

**“JAPANESE IN THE SAMBA”: JAPANESE BRAZILIAN MUSICAL  
CITIZENSHIP, RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND TRANSNATIONAL  
MIGRATION**

by

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**“JAPANESE IN THE SAMBA”: JAPANESE BRAZILIAN MUSICAL CITIZENSHIP, RACIAL  
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This doctoral dissertation is an ethnographic study of musical culture among Japanese Brazilians in São Paulo, Brazil. Specifically, the study explores how the musical culture of this community has changed in recent years as a result of the *dekasegui* movement, the migration of hundreds of thousands of Japanese Brazilians who have traveled to Japan since 1990 in search of work. In order to explore these questions, I conducted fieldwork between May and November of 2003 on three musical groups, Zhen Brasil, Ton Ton Mi, and Wadaiko Sho, each of which have found different ways to invoke, contest, and reinvent their Brazilian and Japanese musical heritages. By exploring these groups' musical practices, texts, dance, costumes, and discourses of self-definition, this study offers insight into shifts in the ethnic self-definition and racial consciousness of the Japanese Brazilian community that have taken place as the result of face-to-face contact between Japanese Brazilians and Japanese under the conditions of contiguous globalization. This study contributes to our current understandings of the impact of circular forms of migration on the musical culture and ethnic identity of diasporic communities in the contemporary world.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The title of this dissertation, “Japanese in the samba,” refers to an often-repeated Brazilian phrase that means “someone is playing music badly.” While in English, the word “samba” refers to a musical genre, in Portuguese it also refers to the place, gathering, or circle within which samba music is played. An emblem of community cohesion, joyful revelry, and friendly interaction, but also of cunning and trickery—the qualities that Brazilians see as most essential to their national character—samba is a circle that marks a boundary, including some and excluding others of those who would enter its communal space. And Japanese Brazilians, marked as perpetual outsiders to this circle, have come to represent the anti-samba within the parlance of samba practitioners. With a population of more than 1.5 million, the Japanese Brazilian community constitutes the largest population of Japanese descendents living in any country outside of Japan. Since the 1930s, official discourses have championed a unitary Brazilian national identity created out of the seamless hybridization of European, African, and Native American cultural forms. Within the logic of this model, all citizens were understood to be *mestiço*, (mixed-race) and therefore equal. However, the idea of racial democracy has silenced political discussion about the continuing importance of race in Brazil (Hasenbalg 1979, 258). According to Twine (1998, 8), the “mythology of the Brazilian racial democracy is still embraced and defended by non-elite Brazilians” and is “a primary obstacle to the development of a sustained and vital antiracist movement in Brazil.” Indeed, for many Brazilians, including the Japanese Brazilians who are the subjects of this dissertation, the

myth of racial democracy renders discussion of “prejudice” and “racism” in Brazil untenable. This triadic myth of national origins continues to engender “common sense”<sup>1</sup> exclusions of Japanese Brazilians from national belonging.

In this dissertation I argue that musical discourses surrogate more explicit forms of public discourse about race. Indeed, music has an important role in national discussions of *mestiçagem* (hybridity). Since the 1930s, when the Vargas regime elevated samba to the status of national icon, samba has been intimately tied to Brazilian nationhood. “In the 1930s samba emerged from marginality to be exalted as an authentic expression of Brazilianness” (Rocha 2002, 55). The investment of the Vargas regime in samba was part of a larger process of erasure of regional difference. According to Schwartz:

It was *mestiço* culture, which, in the 1930s, emerged as the official representation of the nation. In the end, like any nationalist movement, the birth of national symbols is an ambivalent process: a play of power in which private interests take on public meanings. (1998, 192)

Samba continues to stand as an unequaled marker of *brasilidade*. However, samba has also been a highly contested artistic medium, used by dissenters to circulate alternative public discourses.

