

Books and Missiology

Becoming *Nikkei*:

A Comparative Study of Diasporic Japanese *Dekasegi* Christian Communities

by Gary Fujino

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The *dekasegi* or "migrant worker" phenomenon of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries had a profound impact upon the economies and cultural perceptions of their respective immigrant populations in Japan, Brazil, and Peru. It also affected and contributed to the Christian presence in these countries. Defined as South American residents of Japanese¹ or *Nikkei*² identity "who returned temporarily to live and work in Japan, where they often had a separate identity from that of the larger Japanese population,"³ these *dekasegi* lived, worked, raised children, and worshipped in Japan, as well as in their native Peru or Brazil during the decade of the 90s and much of the early 2000s.

As a Japan-based church planter with a North American mission agency, I was tasked with researching, visiting, and helping to establish networks for evangelism and mission in these disparate locales among sections of the *dekasegi* diaspora of Japan, Brazil, and Peru. Over the course of a four-year period (2009–2012), I visited Brazil and Peru several times as well as various *dekasegi* communities inside Japan, where I was living. Based on participant observation, on-site research, and informal interviews conducted during these visits, I was able to observe and study local historical factors, religious affections, different views of personal identity, and the socio-cultural impact of trying to adapt to a specific society in particular but also fluid and globalizing contexts like car manufacturing plants in Nagoya, Japan, or the cities of Sao Paulo, Brazil, or Lima, Peru. I also saw the effects of Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, and even English language use in these various contexts. During the time frame of this research, I personally experienced and witnessed some of the effects of hybridity and globalization upon select *Nikkei dekasegi* diasporic communities in these areas.⁴

What follows are partial findings and missiological implications from this long-term ethnographic research.⁵ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis. Only reflections are contained here, and they may not be generalized beyond the populations studied.

Gary Fujino is professor of Diaspora Studies for Missional University. He served as a missionary church planter to the Japanese diasporas with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Gary co-edited and co-authored the EMS 20 Monograph, Reaching the City: Reflections on Urban Mission for the 21st Century. He has published on cross-cultural identity and mission in EMQ, IJFM, and other publications. He currently resides in the Chicago area.

The thesis developed from my research is that Nikkei identity in the *dekasegi* diaspora mentioned above is formed by an individual but with the influence of a community (which may or may not be Nikkei—or both) as well as variegated other influences. As such, this type of hybrid identity necessitates a unique missiological, evangelistic, and pastoral approach, which I shall suggest in the implications section. Among implications detailed are the understandings that: 1) the pathway of Nikkei and *dekasegi*⁶ identity formation is multi-faceted; 2) Nikkei and *dekasegi* are the same but different in each of the three nations studied; 3) “triadic” convergence⁷ is what helps to form identity and also creates a hybrid identity; 4) the effects of the *dekasegi* movement, even in the present day, should not be ignored; 5) finally, there are various ways for reaching *dekasegi* populations including language outreach. But what works in one place may not apply in the same way for another place.

Basic Demographics and Short Histories

To begin, in order to better understand the implications, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the three countries featured in this paper—specific to their Japanese⁸ and Nikkei populations. These are not meant to be comprehensive or even complete summaries. What has been included here only relates to the phenomenon of the *dekasegi* diaspora.

Japan: A short history on its Brazilian and Peruvian immigrants

The history for Japan on this topic of Latin American *dekasegi* is fairly recent, dating back to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act of 1990 and its revision in 1998, and then again in 2015 and 2018. What this law did, in part, was to open the doors for Brazilians and Peruvians of Japanese descent to leave their home countries and enter into Japan to live and work. The response was overwhelming, peaking at nearly 300,000 Brazilian Nikkei and roughly 100,000 Peruvian Nikkei in Japan through the late 1990s.⁹ But there was a marked decrease from the end of 2008 because of downturns in the global economy. Many *dekasegi* from both Brazil and Peru lost their jobs and domiciles in Japan, some even a way back to their homelands. Language barriers, xenophobia, low or non-employable skill sets, etc., contributed to making it difficult for people to make ends meet.

Figure 1, at the top of the right column, is a sign, in the Portuguese and Japanese languages (ca. 2010), showing rules that Brazilian workers living near the Toyota plant in Homi-city, Aichi prefecture, must follow in order to live in their own community. These Brazilians are surrounded by disgruntled Japanese residents, and the sign represents how rules have been established to keep these communities strictly separated.

