

The Immigrants Who Introduced Japanese Foods to the Americas (Part 2 : South America)

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Brazil is Belbulíndia

An article in a Brazilian weekly magazine once referred to Brazil as Belbulíndia (*Isto é*, 1996), a portmanteau that combines Belgium, Bulgaria and India. Reporting on the Human Development Index (HDI) published by the United Nations Development Program, the article said that although the nation of Brazil ranks around the 60th from the top, the HDI value analysis by state indicates that the country can be divided into three types of states, each corresponding to either Belgium, Bulgaria or India. A north-south divide exists within the country, with some regions comparable to developed countries, some to semi-developed countries and some others to developing countries. This article has often been referred to since it was first published. In essence, it describes a large gap in the degree of development between the developed southern and southeastern regions and the underdeveloped northern and northeastern regions. The gap still remains evident, although it has been steadily reduced. For comparison, Japan has been generally rated around 10th place, though it once held first place.

That article brought back memories for me of the 80s, when I was an undergraduate exchange student travelling through all of the Brazilian states over a period of two months. I felt the characteristics of each region and their differences with all of my senses, and experienced development disparities and cultural diversity that might not be found in other countries. When we arrived at a rustic bus terminal in the northern region after a 42-hour trip, I remember the bus driver shouting out, “Here we are at malaria paradise!” In a southern town, I was bewildered by toilets that were placed so high they were difficult to use. There is no end to my memories of that time. Differences are still found in the food as well. Characteristics that define regional and social strata are prominent, and one cannot speak generally about food across Brazil. The southern region where immigrants settled especially tends to stand out, reflecting strong foreign influences. Immigrants in Brazil are concentrated either in or to the south of the state of São Paulo, with immigrants from Italy and Japan in the state of São Paulo and those from Poland, Ukraine, Germany, Italy and many other European countries in the southern neighboring state of

Paraná. Foods introduced by Japanese immigrants are most prominent in these two states.

Nihonjin-gai in São Paulo

The current *Nikkei* (Japanese immigrants and their descendants residing in a foreign country) population in Brazil is estimated to be 1.5 to 1.6 million. A 1987-1988 survey revealed that roughly 80% of them live in the states of São Paulo and Paraná, with about 27% living within São Paulo City (*Brazil Nikkeijin Jittaichosa Hokokusho*, 1980). The Liberdade district in São Paulo City is called *Nihonjin-gai*, and has been home to many Japanese immigrants since before WWII. Ms. Shizue Arai, an 82-year-old second-generation Nikkei, was born and raised in Liberdade and still lives on Galvão Bueno Street, the main street of Liberdade. Her parents operated a hotel before the war, and an eatery (locally called a “bar”) that served meals to Nikkei customers after the war. Shizue recalls, “Many of those who came from the rural regions would watch several Japanese movies in a



Galvão Bueno Street — Japantown



Shigeru Kojima

A research fellow at the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Culture Studies, Waseda University, Shigeru Kojima was born in Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture. As a student at Sophia University, he went to study in Brazil, and earned a master's degree in Social History at the Graduate School, Federal University of Paraná. After traveling throughout Brazil by bus, he became a fervent admirer of the country, and was inspired to engage in immigrant studies in Curitiba, the capital of the state of Paraná. He lived there for roughly 10 years before returning to Japan. He worked at a university and elsewhere, and helped establish the JICA Yokohama Japanese Overseas Migration Museum, where he currently works in the Project Management Division. He is interested in the history of Japanese immigrants, the identity of the Nikkei, and changes in Nikkei communities in multicultural societies such as Brazil, the US and Canada. His main research themes include festivals, ethnic enclaves, foods and translation.