In opposition to the official discourse of racial democracy, Japanese Brazilians have maintained a distinct ethnic identity and championed a model of “a joining rather than a mixing of different identities, as the creation of a multiplicity of hyphenated Brazilians rather than a single, uniform one” (Lesser 1999, 5). Given the important role music has played in the construction of a national Brazilian identity, it is not surprising

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<sup>1</sup> Here I am invoking Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of “commonsense” or *doxa* as the invisible everyday assumptions that people use to understand their world. Moreover, following Gramsci (1971), I mean to suggest that such commonsense assumptions represent the assertion of hegemonic meanings, ideals and interests.

that music also has been central to Japanese Brazilian ethnic self-definition, with the community sponsoring a wide range of musical activities, including singing competitions and concerts of Japanese classical and folk music (Hosokawa 1998, 2000; Olsen 1982, 1983, 2004; Satomi 1998, 2004).

Since 1990, political and economic changes in both Japan and Brazil have led hundreds of thousands of Japanese to seek work in Japan. These return immigrants are referred to as *dekasegui* (migrant guest workers). I contend that this large-scale pattern of return migration destabilized previous understandings of Japanese Brazilian ethnic identity and that music has been an important space for reconfiguring Japanese Brazilianness. Specifically, I suggest that Japanese Brazilians have begun to invest more strongly in the Brazilian component of their cultural heritage, and in some cases, to stress the common ground between Brazilian and Japanese social and cultural forms. Focusing on three musical groups, Zhen Brasil, Ton Ton Mi, and Wadaiko, I explore the different ways musicians have been impacted by the *dekasegui* phenomenon, arguing that for these groups, music becomes an important way to reconfigure Japanese Brazilian selves.

Having grown up among the Chilean exile community in the San Francisco Bay Area, the child of a North American activist bound to this community through the ties of political solidarity and cultural affinity, I identify strongly with the Latin American cultural and social forms that shaped my childhood. I became interested in Japanese descendants' identifications with Latin American music because, as in my own case, they cannot be explained in terms of ethnic and racial solidarity alone. Rather, the complicated self-definition and music making of Japanese Brazilians pushes us to find new conceptual

tools to model cultural encounters that take place at the interstices of ethnic and racial milieus.

## **1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **1.1.1 Nikkei Immigration**

In 1908, the first Japanese came to Brazil, a group of 781 immigrants who sailed for two months on the *Kasato-Maru* seeking relief from overpopulation and poverty in rural Japan (Cintra 1971; Lesser 1999; Lone 2001; Saito 1961; Saito and Maeyama 1973; Staniford 1973). In Brazil, the abolition of slavery in 1888 left landowners seeking new sources of laborers to work the coffee and cotton plantations that were the mainstay of the Brazilian economy. After what was deemed to be an unsuccessful experiment with European laborers, who were seen as anarchists and rebels after they rejected sub-standard working conditions and the delayed payment of salaries, land barons began to look to Asia for what they believed could be the source of a more docile workforce. Meanwhile, in Japan, the Meiji government, contending with overpopulation and food shortages, began actively encouraging the expatriation of the rural population to Manchuria, and later, to the Americas. It was hoped that colonies of Japanese nationals would not only absorb the excess rural population but also provide food supplies from these new lands. Between 1908 and the outbreak of World War II, 190,000 Japanese came to Brazil, mostly to the rural areas of São Paulo and Paraná states, where they had contracts to work on Brazilian-owned plantations (Yamanaka 1996, 71). However, these

Japanese immigrants, like their European predecessors, found the working conditions abysmal, and many broke their contracts within a few months of arrival. With the help of subsidies from the Japanese government, a large number of these Nikkei Brazilians bought their own small farms, and soon developed a web of small business and cultural organizations, Japanese language newspapers, schools and, eventually, radio and television broadcast shows.<sup>2</sup>

After a suspension of immigration during World War II, a second wave of immigration took place between 1953 and 1973, bringing an additional 60,000 Japanese to Brazil before the Japanese government discontinued its emigration program (Yamanaka 1996, 71). Unlike the earlier wave of immigrants, many of the Japanese who came to Brazil in this second wave were highly educated, male (unlike the families that migrated together in the first wave), and had the intention of staying permanently. Since the 1970s, second- and third-generation Brazilians who grew up speaking both Japanese and Portuguese have progressively moved into urban white-collar occupations, and away from agriculture. There are now more than 1.5 million Japanese Brazilians, and overall the community has been extremely prosperous, rising well above the national average in both education level and earnings, and participating widely in the realm of Brazilian politics (Bernardes 1995).