Figure 1. Symbol representing the Latin American *dekasegi* diaspora in Japan: The polarization of cultures



Brazil: A short history of its Japanese immigrants

Brazil opened its doors to immigrants from Japan in 1908. The one hundredth anniversary of Japanese immigration to Brazil was celebrated in 2008. Japanese laborers originally went to Brazil to replace slave laborers brought in from Africa; the former group had dreams of making it rich and then returning to Japan. Most stayed and made names for themselves as a people by farming the most difficult hinterlands, including the Amazon, against great odds and hardships. After World War II, some pro-Emperor protests and an internal terrorist-like activity from both Nikkei and Brazilians alike erupted and polarized society for a couple of decades after the war. Gradually, the Nikkei population gained status and acceptance in society and moved from the farm to the city. The majority of Nikkei are now part of the Brazilian middle class. But assimilation has come with a cost and many Nikkei still do not feel completely Brazilian nor do all Brazilians completely accept them. The Nikkei in Brazil remain a largely unreached people group of between 1.3–1.8 million according to various estimates.

Figure 2, top of page 21, shows a highway exit leading into Mogi das Cruzes marked by a *torii*, the traditional gate used in Japan to demarcate the entrance to a Shinto shrine. Forty-five kilometers outside of Sao Paulo city, Mogi das Cruzes has a sizeable Nikkei population. This symbol of Japan over a major road in Brazil illustrates how Nikkei Brazilians who erected this *torii* seek to co-exist there in an unusual mix or “fusion” of cultures.

Figure 2. Symbol representing the Brazilian dekasegi diaspora: A Japanese torii—The fusion of cultures



Peru: A short history of its Japanese immigrants

Peru welcomed Japanese immigrants a decade earlier than Brazil and hosts one of the oldest “new worlds,” behind Hawaii and Guam. In 2019, Peruvian Nikkei celebrated its 120 years of immigration. World War II was a watershed event for the Japanese in Peru because of negative circumstances flowing out of Peru’s military alliance with the United States, i.e., incarceration and deportation for those with Japanese “blood,” caused Peruvian Nikkei to become less strict about cultural preservation. This is reflected in present day trends where over 60 percent of Nikkei are said to marry outside

Figure 3. Symbol representing the Peruvian dekasegi diaspora: Nikkei artist’s rendition of Japanese cartoon—The embedding of cultures



their community. The modern day rise of Alberto Fujimori to power as erstwhile president of Peru, the effects of his three consecutive administrations, and his subsequent decline from power, imprisonment, and loss of favor in Peruvian society profoundly affected the resident Nikkei communities in both Peru and Japan, even in the United States. Despite the dekasegi phenomenon of massive Nikkei emigration that was instigated under Fujimori, the effects of enculturation and globalization have weakened or even caused some Nikkei in Peru to lose their traditional ties to Japan.

Figure 3, bottom left, is a painting for an art class by a Nikkei woman at the Peru-Japan Cultural Center in Lima.

The cartoon characters from Japanese children’s stories in the original (top right) were originally depicted with wide, round eyes. But, for her own art class project (bottom left), this lady of Japanese descent chose to draw these same characters with narrow, slanted ones—even though wide, round eyes were initially drawn by Japanese animators in Japan.

Missiological Implications Based on Data Interpretation

Missiological implication #1: The pathway of Nikkei dekasegi identity formation is multi-faceted

The model depicted below illustrates my conception of Nikkei identities of the various people I met and interviewed while in Japan, Brazil and Peru on research trips between 2009–2012. Additionally, several extended in-country visits were made to various Peruvian and Brazilian communities throughout Japan during that same time period. This schema is a generalization, an amalgamation, of my interview data and responses separated into categories and designations which shall be explained further below in this section.

Figure 4. Nikkei Identity: The Influence of the Big Picture



The following is my explanation for the contents of the graphic on the previous page, page 21:

The Individual: I view one's core identity as an amalgamation of inward and outward influences. Here, and specific to our topic, "self-derived consciousness" means what one thinks about oneself as it relates to Japan, i.e., an intrinsic, psychological state of mind or influence. That is, the thinking, "I am a 'Japanese', a Nikkei, a *dekasegi*, or a combination of all. It speaks to the question, where do I come from? Or, who am I?"