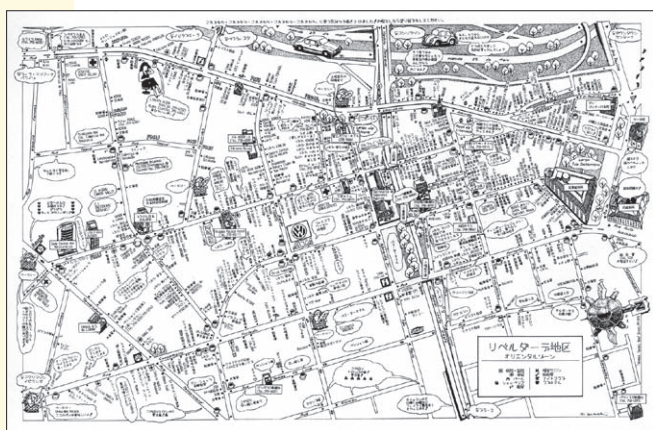
row, and eat sushi and hand-kneaded *udon* noodles before returning backcountry. In addition to sushi and *udon*, the bar also served *nishime* (Japanese stewed vegetables), *inarizushi* (pouches of fried tofu filled with sushi rice), pizza and fried shrimp. Brazilians also sometimes ordered *inarizushi*. Wednesday menus included a Brazilian dish, *feijoada* (a stew of beans with beef and pork).” The Liberdade Commerce and Industry Association was established in 1972 to serve as an affiliation of 80 stores, mainly Nikkei. The association’s 1982 statistics indicate that the town had 90 restaurants, 75 Japanese or oriental sundry stores, 72 clothing stores, 65 eating and drinking establishments operating at night, 35 souvenir stores, 33 Japanese grocery stores, 25 book and record stores, and 2 Japanese movie theaters. Liberdade was also home to a Korean community, with some 20,000 Korean Brazilians and 10 Korean stores. Chinese restaurants were found across São Paulo City, including many in Liberdade, where Beijing, Cantonese and Taiwanese cuisines were available. We can see in the illustrated map that Liberdade was a busy place. It certainly was Nihonjin-gai, no less.



Asahi Shokudo (eatery) 1953
(Property of Shizue Arai)



Asahi Shokudo advertisement, *Paulista Nenkan*, 1953



Illustrated map of Liberdade in the 1980s (From *OPA* magazine)

Japanese Foods in Liberdade

Modeled on Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, California, Liberdade was designated as a special tourist district by São Paulo City, and decorative lily-of-the-valley shaped street lamps and a large red *torii* (the Japanese gate commonly seen at Shinto temples) were installed. Since then, the district has maintained the townscape as Oriental Town. However, because of the so-called *dekassegui* movement starting in the late 1980s, the presence of the Nikkei in Liberdade was

eclipsed by Chinese and Koreans, literally making it an Oriental town. However, the town today still abounds with Japanese foods. Once you step into a Nikkei grocery store, you will find stacks of bagged Japanese rice in some 10 varieties and almost every kind of Japanese food. A wide variety of takeout sushi and *bento* (prepared meals) are also offered. The *bento* in Liberdade, however, is somewhat different from *bento* in Japan. Typical varieties contain rolled sushi, with stewed vegetables, tempura, grilled fish, fried chicken and pickled vegetables. In this town there are *bento-ya* (bento stores) and *yakisoba-ya* (fried noodle stores). If you closely look at the other side of the counter, most of the cooks are Brazilians, particularly *Nordestinos* (northeasterners).



Stacks of Japanese rice at the store



Varieties of bento



Bento shop menu

Japanese Food Tradition Carried on by Nordestinos

The cooks working in Japanese kitchens and sushi chefs (called *sushimen*) are predominantly *Nordestinos*, of whom the majority are *Pernambucanos* (from the state of Pernambuco). Some of them have been introduced in magazines as individual success stories. Surprisingly, *Nordestinos* are becoming the main culinary stars behind even such traditional Japanese foods as handmade tofu and Japanese sweets, as Nikkei children with higher educational backgrounds rarely take over their parents’ trades. At Kanazawa Seika, a time-honored confectionery on Galvão Bueno Street, the confectioners are *Nordestinos*. I wondered if this trend of Japanese food preparation leaving the hands of the Nikkei would result in changes in the foods, in terms of colors as well as flavors. As far as the colors of Japanese sweets are concerned, I have certainly noticed some changes.