Unlike European and African immigrants to Brazil, after nearly a century of Japanese immigration, people of Japanese descent in Brazil are not considered “Brazilian” in popular discourse, and are regularly referred to as “Japanese,” even when

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<sup>2</sup> The word Nikkei derives from Nikkeijin, which is often used by both Japanese and Japanese diasporic communities to refer to Japanese descendants living outside of Japan. It derives from the Chinese characters “sun line people,” where sun is the first character of the name “Japan.” Combined with a country of residence, such as “Nikkei Brazilian,” the term Nikkei is often used by Japanese communities overseas to signal a continued ethnic identification with Japan. I will use this term interchangeably with Japanese Brazilian. See Roth (2002, 23-34) for a discussion of the etymology of the term “Nikkeijin.”

their families have been in the country for many generations. In part because of this external pressure imposed by the larger Brazilian culture, Japanese Brazilians have maintained a strong sense of their ethnic identity as something that distinguishes them from the larger Brazilian population. For some Japanese Brazilians, music making has been an important factor in maintaining a separate ethnic identity (Olsen 1982, 1983, 2004; Hosokawa 1998, 2000; Satomi 1998, 2004). Japanese language song competitions have been important in “promoting strong affective experiences of belonging among participants” (Hosokawa 2000, 96-7) from the Japanese Brazilian community. The first Japanese language song competitions, known as *nodojiman*, were organized in 1949 and included the singing of Japanese popular songs (*kayōkyoku*), as well as Japanese and Western art songs. *Minyo* (Japanese folk music) associations, which were somewhat less stable than the *nidojiman*, promoted the competitive singing of Japanese folk songs. In both of these competitions, live musicians were originally used. Later, in the 1970s, the *nodojiman* competitions were slowly taken over by karaoke competitions, which use recording technology to provide the background soundtracks for competitors who sing the latest Japanese popular songs in Japanese. In many cases, second- and third-generation Nikkei Brazilians who participate in these competitions do not have the Japanese language skills to understand the meanings of the sung texts. Rather, they experience an emotional connection to what is felt as a family and not a functional language, a language that can consolidate their sense of belonging to a subculture (Hosokawa 1998, 153).

While singing contests have been an important part of Japanese Brazilian musical life, they are not the only spaces of music making among the community. Since the

middle of the century, the Okinawan community in Brazil has offered concerts of *koto* (the thirteen-stringed zither), *sanshin*<sup>3</sup> (three-stringed plucked lute), and *taiko* drum ensemble music. Approximately ten percent of Brazil's Nikkei community is of Okinawan descent (Lesser 2002, 52). Meanwhile, Naichi (mainland) Japanese descendants continue to support a rich culture of *shamisen*, *koto*, *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute), and *taiko* musical practice (Olsen 1983, 55). Cultural associations in each of these communities offer weekly classes, sponsor regular concerts, while Japanese Brazilian musicians perform at important celebrations such as weddings and the yearly Obon festival, a Buddhist event that honors the souls of the dead.

### **1.1.2 Ethnicity in Brazil**

While the song competitions and other musical events discussed above may strengthen the Nikkei's sense of belonging to a subculture, some researchers have suggested that such staging of Japaneseness may also strengthen Japanese Brazilians' position in relation to the larger Brazilian society, in which Japanese Brazilian ethnicity is seen in a partially positive light (Tsuda 2003). Specifically, Japanese Brazilians are often seen as harder working and more honest than other Brazilians. Many Japanese Brazilians see their Japanese cultural heritage as the source of positive qualities that distinguish them from the larger Brazilian population. Tsuda argues that because of their economic successes, Japanese Brazilians are seen as a positive minority:

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<sup>3</sup> The Okinawan *sanshin* is slightly smaller than the *shamisen*, the traditional three-stringed plucked lute of mainland Japan. Traditionally the body was covered with snakeskin and the black wood of the *kuruchi* tree, unlike the *shamisen*, which is made of cat or dog skin and the wood of the *sakura* tree. Synthetic-headed versions of both instruments are now available.

Because of their social success, urban middle-class status has now become a distinctive ethnic attribute that defines the Brazilian *nikkeijin* as “Japanese” and distinguishes them from the rest of Brazilian society as a socioeconomically privileged positive minority. Because of strong class consciousness in Brazil, socioeconomic status is a quite effective means to differentiate ethnic groups (Tsuda 2003, 67).