For example, in the course of my research of these various communities, I found that many Nikkei from both Brazil and Peru seemed to suffer from identity crises when they went to live and work in Japan because of confusion between the meanings of Nikkei and "Japanese." These are not synonymous terms. On the other side of this, some Nikkei did not suffer from identity crises when they went to live and work in Japan simply because they were able to discern and decide for themselves the differences of meanings behind their identities as Nikkei or "Japanese" and how those terms might apply to them. At the same time, some non-Nikkei respondents might even generalize the differences based on ethnicity, i.e., saying, "we are all Brazilian" instead of admitting that one could be "a Nikkei from Brazil." Contrary to the first two examples, these respondents chose to focus more on the similarities, saying, "we all have the same heart" or, "yes, there are differences of language and culture but the human heart is the same."

Many Nikkei from both Brazil and Peru who went to live and work in Japan seemed to suffer from identity crises because of confusion between the meanings of Nikkei and "Japanese." Others did not suffer because they were able to discern the difference of these meanings and how they apply to them.

Adachi describes these different types of self-identification as something "beyond-the-state" and specifically hints that

some South American *Nikkei* and other Latin American transnational migrant workers are creating a new sense of ethnic identity by claiming to be simply Latin American, aligning themselves along non-Japanese Latin Americans.¹⁰

She goes on to underline that because of mobility and transmigration patterns,

boundaries of ethnic groups become more fluid in a global world... People can create various homes and origins... The

more people move around—connecting with people from various "homes"—the more complex the concept of ethnicity becomes.¹¹

This fluidity of "ethnicity" and identities ties directly to the concept of hybridity. What Werbner and Modood call the "transgressive power," "ambivalence and the sheer efflorescence of cultural products, ethnicities and identities."¹²

DeVos and Romanucci-Ross call ethnicity a "self-perceived group,"¹³ more than being based upon "common lineage." Thus, ethnicity is always being made and remade, especially because of political and social boundaries as "a subjective sense of continuity and belonging."¹⁴ This agrees with Hirabayashi et al's definition of Nikkei above. I also concur with anthropologist Michael Rynkiewicz who notes that, in reality, *all* cultures are contingent, constructed and contested.¹⁵ Ethnic and cultural (Nikkei) identity naturally proceed out of all of the aforementioned manmade constructs.

In plain terms, what this means regarding the ethnic identity of Nikkei is that, in part, one "becomes Nikkei" because one chooses to be with a "self-perceived group" who call themselves Nikkei or even that the person himself prefers to think as such. This selection of self-identification is not primarily nor even necessarily contingent on ethnicity, language or cultural surroundings. Rather, it is based on how one thinks and feels about oneself, internally and individually, as well as from how one might be described or thought of by outsiders of a given group, which create for the insider "a subjective sense of continuity and belonging."

Self-perception can also be influenced by what others say about oneself, the extrinsic influences of culture, society, even racial prejudice or unconscious profiling, etc. In other words, this is the externally imposed concept of "the other" which says "you're so (not) Japanese" or "you don't look Japanese" or even "all Japanese are like you . . ." etc. In sum, the combination of what people may think of you, along with what you think of yourself regarding your own ethnic identity is what makes or doesn't make a person identify himself as a Nikkei, a "Japanese" or a *dekasegi*.

The Community: The category, "the community" in the graphic above encompasses topics too broad and expansive to be properly covered in a paper this size. However, they are worth mentioning in passing, and include generational heritage and societal pressures from both the larger Nikkei, Japanese or Latin societies surrounding these communities. That is why I include four generations of Japanese immigrants in the graphic above, as well as perceptions of one's local societal setting (the area where one grows up), plus larger outgroup pressures (nationally, from within Japan, Brazil or Peru).

A helpful visual illustration of this is an unpublished generational chart (below) of immigration and social perceptions of Nikkei in Brazil. It was created by Dr. Jurandir Yanagihara, a third generation Brazilian Christian of Japanese descent.

The Big Picture: This final categorization which includes the influences of history, globalization, marriage and family ties, as well as political concerns are, again, beyond the scope of this paper to cover in detail. It is not possible to comprehensively cover each country and its immigrant populations in this way.