Article on a sushiman, *Where Curitiba*, 2013



Japanese sweets at Kanazawa Seika

The successors of Japanese food manufacturing are not limited to those Nordestinos who have worked and trained under Nikkei craftsmen. Mr. Joaquim Ferreira de Souza, from Santo Antônio da Platina in Paraná, is a well-known tofu craftsman in Curitiba, the capital of the state of Paraná. He sells tofu every day to Nikkei



Joaquim's tofu, in a shop (right)



Inside Joaquim's tofu factory

grocery stores and leading supermarkets. Joaquim is not a Nikkei—his father is from the state of Minas Gerais and his mother is from the state of São Paulo. Nor has he ever worked for a Nikkei employer. He became interested in tofu during a training course he received when he was working for a dairy product company, and learned how to make it then. Several years later, he decided to go independent, and built a small factory to start making tofu. He was attracted by the high profit margin in tofu, as soybeans were readily available at low prices. In the beginning, he sold his tofu in farmer's markets and city markets, always letting people taste it, to build a customer base. Today his factory produces 700 to 850 blocks daily to deliver to roughly 50 stores, including 7 leading supermarkets. Deliveries begin with a 4 a.m. trip to the central wholesale market and finish by noon. In the beginning, 80% of his customers were Nikkei, though non-Nikkei now make up 60% of his clientele. This is solid evidence that tofu consumption has been spreading among Brazilians. According to Joaquim, there are other non-Nikkei Brazilians in the same trade. At the end of the interview he said, "Nikkei customers are the best. They keep their promises and pay promptly. If they order 50 blocks, they will surely take 50. They never ask me to take back 30 because they only needed 20 on that day. I respect the integrity of Nikkei." "*Japonês Garantido*" (guaranteed Japanese) is a widely used term representing the trust and confidence the Nikkei have earned in Brazilian society. I was very pleased to know that this trust was proven here as well as in many other parts of the country.

Contribution of the Nikkei

The ultimate contribution of the Nikkei in Brazil is the high degree of public confidence they have earned, as evidenced by the phrase *Japonês Garantido*. Similarly, their contributions to Brazilian agriculture have also been very

highly valued. Their diversified input has included the introduction of new crops, the development of improved varieties, the establishment of intensive agriculture

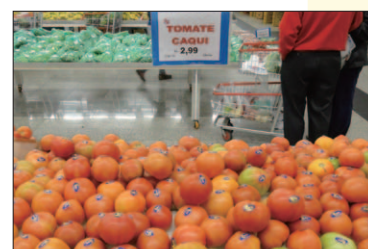
systems and the foundation of agricultural cooperatives. Recognition of this can be seen on a coin released in 2008 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Japanese immigration to Brazil. It has an image of the Kasato Maru, which carried the first Japanese immigrants to Brazil, on the front, and a Nikkei woman harvesting persimmon on the back. Japanese cultivars of sweet persimmon introduced to Brazil have been so broadly accepted by Brazilians that the Japanese word for persimmon (*kaki*) has become the Portuguese term of *caqui*. This typifies the contributions of the Nikkei in Brazilian agriculture. The Fuji apple is also well known. Among vegetables in supermarkets you will find cucumbers and eggplants labeled with *japonês*, and *tomate caqui* (persimmon tomato), clearly indicative of the Nikkei contribution. How was the life of these Japanese immigrants in the early days, from their arrival in Brazil until WWII?



100th anniversary commemorative coin marking Japanese immigration to Brazil



Cucumber and eggplant with *japonês* indicated on the sign



Persimmon tomatoes

Takuan Trade in South America

Concerning the *takuan trade** in South America, valuable data is found in a report on the 1955 survey conducted by Nihon Gakusei Iju Renmei. The amount of takuan trade by country shown in this report indicates that the main products imported to Brazil were kitchenware and household appliances. The most commonly imported foods were (in descending order) fish, green tea, seasonings and scallops. No canned foods were on the list.