Tsuda goes on to argue that as a positive minority, Japanese Brazilians actively promote and maintain ethnic difference from other Brazilian groups:

Japanese Brazilians are not barred from assuming a majority Brazilian identity by ethnic discrimination and marginalization, but self-consciously prefer to retain their “Japanese” minority status (Tsuda 2003, 254).

However, economic prosperity among minority populations does not guarantee that there are no social stigmas associated with that minority status. And while Japanese Brazilians may be valued for their presumed honesty and hard work, they are also constantly reminded of their outsider status. Moreover, while positive images of Japanese Brazilians do circulate in television and print media, there are also many representations of Japanese Brazilians as bucktoothed, accented buffoons, images that predominated in previous decades. As my research shows, assuming majority Brazilian identity is extremely difficult for Japanese Brazilians, who find themselves ridiculed when they attempt to enter into Brazilian musical venues, and their “positive minority” status becomes questionable as soon as we widen our perspective to include other measures of status than economic prosperity.

It is probably more accurate to approach Japanese Brazilian ethnicity as a model minority. According to Shimakawa, “model minority” is an “oxymoronic” term that in the U.S. context “embraces Asian Americanness as exemplary of the correct embodiment of Americanness even as it marks that group out as distinguishable from ‘normal’ Americanness by virtue of its racialized minority status” (2002, 13). In the same way that

Japanese Brazilians are praised for their exemplary qualities, in the U.S. context, Asian Americans are praised for their ability to surpass white Americans in their embodiment of American “citizenly values and practices (including subjection to the law, heteronormative and patriarchal ‘family values,’ and especially the pursuit of higher education)” (Ibid.). However, their ability to symbolize these values for white citizenry is based upon their continuing embodiment of unassimilable abjection. In the Brazilian context, the positive attributes for which Japanese Brazilians are praised are not seen as central to Brazilian national identity, and therefore mark Japanese Brazilians even more ferociously as outsiders.

An excellent study by Lesser and Mori (2003) helps to explain the contradictory status of Nikkei Brazilians. In their study of attitudes towards recognized Brazilian ethnic groups they asked participants to rank recognized ethnic groups (Whites, Blacks, Arabs, Jews, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Brazilians for the Northwest of the country) in several categories.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the researchers were interested in understanding which ethnic groups are seen as sociable, hardworking, strong, agreeable, beautiful, friendly, tolerant, hospitable, and patriotic.

With regards to Japanese Brazilians they discovered the following:

A series of stereotypes about Nikkei were interpreted very differently in social and in professional spheres. Thus while the notion that all Nikkei are hard working and smart leads to certain social advantages, it leads to an equal number of disadvantages. Put differently, the images that seem to lead people to have positive images of Nikkei in certain spheres also make them “problematic” in others. For Example, when we analyzed our data in aggregate, we found that Nikkei were seen positively in all areas except those which might be defined as “bem brasileiro,” a widely used phrase that suggests the long-held notion that the

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<sup>4</sup> For this study a research team completed and analyzed 650 questionnaires collected in the city of São Paulo, a metropolis with a total population of 9.8 million people. Information was collected about the social class, gender, age, and occupation of respondents, as well as their rankings of different Brazilian ethnic groups. They also did a qualitative study of images of Asians in Brazilian advertising.

strength of the Brazilian people is their cordiality...Furthermore, most people responded negatively when asked if Nikkei “felt Brazil as their homeland.” In sum, while Nikkei were seen as highly sociable, hard working, strong and nice, they were not seen as particularly good looking, tolerant, hospitable or patriotic (Lesser and Mori 2003, 91).

The price of being seen as better than members of other Brazilian ethnic groups in some respects, is that Nikkei Brazilians are ultimately seen as un-Brazilian. While Japanese Brazilians may seek to maintain their minority status in so far as it helps them to accrue economic benefits, that accrual comes at a price, and ultimately, may not be reducible to a question of personal choice. Moreover, while many Japanese Brazilians maintain a sense of themselves as different from mainstream Brazilian culture, they also identify very strongly with Euro Brazilians, an identification that is reflected in the high rates of intermarriage among White and Japanese Brazilians. Among the great-grandchildren of Japanese immigrants to Brazil, over sixty-one percent intermarry,<sup>5</sup> usually with White Brazilians.