So, once more, we will only touch on one specific example from recent history: the 1990 immigration law enacted by Japan to open its borders to Nikkei abroad which forever changed the relationship between not simply Brazil and Peru but with the families who went from those countries as well. It illustrates the impact of the “big picture” quite well. A *Wall Street Journal* op-ed column December 6, 2018, noted that these South American dekasegi,

ethnic Japanese who live abroad...were welcomed to Japan throughout the 1990s. But during the financial crisis (of 2008 and beyond) the government offered them cash grants to leave lest they displace native workers.¹⁶

What this historical and societal example underlines is how governments can easily both instigate and then obviate the very same immigration patterns they commence. The 1990 Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was specifically directed toward migrant workers of “Japanese” identity. So, the impact on both the individual and the community of dekasegi Nikkei, not only in Japan but in Peru and Brazil as well,

is germane concerning the implementation of that law and its various changes in 1998, 2015 and 2018. The implementation of its most current revision in November 2018 by the current Japanese government raises many questions as to Japan’s capability to receive and “welcome” non-Japanese immigrants. In one news article, the dekasegi movement of the 1990s is cited as a specific example of such challenges to Japanese law and immigration policies.¹⁷ Beyond historical and political machinations, we would be remiss to not also mention the persistence of both in-group (endogamous) marriages—to “preserve” identity—and out-group (exogamous) marriages—in conforming with social mores—to the degree that some of my respondents in Peru, for example, feared the total loss of their Nikkei identity because of high intermarriage rates.¹⁸ These and other of the “big picture” items mentioned above in the graphic affect individuals and communities at the “grassroots level” which also influences and causes a hybridization of Nikkei identity, whether these persons are in Japan, Brazil, Peru or elsewhere.

Identity is a fundamental aspect of personality formation even though it is a cultural and social construct. And as we have seen, in the case of Nikkei and dekasegi identity, how it is formed in a globalized and migratory context could also deeply influence the practice of ministry in terms of evangelism, discipleship and the structure of worship and church attendance. Thus, in seeking to minister to the disparate populations and generations of each nation mentioned in this paper, the pathway of identity formation along which a Nikkei must pass is something that must be taken into account as the gospel is shared with them.

Table 1. The historical process of migrant integration for the Nikkei into Brazilian society (Source: Jurandir Yanagihara)

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Identity</i>	<i>Form of Identity</i>	<i>Feelings Toward Larger Culture</i>
1908–1941	Accommodation /adjustment	Become wealthy enough to be able to return to Japan	In colonies, on the farms	Japanese	Similar to what they had in Japan	As a stranger
1942–1962	Adaptation	New motherland	On the farms and in the city	Japanese-Brazilian	Constructed	Dualistic: being both Japanese and Brazilian at the same time
1963–1980	Integration	Individualized recognition	In the city and on the farms	Nikkei-Brazilian	Fragmented	Double “non-citizenship”
1981–2000	Identification	Roots	The city	Brazilian-Nikkei	Self-acceptance	A “non-native” Brazilian
2001–	Acculturation	Enjoyment and influence	Upper middle class	Brazilian with Nikkei roots	Acknowledged	A type of a Brazilian with an ethnic consciousness

Missiological implication #2: Nikkei is one and the same, yet different in three countries

Closely related to missiological implication #1 that Nikkei *dekasegi* identity formation is multi-faceted and complex, there is also the notion that Nikkei is the same yet different in each of the three nations and even within their own communities, as Jurandir Yanagihara's taxonomy demonstrates, in table 1, page 23.

On the one hand, many similarities exist. Nikkei everywhere share a common heritage with Japan and/or the Japanese community in their localities, as well as a common original language (Japanese)—except sometimes with immigrants from Okinawa (Okinawa dialect). Immigration a century ago took place only a decade apart for the original ships departing to Brazil and Peru, and recent “re-emigration” to Japan from Brazil and Peru started once more for Nikkei in both countries at the same time, beginning in 1990 because of the enactment of the Japanese law mentioned above. The inherited cultural heritage from the *Meiji* era brought by the original pioneer settlers a hundred years ago is shared and has been transformed as successive waves of immigrants who, in turn, “brought” the accoutrements and behaviors of their successive eras to these adoptive homelands. For example, many traditional Japanese values such as restraint, hard work, pensiveness, a focus on education, and being true to oneself were still emphasized among the Nikkei I met in Japan, Brazil and Peru.¹⁹