In the first place, there are virtually no Nikkei people in Brazil who have heard of the term, takuan trade. In fact, I have never met one who understands the term. Hence, I can assume that the situation of imported Japanese products in Brazil was quite different from that in North America. Some people who had been engaged in the takuan trade in North America told me that exports to South America, especially Brazil, made no

business sense due to the high tariffs. It is easy to imagine that imports from Japan to Brazil entailed a number of hurdles, including distances and travel times that were twice those to North America. Yet, this does not mean that there were no Japanese who engaged in trade between Brazil and Japan.

*Takuan trade: The business of importing Japanese foods and everyday sundries from Japan for Japanese immigrants is called *takuan boeki* in Japanese (directly translated here as *takuan trade*), as products included *takuan* (pickled *daikon* radish).

Early Japanese Stores

The well-known pioneers of Japanese retail in Brazil include Fujisaki Shokai and Hachiya Kyodai Shokai. Fujisaki Shokai was established in São Bento, São Paulo City in 1906, two years prior to the arrival of the first



Fujisaki Shokai
(Nanbei Nihonjin Shashincho, 1921)

Japanese immigrant group in Brazil. At that time, the only Japanese products available in Brazil were provided by Germans. Hachiya Kyodai Shokai was originally established as Nippaku Shokai in Rio de Janeiro in 1908. However, it closed before long, and was then reestablished as Hachiya Kyodai Shokai (*Brazil Nenkan*, 1933). Foods were hardly referred to in articles and advertisements pertaining to these Japanese stores, and there were no advertisements to promote any individual item. According to a study conducted by Prof. Koichi Mori at the University of São Paulo, some Fujisaki Shoten advertisements were found in Japanese language newspapers in the 1920s with references to foodstuffs. Prof. Mori uses the term “Emigrant Ship Trade” (*Brazil Nihon Imin Hyakunen-shi*, Vol. 3). However, there is no evidence to suggest that this term was as common as the term “takuan trade.”

The Real Picture of Japanese Food Imports

According to *Brazil Nenkan*, the main Japanese products imported into Brazil on record from 1924 to 1928 were porcelain, toys, fans, silk, cotton yarn and cotton goods. Foodstuffs were tenth on the list. Foodstuffs included canned fish and shellfish, dried vegetables, canned vegetables, canned fruits, flour, starch, sake, beverages, dried fruits and green tea. The following passages are found in another publication of the time:

“Most families make miso and soy sauce at home. As wheat is not readily available, they use rice, soybeans, onions, etc., but still the taste is rather good. In towns, there are brewers who produce and sell Japanese sake, soy sauce, miso, etc.

The major alcoholic beverage varieties are *pinga* (a potent spirit made from sugarcane) and beer. Beer is priced almost the same as in Japan, while *pinga* is inexpensive and made for the masses. Most dry foods are imported from Japan, and include salted herring roe, *shiitake* mushrooms, agar, dried baby sardines and dried fish. In towns, tofu merchants conduct daily rounds of their customers. If you have money to spend, you can live like you are in Japan—it is both a happy and unhappy aspect of living in Bastos.” (*Brazil*, 10th anniversary issue, 1936)

Judging from the above citation, it can be presumed that products that filled the general needs were imported from Japan. However, we can also see that they were not affordable for everyone. As in North America, it seems that homemade miso and soy sauce were common among early Japanese immigrants, and there are testimonies that some families were still making them at home in the early 1980s.

In talking about the emergence of a concentration of Japanese restaurants in Nihonjin-gai in São Paulo City, *Brazil Nenkan* said, “There were only one or two in 1930, and now the number has grown to more than 10 restaurants.” They continue, “Japanese sake used to be considered impossible to brew in Brazil. In the beginning of this year, though, crystal-clear genuine sake was successfully brewed by Tozan Farm and sold to sake lovers under the brand names of Azuma Kirin and Azuma Otori.”

It is clear that there was trade of foodstuffs between Japan and Brazil. However, due to diverse barriers, it seems that the scale of trade never reached the heights it achieved in North America. Because products from Japan were not easily obtainable, early Japanese immigrants had to use their ingenuity, and put a great deal of effort into making these foods on their own.

What Did Japanese Immigrants Eat?