Questions of ethnicity are even more complicated for Okinawan-Brazilians, who make up ten percent of the Japanese Brazilian population. The question of how to relate to Japan and Japanese culture is complicated by the deep resentment that many Okinawans feel towards the mainland Japanese. The Okinawan occupation by Japan in 1879 led to the suppression of the Okinawan language and Okinawan cultural forms. Many Okinawan-Brazilians continue to identify strongly with their Okinawan heritage, differentiating themselves from Japanese Brazilians whose families came from the

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<sup>5</sup> Lesser, Jeffrey. “Asians in South America.” World Culture Encyclopedia: South America, <http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Asians-in-South-America.html> (accessed December 4, 2007).

mainland of Japan. However, Okinawan ethnic identity is rarely acknowledged by non-Nikkei Brazilians.

### **1.1.3 The *Dekasegui* Experience**

In the 1980s, global economic forces once again impacted the Brazilian Nikkei community. Brazil's economy took a steep downturn in the late 1980s. Facing the low wages that even white-collar jobs were paying—and in some cases, unemployment—many Japanese Brazilians joined the flood of Brazilians who sought economic relief by expatriating. Approximately 1.4 million Brazilians went abroad in search of work between 1986 and 1990 (Yamanaka 1996, 73). At the same time, the economic boom in Japan left Japanese manufacturers scrambling to find unskilled laborers to take on the dangerous and difficult production jobs that many Japanese nationals were loath to accept. Realizing they would have to loosen tight immigration laws in order to provide this unskilled labor force, in 1990 the Japanese government implemented new immigration laws that allowed first-, second-, and third-generation Japanese Brazilians to enter the country on one- to three-year work visas. They believed that Nikkei Brazilians' Japanese racial and cultural heritage would make them more adaptable to the Japanese cultural environment than other non-Japanese laborers. For Japanese Brazilians, who had long idealized Japan and things Japanese, Japan seemed more accessible than other transnational destinations. Between 1990 and 1996, almost 200,000 Japanese Brazilians immigrated to Japan where, in a relatively short time, they could earn salaries that were many times greater than what they could earn in Brazil, even in the white collar sector (Yamanaka 1996, 83; Linger 2001, 26; Roth 2002, 16). A large number of these

immigrants later returned to Brazil and/or shuttled back and forth between the two countries, a pattern of cyclical migration that has had a profound impact on the Brazilian Nikkei community and beyond. Indeed, investment by return migrants has fueled economic growth in several communities, particularly in São Paulo state, and established Japanese Brazilians as an important consumer constituency.

While economic motivations were important for these immigrants, many Brazilians went to Japan with a desire to know the country that had been idealized by parents and grandparents. In the years before the “return” migration boom, many Japanese Brazilians saw Japanese culture as the embodiment of ideals such as community cohesion, dedication to work, and respect for elders, which were understood to be lacking in the mainstream of Brazilian culture. Toma Carignato describes this idealization of a Japanese homeland, which had a nostalgic pull even for Japanese Brazilians who had rejected much of their cultural heritage, “Brazilian *dekasegui* tried to re-connect with the culture they had idealized. They tried to recover the traditions, which, in the process of integrating into Brazilian society, they had often ignored or avoided accepting” (2002, 63).<sup>6</sup>

Dishonest labor contractors, abysmal working conditions, and strained relationships with Japanese bosses and co-employees led many Brazilian Nikkei to reevaluate their relationship to Japaneseness, question their idealized assumptions of Japanese cultural superiority, and reconsider their relationship to Brazilian national identities. After a lifetime of being referred to as “Japanese” in the Brazilian context, *dekasegui* workers encountered a Japanese populace that often regarded them as suspicious foreigners. Faced with an unruly Japan that could not be contained by frozen

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<sup>6</sup> All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

idealizations of distant sojourners, the *dekasegui* were forced to radically rethink their relationship to their Japanese heritage. While *dekasegui* found different paths through this unknown territory, for many, idealizations of Japanese difference were shattered in the face of dangerous working conditions, xenophobia, and the shock of encountering an unfamiliar social-scape so different from the memories of parents and grandparents who had emigrated to Brazil (Linger 2001, 28; Roth 2002, 34-36; Yamanaka 1996, 83-86). While some of these Japanese Brazilians have stayed in Japan finding ways to inhabit Japanese society as marginalized workers, many have returned to Brazil, initiating a large-scale reevaluation of Japanese Brazilian identity in the Brazilian context. As I will suggest, this reevaluation, while far-reaching, has taken many forms, music being a particularly rich site to examine the affects of this circular migration pattern upon the Nikkei Brazilian community.