On the other hand and at the same time, differences are also considerable. The biggest difference I saw was how Nikkei were treated in the various local communities of each country. For example, in Aichi, Japan, the Nikkei Brazilian community and in Kani, Japan, the Nikkei Peruvian community, was “in but not of” the surrounding Japanese community. One could feel the polarization of cultures that was almost palpable between the resident Japanese community and the immigrant worker Nikkei population, i.e., with the not so subtle sense that “we are not the same and you are not welcome here.” Inside Brazil, on the other hand, there was a definite sense of fusion between cultures where one could clearly be both Brazilian and “Japanese” at the same time, without too much sense of dissonance or contradiction. I myself felt this even as a visiting Nikkei when people spoke Portuguese to me and didn't even give me the second look that I often get in other contexts. Inside Peru, I felt an embedding of identities where people almost seem determined to be either “Japanese” or Peruvian or both. In other words, people came across as consciously choosing to be who they were; they were also able

to clearly state reasons as to why this was true for them. Even with these examples, it can be seen that ministry outreach would not be the same for each population.


Thus, in application, for such variegated homogeneity, it would not be appropriate to generalize or use a “one-size-fits-all” approach, i.e., to think that one type of evangelism or discipleship methodology will “suit” any kind of Nikkei or that “if it works in Japan, it will work with ‘Japanese’ everywhere.” As already noted above in missiological implication #1, Nikkei identity formation is complex and beyond simple generalizations. For individuals on a personal level and sometimes even communities, it appears that Nikkei identity is less defined by skin color or Japanese language proficiency, and more by the composition of one's home, upbringing and environment, educational connections and the desire one has to be/become a Japanese. So, if such factors are not carefully considered, many could “fall through the cracks” and be missed by a so-called “cookie cutter” approach in reaching these disparate populations.

Missiological implication #3: Triadic convergence

Taking into consideration the similarities and differences between both the dominant culture and the Nikkei sub-cultures mentioned above in missiological implication #2, my research data findings agreed with Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano, and Hirabayashi on the value of relational ties that comprise a “triadic convergence.” The idea of “triadic,” or a group of three, comes from the writings of Nikkei identity scholars looking at Nikkei populations in a global context. I also sensed this positive tension as I did my fieldwork. This same term of “triadic convergence” applies to the *dekasegi* since *dekasegi* are not an ethnicity per se but Nikkei from different places who have become migrant workers, usually in Japan.

“Triadic” speaks of “interactive relationships between the home nation, Japan and Nikkei community formation.”²⁰ Like the legs on a tripod, these three facets together are necessary for explaining and dealing with a globalized, hybrid identity like the *dekasegi*, or even the Nikkei in Brazil or Peru.

1. Home nation: in our case, this is Brazil or Peru or even Japan in some instances.
2. Japan: important to this is how one's concept and perceived relationship to the nation and people of Japan impacts one's life. “Japan” as a part of the convergence refers to the “big picture” part of the diagram in missiological implication #1, where



“One-size-fits-all” evangelism will not suit the triadic convergence of *Nikkei* identity.

one's conception and relationship to Japan is a key element in forging identity, practice and behavior in general for both individuals and communities.

3. Nikkei community formation: this is about how the Nikkei in that context perceive themselves as regards to their Japanese "connection" within their home nation. We have already discussed this at length above.

I encountered a specific example of this kind of triadic convergence in Brazil simply because one time I happened to be visiting near that occasion on the local calendar. Traditionally, the *Bon Odori* or "Festival of the Dead" as it is often called is celebrated by Japanese in Japan during the summer months, usually August. The festival is often held for three or more days and includes civic holidays, cemetery visits and memorial celebrations as well as festivities and customs, such as *Toro Nagashi*, a traditional sending off of lit paper lanterns down rivers in Japan during *Obon*, as this festival is also called. However, in both North America and Brazil, the dates will often shift depending on the local calendar. In Brazil, for example, I discovered that the Obon festival is normally held during the first week of November. When I asked if this was intentionally done to coincide with the Day of the Dead in South American Catholic tradition, I was told yes.²¹ Called *Finados* in Portuguese but synced with Obon, this time period is when Nikkei in Brazil follow the custom of their home nation yet incorporate the tradition of Japan as local Japanese Brazilians work to build Nikkei community formation, a practice that both sets them apart yet also allows them to participate in the local context of their home nation. This is triadic convergence.

In 2012 it was estimated that there were between 200-300 Portuguese-speaking churches in Japan, comprised both of Nikkei and Brazilians of all ethnicities. This is phenomenal, since the total Christian church demographic in Japan hovers somewhere between 7,800 -8,000 congregations for the entire country.