Then, what did Japanese Immigrants eat? In his work, *Imin no Seikatsu no Rekishi* (1970), which recorded immigrant life in Brazil in great detail, Tomoo Handa said that the foods eaten by Japanese immigrants in Brazil were characterized by locally available ingredients prepared with Japanese-style culinary methods. They made Japanese-style dishes using a long-grain rice called *agulha*, which is commonly eaten by Brazilians, *feijão* (beans), cornmeal, dried codfish and dried meats. Since 1930 or so, Japanese immigrants in São Paulo City have generally had a Brazilian-style meal for lunch with plain rice, *feijão*, beef and salad or pickled vegetables, and a Brazilian-style rice, which is similar to pilaf, but to unseasoned Japanese-style



Bottled hanaume

steamed rice. The use of short grain rice, called *catete*, began only after many Japanese joined the urban life in São Paulo, when the demand for this rice rapidly increased. Japanese immigrants made many varieties of pickles with local ingredients as well.



Hanaume

Pickled *mamão* (papaya), *melancia* (watermelon) and *chuchu* (chayote) are still made in some families. As a substitute for *umeboshi* (pickled plums), they created *hanaume* by pickling bright red *vinagreira* (roselle) calyces with salt. *Hanaume* is now also sold in Nikkei supermarkets. The dish of *quiabo* (okra) dressed with miso has been handed down to the present generation as well.

Ms. Hamako Hara, an 84-year-old second-generation Nikkei who was born in Antonina, Paraná, said “we had *arroz com feijão* (rice with beans), *carne seca* (dried meat) and home-grown vegetables such as *alface* (lettuce), *couve-flor* (cauliflower), carrots and *daikon* radish.” *Arroz com feijão* is a staple dish for Brazilians. While most Brazilians ate feijão with pilaf-style rice, the Nikkei ate them with plain rice. “We put dried meat in feijão,” she said, “and we had miso soup for dinner. Pickled daikon radish and carrots were always served. Taro was stewed, and its stems were dried and used in the miso soup. We rarely had fish, not even once a month. We sometimes bought *sardinha* (sardines) from a fish peddler, but they were probably expensive.”

Mr. Toshihiro Iida, 75 years old, is also a second-generation Nikkei. He was born in Bauru, São Paulo, and raised in Assaí. He remembers, “At Assaí, we produced almost all the foods we needed. Our standard meal consisted of rice, stewed vegetables, feijão, miso soup and pork or chicken. We grew dry-land rice. For fish, we had sardines once in a blue moon, whenever a traveling Nikkei fish peddler came to the area.” Hamako remembers that her mother, a first-generation Nikkei, grew gourd and konjac yams to make *kanpyo* (dried shavings of gourd) and konjac. Her mother made even *chikuwa* (fish paste wrapped around a stick and broiled) and *kamaboko* (molded and steamed fish paste). Even today, on New Year’s Day her family and relatives, roughly 100 people, get together and pound mochi. Japanese-style dishes made by early Japanese immigrants using Brazilian ingredients are called *colônia* dishes. The Portuguese word “*colônia*” is equivalent



Colônia dishes

to the English word “colony.” Here, though, it refers to the Nikkei community. Ms. Seiko Sasaya, a 68-year-old second-generation Nikkei born in Julio

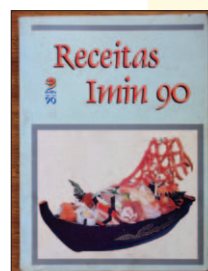
Mesquita, São Paulo, offered me a meal based on typical *colônia* dishes. The menu consisted of beef with onion and potatoes, feijão, *farofa* (a toasted manioc flour mixture), okra dressed with miso, fried eggplant and green pepper, pickled cucumber, *rúcula* (arugula), *rakkyo* (Japanese scallions), *hanaume* and plain rice. Such *colônia* dishes are still common in Nikkei families today. The efforts and ideas individual immigrants put into these foods have been compiled into a collection of recipes.

A Collection of Recipes

A collection of recipes entitled *Delicias da Mamãe* (Mom’s Delicacies), published by ADESC (Associação of Agricultural Cooperative Women’s Groups), has been reprinted many times.