## **1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Departing from earlier studies in ethnomusicology that represented culture as a fixed system providing a unitary base-line from which musical change can be measured (Blacking 1978; Kartomi 1981; Nettl 1985), I locate my own study among more recent ethnomusicological work that understands culture to be a set of resources. Such resources are inherited from a complicated and evolving pool of historical and geographical sources that people politically deploy in creative response to their specific circumstances (Keil 1985; Mientjes 1990; Erlmann 1990; Blum and Hassanpour 1996). Thinking about

culture in these terms allows us to view new forms of music making not as the rupture of “traditional” performance modes—that are assumed to be stable entities that can be more or less faithfully repeated in new contexts—but as the active reworking of inherited forms such that they become meaningful in ever-changing social worlds:

Thinking of the past as a resource pool for expressive culture and the present as an open-ended field of possibilities parallels the way anthropological thought has moved from the self-regulating, enclosed-culture model to the shifting, strategic view of local action. (Slobin 1994, 248)

There are several theoretical motivations for using this model of culture. First, abandoning the model of a unitary cultural baseline throws into relief the fact that ethnic groups such as the Japanese Brazilians in this study are by no means monolithic in their life experience or the ways in which they self-identify. Rather, individuals or small groups within a larger ethnic community mobilize cultural and musical resources in a variety of ways as they seek to understand their relationship to their local, national, and international contexts. Indeed, the Japanese Brazilian community is neither static nor monolithic, but rather involves the evolution of many different subject positions that reflect the different strategies that Japanese Brazilians have used to negotiate the different contexts in which they find themselves. “All Nikkei have multiple identities...whether it is deployed subjectively or analytically, the concept of ‘Nikkei’ is necessarily characterized by flexibility and soft boundaries” (Hirabayashi et al. 2002, 344). I therefore take as a central tenet of my study the idea that Japanese Brazilian identity is constantly renegotiated by members of the Brazilian-Nikkei community, and that within that community there may be many different ways to conceptualize and enact Japanese Brazilianness through musical performance.

Second, this fluid notion of culture emphasizes the agency that individuals and small groups have as they invent cultural practices in order to articulate identity. These identities are not fixed and essential, but “from a historical point-of-view, relational, and conjectural” (Waterman 1990, 367). As Waterman goes on to suggest, such a focus on agency should not lead us to view social actors as free-floating agents who are unencumbered by external forces as they redefine themselves. Rather, we must remain attentive to the economic and political constraints and community contexts that these social actors must negotiate. “Diasporic identity is not invented as a free expression of group will; it is improvised under pressure from within and without” (Slobin 1994, 248). Social and musical life is better seen as growing out of the creative encounter between individuals and groups as they find paths through the social, political, and economic restraints and expectations that are imposed upon them. It will therefore be important in my study to attend to the political, economic, and symbolic terrains within which Nikkei musicians create and perform music, while celebrating the creative ways with which these musicians negotiate the complex worlds where they find themselves.

While I believe that the concept of identity will be a useful tool in understanding the diasporic music making of the Japanese Brazilian community, I would also like to remain attentive to the complexities and limitations of using identity as a conceptual framework. It is my belief that while identity has become an important concept within ethnomusicology, it has sometimes been used without sufficient attention to the tacit psychological and sociological assumptions that are attached to concepts of identity, or to the rich debates surrounding identity in other fields of thought. It will therefore be one of the goals of this study to examine and expand the concept of identity as it has been

mobilized within the ethnomusicology literature by engaging recent work on identity in the fields of ethnic studies (Shimakawa 2002; Palumbo-Lui 1999; Muñoz 1999), cultural and post-colonial studies (Hall 1990, Bhabha 2004) and feminist theory (Irigaray 1991; Butler 1990, 1993).