Missiological approach: To reach various populations of Nikkei in a globalized world, using a triadic approach is a needed framework. We must consider the home nation, its relationship to Japan, and how the resident Nikkei community forms its

identity as we minister to these groups. The older geographical-based, static, local context approach is inadequate to explain or deal with these and other Nikkei and dekasegi experiences.

Missiological implication #4: The effects of *dekasegi* movement should not be ignored

In Peru, anecdotally, it is estimated that half of the entire Nikkei Peruvian population had been dekasegi in Japan for varying lengths of time. In Japan, Brazilian immigrants, most of whom are Nikkei, are a sizeable and influential population. The global recession that started in 2008 caused many dekasegi to return to their home nation from Japan, or left them stranded in Japan without a job or a future. However, even though the enormity and pace of this dekasegi movement from more than a decade ago has waned, missiologically speaking, opportunities for sharing the gospel with, through, and in these migrant populations in any of the three countries remain ripe. What does this mean in application for mission?

First, a vision for training these dekasegi is strongly evidenced among professional Christian workers on both sides of the ocean. In Brazil, for example, intentional, organized efforts are taking place to specifically reach returnees from abroad because it has been found that Nikkei may sometimes come to Christ more easily abroad (though usually in a Portuguese language context). This can be attributed to the fact that those who leave their homeland are often more open-minded than those who remain, simply by nature of the fact that they have left their homes for regions beyond. Thus, receiving the gospel is only one of many "new" experiences that migrant workers encounter. Because of this reality, some churches in Brazil send missionaries to Japan, both to minister to unreached Japanese but also to establish Portuguese-speaking congregations there. In 2012, it was estimated by a coalition of evangelical Brazilian pastors in Japan that there were between 200–300 Portuguese-speaking churches in Japan comprised both of Nikkei and Brazilians of all ethnicities. This is phenomenal since the total Christian church demographic in Japan hovers somewhere between 7,800–8,000 congregations for the entire country!

Also, some dekasegi who have been abroad are sometimes more open to the gospel once they return to Brazil than before they left. My respondents explained that this was because "becoming Christian"—which often meant becoming Roman Catholic—was perceived by many Nikkei as a betrayal of their Japanese identities and heritage so, in general, Christianity in every form was resisted by most Nikkei (as it is in Japan). But spiritual needs manifested overseas were met by the gospel from Christians living there. Being out of their home country actually made turning to Christ easier for many, according to my respondents.

Inside Japan itself, both Brazilian and Peruvian pastors expressed a desire to see both an expansion of their language

ministry works among their own people as well as a desire to see the surrounding Japanese population reached for Christ. Two pastors I spoke with in Japan also mentioned a vision to train lay persons to lead churches so that the church could eventually function without professional clergy. This also addresses a felt need that was raised by one missionary who told me that Nikkei tend to feel better when a Nikkei church leader is over them, one who “looks like them.”

and only in Japanese and sometimes even in English as a support language or as a venue for evangelism, when necessary. Learning English as a second language was quite popular in Lima when I was there. On the other hand, Nikkei in Sao Paulo and other Brazilian locales seemed very interested in improving their Japanese facilities. Thus, language classes specific to such interests and contexts could become another form of outreach.

The heart language of the majority of Nikkei I met was not the Japanese language, and any evangelism or training should be primarily conducted in their heart language of Portuguese or Spanish. But the ability to speak Japanese remains a staunch vested interest.

On the other hand, many Nikkei in Peru have either lived or worked in Japan (and therefore now have connections there) or have relatives or friends who did. Similarly, because of the large, still extant Brazilian communities in Japan, with relatives and friends living there, the desire and ability to visit Japan—even if one is not a *dekasegi*—is appealing and strong to many Brazilian Nikkei. The question for visitors from both countries to Japan is not whether they will come but, spiritually speaking, what will be done with them when they do come? And what will be done for them or through them when they return to their own country?

Finally, whether in Japan or in their homeland, whether returning from Japan or going there for the first time, there is a viable opportunity for both a harvest of new souls and for training Nikkei to win Nikkei to Christ. As already mentioned, the prominence of the *dekasegi* in Japan has lessened radically in 2018 from a decade ago yet their influence remains—since many have stayed as families and are still working in Japan as they continually seek to integrate into the larger Japanese context. In a different but similar way, *dekasegi* who return from Japan suffer from some of the same adjustment and adaptation issues experienced by military, diplomatic or missionary personnel in America who return from abroad. Thus, on both sides of the Pacific, the people and the influence of the *dekasegi* movement remain an issue to be engaged with missiologically. There are still many unanswered questions and untapped potential.