ADESC collection of recipes, 2004



Collection of recipes published to commemorate the 90th anniversary of immigration

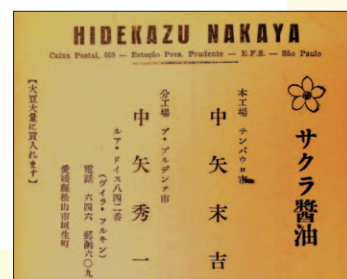
This publication contains recipes and cooking methods contributed by members of Agricultural Cooperative Women’s Groups in various places. It is filled with creative ways of matching Brazilian ingredients to Japanese-style dishes, and was achieved through information sharing. Such recipe collections were published often in the past, usually as commemorative projects, and have been passed down within families. Some people still keep and use handwritten recipes. The Nikkei culture is still very much alive in these dishes.

Soy Sauce and Brazil

What did early Japanese immigrants do about such basic Japanese foods as soy sauce, miso and tofu? As already noted, many Nikkei remember that, before WWII, soy sauce, miso and tofu were often made at home by Nikkei families. The pioneer of commercial soy sauce production in Brazil is generally believed to be Eitaro Kanda, from Niigata Prefecture. He started his business in Santos, São Paulo in 1914. Subsequently, other



Eitaro Kanda, the pioneer of commercial soy sauce production (Nanbei Nihonjin Shashincho, 1921)



Sakura Soy Sauce advertisement (Paulista Nenkan, 1951)

proprietors emerged in rapid succession, and even today there are seven leading Nikkei soy sauce companies. Among them, Sakura brand soy sauce, produced by *Sakura Nakaya Alimentos Ltda.*, holds the largest market share. Soy sauce production in Brazil features the use of whole soybeans, as well as corn in place of wheat which was difficult to get before. As a result, Brazilian soy sauce is rather sweet, and has a stronger aroma and color than its counterparts in Japan. Before soy sauce was imported from Japan and introduced to Brazil, Nikkei soy sauce of this flavor spread and took hold in the country. In fact, if you ask Brazilian students at a Japanese language school what *sakura* is, most students will reply that it is soy sauce. *Sakura* is better known as a soy sauce brand than as the national flower of Japan after which it was named (the cherry blossom). Today, soy sauce and rice for Japanese cuisine are found in Japanese food sections, not only in Nikkei grocery stores, but in leading Brazilian supermarkets and international supermarket chains such as Carrefour, as well. This clearly suggests that more than a few Brazilians make Japanese dishes at home.



Nikkei grocery store



Japanese food section



Carrefour-brand soy sauce



Japanese rice produced by a leading Brazilian rice distributor

Soy Sauce and Teppanyaki—Japanese Cuisine Began with Teppanyaki

Mr. Makoto Nakaba, a 73-year-old immigrant from Amami-Oshima, Kagoshima Prefecture, came to Brazil 53 years ago as an unmarried immigrant, summoned and sponsored by the Cooperativa Agrícola de Cotia (CAC). Mr. Nakaba's relatives opened a Japanese restaurant in Curitiba, Paraná 50 years ago that he took over later on. After working on a CAC member farm for two years, he moved to Curitiba in 1961. After spending 3 years working as restaurant help, he came up with the idea of offering *teppanyaki* (foods cooked on a hot griddle). At first, nobody was interested in his Japanese dishes.



Beef teppanyaki

Looking for a way to make Japanese dishes that would appeal to local tastes, Mr. Nakaba came up with teppanyaki using beef and chicken. He tried using various seasonings and finally settled on soy sauce. Although Brazilians were not familiar with soy sauce at that time, teppanyaki gained popularity because of the appetizing smell of the meat and soy sauce sizzling on the iron plate. Building on this appeal, he also eventually offered fish and shrimp teppanyaki. This trend continued for about 20 years, and for a good while Japanese cuisine simply meant teppanyaki to Brazilians. It was first made by Japanese, offered at Japan Club gatherings, and served in Japanese restaurants. Teppanyaki was the whole of local Japanese cuisine. Even today, teppanyaki accounts for approx. 30% of his restaurant's total sales.



