people's dedication and evolving over time. It has become not just "Japanese culture" but something newly nurtured within Brazil itself. For me, this Japanese-Brazilian culture is both my family's history and my own roots.

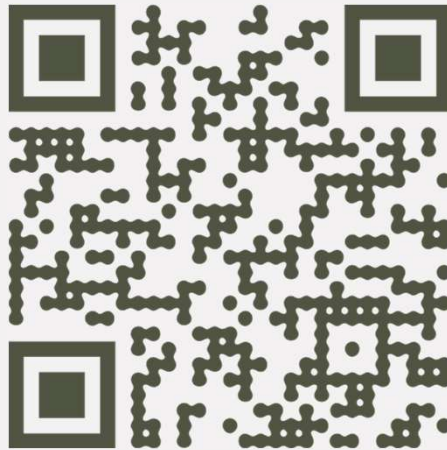
Conclusion

The story of Japanese immigration to Brazil is one of hope and courage. From the Japanese-Brazilian community, I have learned something very important: respecting other cultures does not mean abandoning your own. Rather, learning about diverse ways of thinking and living expands the choices we have to find happiness and is essential for living together in peace. Having grown up witnessing the possibilities of multicultural coexistence firsthand, I hope to contribute to building a society where everyone can take pride in their roots and embrace other cultures with openness.



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