Missiological implication #5: Language, culture, and other means can be tools to win Nikkei to Christ (but not necessarily the Japanese language!)

The heart language of the majority of Nikkei I met in both Brazil and Peru was *not* the Japanese language. Therefore, evangelism and training should be primarily conducted in the heart language of Nikkei (whether in Portuguese or Spanish),

Having said this, it must also be noted that the ability to speak Japanese at varying levels still remains a staunch vested interest for Nikkei communities in Brazil and Peru. Inside Japan, speaking Japanese is almost a requirement for survival for *dekasegi* communities there; it is not uncommon for *dekasegi* children in Japan, raised in the Japanese school system and fluent in the language, to become *de facto* interpreters and interlocutors for their parents to the larger surrounding Japanese-speaking community. Japanese language acquisition is difficult for many Latin Japanese so teaching the Japanese language to native Portuguese or Spanish speakers could itself be an outreach tool among Nikkei in Japan.

On the other hand, Nikkei in South America seems to cling sometimes to the Japanese language as a tool to form or protect their identity as being “special” Brazilians or Peruvians. Thus, teaching Japanese classes or, better, using Japanese biblical language to teach grammatical patterns and vocabulary for everyday use (much as TESOL classes are used for evangelism in the US and abroad) would be appealing to many Latin Nikkei who “like” the Japanese language or want to keep up with it for manga (comic book) reading or to learn new conversational vocabulary.

Missiological approach: The heart language of the majority of the Nikkei I met was either Portuguese or Spanish; many spoke better English as a second language than speaking Japanese. But Japanese as a language remains a tool, a venue, for reaching Nikkei everywhere for Christ.

Some Final Thoughts

My research raised many questions that weren’t answered. Much more research and active outreach among *dekasegi* communities in Japan as well as toward returnee Nikkei in their home contexts of Brazil and Peru needs to be conducted.

As previously noted, there are consonant “touchpoints” between Brazilian and Peruvian Nikkei regarding their identities. Such topics would include shared and similar experiences under World War II, generational changes in language and culture, and racially-charged impressions from the local culture. Because of the influence and experience of migration, the effects of globalization are deeply ingrained into the Nikkei psyche, whether in Brazil or Peru, and should not be ignored. Identity regarding Nikkei is fluid and changing, defying conventional wisdom because there is no singular categorization for Nikkei “ethnicity.” Hybrid identification may be the answer here but further research will need to be conducted since Brazilian and Peruvian Nikkei seem to view themselves as both the same and different from their local setting at the same time. For individuals personally, their Nikkei identity is less defined by skin color or Japanese language proficiency, and more by home upbringing/environment, educational connections and the desire to be a “Japanese.” Nikkei in both

countries remain a largely unreached people group. Utilizing existing Japan-Brazil or Japan-Peru relationships must be considered, because of immigration and identity issues, especially the reciprocal (on both sides of the ocean) training of lay Christians for evangelism, church planting and training in leadership and multiplication. Strategies for reaching Nikkei should be considered from the basis of a variegated perspective rather than from a “cookie-cutter” approach. Finally, since we live in a globalized, migratory world—especially as this relates to Nikkei traveling to and from Japan—we must seek to strategize with this in mind, not merely looking at a local context or even countrywide. As a focus of evangelism, training and church planting, Nikkei are globalized sojourners. Those of us who seek to reach them must expand the horizons of our own mindsets, methodologies and practices, as we pray and plan to reach Nikkei everywhere for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. **IJFM**