Yakisoba stall in the Sunday market



Instant yakissoba sauce

Afterwards, the Japanese dish of *yakisoba* (stir-fried noodles) began to gain traction. This is actually the Chinese dish chow mein, which was first sold by Chinese at the Sunday market in Oriental Town in São Paulo (*Nikkei Shimbun*, Nihonshoku Frontier). Chow mein had also been popular among the Nikkei in North America since before WWII, and is slightly different from Japanese yakisoba. This fried Chinese noodle dish also came to be seen as a Japanese dish in Brazil. As some people make it at home now, dehydrated noodles and instant sauce are sold in stores.

It was not until the 1980s when sushi and sashimi became popular. Non-Nikkei Brazilians were initially reluctant to try these dishes. In any case, although there were imported Japanese ingredients available, they were also unaffordable to most.

Japanese Restaurants Depended on Couriers for Ingredients

As Japanese ingredients were extremely expensive, it was a part of Mr. Nakaba's routine in the 1980s to go over to Japan twice yearly to buy them. He brought back large quantities of dried *kombu* kelp and dried *nori* laver, which were essential ingredients for any Japanese restaurant. Quality octopus and sashimi were available at reasonable prices in Brazil at that time, as they were not popular items except among some Spanish and Portuguese who knew how to eat them. Mr. Nakaba went to the fishmonger's almost every day to buy them. He once overheard a customer talking behind him, "to buy such wormy stuff, I wonder what in the world they eat." The turning point in this situation was the health food boom.

Japanese Cuisine Is Healthy.

In the 1980s, the McGovern Report helped spread the idea in the U.S. that Japanese foods were healthy, and this idea was featured in magazines and newspapers in many different ways. The influence of the McGovern Report also reached Brazil. In response, the literati were among the first to visit Mr. Nakaba's restaurant. In the case of sushi, however, after bringing a piece up to their mouth, they appeared to be having difficulty in gathering the courage to actually eat it. After trying it several times, they grew to love it and sushi began to spread from the literati to the other parts of society as a luxury food. It was a great shift of value from an exotic and unappealing food to a high-end dish. As a result, Japanese restaurants in Curitiba increased from 7 or 8 to nearly 40 in the 2000s. The standard steps that ordinary Brazilians follow in experiencing Japanese dishes are now *teppanyaki* → *tempura* → *sukiyaki* → grilled fish, and finally sushi and sashimi. Though 60% of the customers were Nikkei in the 1980s, a full 70% became non-Nikkei Brazilians by the 21st century.

Refeição De Casa

To increase his customer base among non-Nikkei, Mr. Nakaba tried various things to make Japanese foods more attractive to them. One such measure was to offer *teishoku* (individual set meals).



Teishoku sign for Restaurant Nakaba

People in Brazil today understand what *teishoku* is, but they didn't in the beginning. So Mr. Nakaba called it *refeição de casa* (home meal), and priced it so it was affordable for ordinary Brazilians. The main dish was meat, a favorite ingredient of Brazilians, and feijão was also included in the set. It was much later that fish was used for *teishoku*. The basis for his idea was the *colônia meal*, the home-cooked meals of Nikkei families introduced above, and it was readily accepted by his customers. Brazilians did not eat many vegetables, and when they did, they often ate them uncooked. Even tomatoes were not available, except for very small ones, nor were they distributed in markets. They did not know how to stew vegetables. The fish was grilled or deep fried to make it agreeable to the palate of the locals.

Another measure Mr. Nakaba used was the buffet style system called *rodízio* in Brazil. By offering many different items that the customers could sample, Mr. Nakaba was able to introduce various new Japanese dishes. In this way, fried fish, *tonkatsu* (port cutlet), fried prawns and fried oysters gained popularity. Gradually customers began eating such

dishes as *kinpira* (sautéed and simmered) burdock and grilled eggplant.