Endnotes

- ¹ “Japanese”: used here as a descriptor, Nihonteki: 日本的 lit., ‘Japanese-y’ or ‘Japanese-like.’ I sometimes use this term as an adjective, although with the same spelling in English; it has broad application and can be used to describe things Japanese, whether they come from or are related to Japan itself or whether they are associated with Nikkei expatriates abroad, e.g., in Brazil or in Peru.
- ² Nikkei: 日系 lit., “of the Japanese system, lineage or group.” A person or persons of Japanese descent, and their descendants, who emigrated from Japan and who created unique communities and lifestyles within the societies in which they now live . . . Nikkei also potentially encompasses people of part-Japanese descent, to the extent that they retain an identity as a person of Japanese ancestry. Being Nikkei, in other words, has primarily, but not exclusively, to do with ethnic identity.” Lane Hirabayashi, Akemi Kikumura-Yano and James Hirabayashi, *New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan* (Stanford, CA : Stanford University, 2002), 19–20, 25.
- ³ Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano, and Hirabayashi, 19.
- ⁴ I have been asked why I did not also cover other Japanese populations for this research. The answer is twofold: 1) the specific assignment I had with my agency was only with these countries so my focus of study was only on these nations initially. Also, 2) the Nikkei dekasegi populations in both Brazil and Peru created measurable and visible communities and sub-cultures that affected local areas in Japan in a significant manner. Other possible Nikkei dekasegi populations were not so visible or prevalent within Japan during this same time period. Further research should be done in other areas of the global Japanese diaspora but that was beyond the scope of this particular project.
- ⁵ I presented my research details and methodology at the June 2018 consultation in Manila, the Philippines. This paper has been edited to only show the final conclusions and missiological implications because of space considerations.
- ⁶ In this paper, I do not use dekasegi as a category of ethnicity. Rather, it is a descriptor of a type of Nikkei identity that is manifested in these various contexts by nature of migration.
- ⁷ See Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano, and Hirabayashi, 2002.
- ⁸ Here, I use “Japanese” as a noun: for a people, Nihonjin: 日本人 lit., ‘a Japanese person or the Japanese people.’ In this paper, I sometimes use “Japanese” as a noun to describe only a Japanese citizen who lives in Japan or is temporarily living outside that country but intends to return, who speaks the Japanese language as their only or first tongue, who “looks” Japanese physically, and who is regarded by other Japanese individuals or the larger society as a Japanese person. The term may also be applied in a plural form toward a group of individuals.
- ⁹ A *New York Times* article (April 25 2009) estimated a combined population of 366,000 Brazilian and Peruvian immigrants in Japan.
- ¹⁰ Adachi, 19.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Werbner and Modood, 2015.
- ¹³ DeVos and Romanucci-Ross, 18.
- ¹⁴ DeVos and Romanucci-Ross, 25.
- ¹⁵ Michael A. Rynkiewicz, “The World in My Parish: Rethinking the Standard Missiological Model,” *Missiology* 30, no. 3 (2002): 315–16.
- ¹⁶ I would add that one condition of those grants was a signed contractual promise never to return to Japan.

¹⁷ “Making Sense of Japan’s New Immigration Policy: A Controversial New Regulation Will Allow More Foreign Workers into Japan. But Can Japan Take Care of Them Once They Arrive?” <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/making-sense-of-japans-new-immigration-policy/>.

¹⁸ See the following links for miscegenation statistics in Brazil among Nikkei: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed-race_Brazilian#Japanese/non-Japanese <https://www.labeurb.unicamp.br/elb/asiaticas/japones.htm> (this link is in Portuguese).

¹⁹ Nobuko, Adachi, *Japanese and Nikkei At Home and Abroad: Negotiating Identities in a Global World* (Amherst, NY: Cambria), 2010.

²⁰ Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano, and Hirabayashi, 338.

²¹ Please see the article in the *Nichi Bei* online periodical, “The Transformation of Obon in Brazil”: <https://www.nichibei.org/2010/06/the-transformation-of-obon-in-brazil/>.

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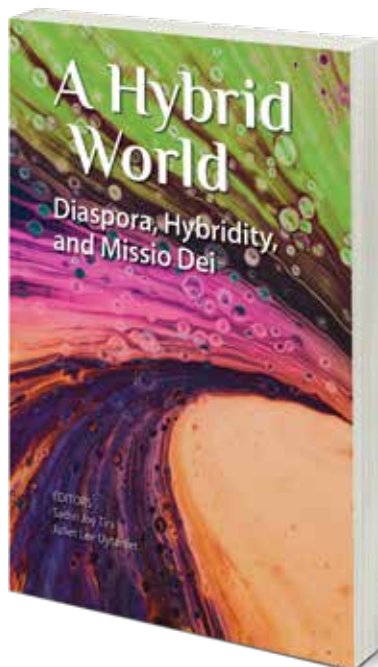
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