The Spread of Japanese Foods and Brazilian Style

Though the number of Japanese restaurants in Curitiba increased to nearly 40 in the 2000s,



Sushi served at a churrascaria



Flyer of a por quilo restaurant

they didn't slow down. There are about 100 now, including *Yakissobateria*, *Temakeria* and *Robataria* (stores offering *yakisoba*, *temakizushi* or hand rolled sushi, and *robatayaki* or charcoal-grilled foods). According to a 2010 report from the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), there are at least 792 Japanese restaurants in Brazil. It is said that



An example of a plate at a por quilo



Sushi placed beside sandwiches
Livraria Cultura

Japanese restaurants share great popularity with *churrascarias* (Brazilian barbecue restaurants). Sushi is now so loved in Brazil that it is served even in *churrascarias*, and is always on the menu in similarly popular *por quilo* (meaning per kilo) restaurants that sell foods by weight. Furthermore, at large bookstore cafés, customers can enjoy sushi as well as the usual coffee and pasta while reading a book. Besides being offered at *churrascarias* and other restaurants as a meal, sushi is accepted as a snack that can be easily enjoyed at reasonable prices in cafés and shopping center food courts. On top of that, in Brazil, you find varieties of sushi that would be unimaginable in Japan.

Brazilian-Style Sushi

Hot Filadelfia and *Romeu e Julieta* may sound fanciful, but they are names of sushi. The former is tempura of rolled sushi with salmon and cream cheese filling, while the latter is rolled sushi with cheese, *goiabada* (guava jelly) and strawberry filling. Hot indicates foods deep fried in batter, such as hot banana and hot *goiabada*. *Romeu e Julieta* is a typical desert, in which the salty flavor of the cheese and sweet *goiabada* make a superb combination. For each Hot *Filadelfia* and *Romeu e Julieta*, an inside-out version is also

available for those who don't much care for the texture of the dry *nori*. There are other varieties of rolled sushi using various fruits and *brigadeiro* (chocolate bonbon) for the filling. Hearing of these, many Japanese would be stunned, though I worked up the courage to try them. On first impression, while they were not fantastic, they were not all that bad either. And my impression may have been biased because of my fixed ideas about sushi. These sweet varieties of sushi have been around for about five years now. The fact that they remain around to this day shows that they are considered to be tasty by at least some Brazilians.



Hot Filadelfia



Romeu e Julieta

The First Sushi One Encounters Determines What Sushi Is.

Brazilians who have never tried Japanese cuisine don't think about whether they are eating Brazilian sushi or Japanese sushi. As long as it tastes good, it's good enough. These new varieties of sushi may even be considered as the development of sushi as a dessert, completely apart from authentic Japanese sushi. It may be that our sense of taste is determined by what we first encounter, and what we have gotten used to. This would be true particularly for those who don't have any fixed idea about how the authentic dish should taste. This applies not only to sushi, but to Japanese foods in general, and to soy sauce as well. Mr. Nakaba told me something interesting. At his restaurant, he originally used Sakura soy sauce for teppanyaki. He then switched to Kikkoman soy sauce when it was made available by importers. He immediately got complaints from customers, who said they missed his usual soy sauce and were unhappy with the taste of this replacement. "This doesn't mean that Kikkoman soy sauce does not taste good, but simply that Sakura is familiar to second-generation Japanese Brazilians." At present, his restaurant has to use Sakura, even though, as Mr. Nakaba said with a wry smile, "for us Japanese, Kikkoman is superior in quality and tastes better." He adds, "Sushi tempura seems bizarre to me, but it has been accepted by second-generation Nikkei without any resistance. As long as the locals like it and it tastes good to them, I can't find any problem with that."

Nostalgia and Unbridled Creativity

In reviewing Japanese foods in Brazil, we came to realize that the contributions of the Nikkei and the progress in localization were getting blurred together. Two keywords emerged in my mind. They are nostalgia and unbridled creativity. The flavor of hand-made tofu arouses a nostalgic feeling, while sushi tempura and fruit sushi represent creativity unrestrained by tradition. For their strong nostalgia for Japanese foods, early Japanese immigrants used ingenuity in their constant trial-and-error efforts to make Japanese or Japanese-style foods. In contrast, later generations of Nikkei have had no such nostalgia for Japanese foods, and non-Japanese Brazilians are displaying creativity with wild abandon. What we learn from the difference between them may totally depend on us.

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