Appreciating the diverse contexts that affect the music making of sub-cultural groups has led several ethnomusicologists to emphasize the importance of circular links between different types of spaces and their impact on music making practices (Erlmann 1990, 1996, Turino 1993, 2000; Waterman 1990). In order to understand the complex and multivalent ways that Japanese Brazilians musically construct identity, I will use a triadic approach, analyzing Nikkei Brazilian identity formation in relation to local, national, and global contexts. Following Hirabayashi et al. (2002), I will argue that music serves to forge complicated understandings of Japanese Brazilianness that involve negotiating relationships: 1) within the Japanese Brazilian community; 2) among Japanese Brazilians and other Brazilian ethnic groups; 3) transnationally, between Japanese Brazilians and Japanese communities in Japan and in other diasporic communities in the Americas. If, as I contend Japanese Brazilian identity develops partly in relation to larger transnational events, then it is not sufficient to understand the identity formation of this community focusing narrowly upon the local Brazilian context.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this dissertation I explore the impact of the *dekasegui* movement on the music making and identity formation of Japanese Brazilians in São Paulo, Brazil, between 1990

and 2003. Focusing upon the groups Zhen Brasil, Wadaiko Sho, and Ton Ton Mi, I examine the ways that Brazilian musicians, as well as their networks of audiences and patrons, have responded to the changes that were initiated by the *dekasegui* phenomenon, arguing that this new circular migration pattern has initiated a complex re-evaluation of Nikkei identity that can be fruitfully explored in both the content and contexts of Japanese Brazilian music making. My goal was to learn about the stylistic and repertoire choices they make, the forms of community they build in these different contexts, and ultimately, what this music can tell us about the larger processes of identity formation that are taking place in the Japanese Brazilian community.

I chose to focus on these groups because they have each, in their own way, been strongly affected by the *dekasegui* phenomena, finding different artistic responses to the opportunities that transnational migration has made possible, and, in some cases, has foreclosed. Two of the groups, Setsuo Kinoshita and Ton Ton Mi, have successfully found audiences for their music in both Japan and Brazil, while the third, Zhen Brasil has not. Through musical and discursive analysis of interviews with band members, their fans, music industry workers, and Japanese Brazilian community members, I explore the impact of these groups. Why have these groups found success and failure in domestic and international markets? What shifts and compromises, if any, have the groups made in their repertoires and presentation in order to find audiences in new contexts? Who are the national and international audiences that respond to each of these groups respectively?

In order to explore these questions I examine several facets of the music making of these groups. First, I am interested in the specific contexts of the music making itself. Where do they perform, teach, and rehearse their music? Who are their audiences and in

what ways do they consume the music of these groups? Are their audiences primarily Nikkei or Japanese or have they found fans among Brazilians of other ethnic backgrounds? Where are the clubs, competitions, festivals, and private parties in which they perform?

Secondly, I examine the specific musical choices that these musicians make. What repertoires of music do these musicians perform? How have their repertoires changed through time and across different performance contexts? Do they compose their own music or perform pre-composed music? What instruments do they use and combine? What musical styles do they engage, and what innovations to those styles do they develop in their musical practice? What languages do they incorporate into their musical texts? What are their song texts about? What costumes and staging do they use when they perform?

Finally, through personal interviews, I explore the meanings that music making has for these musicians. How did they become musicians? Why is music making important to them? Why are particular stylistic and repertoire choices important to these musicians? How do they understand their relationships to Brazilian and Japanese culture? What are the difficulties and joys that they have found in playing music in different contexts? How have their understandings of these questions changed as a result of contact with Japan?

Ultimately, these questions help me to approach an understanding of the diverse routes of transnational music making that Brazilian musicians have begun to develop in recent years. In particular, my research has uncovered several trends in Japanese Brazilian music making in the *dekasegui* era. Several anthropological studies have found

that the *dekasegui* phenomenon has led to a surge in Brazilian nationalism among Japanese Brazilians who have begun to consciously reevaluate their relationship to Brazilian culture and to self-identify more strongly as Brazilians—a shift that has led to an increased interest among Nikkei Brazilians in Brazilian cultural forms (Linger 2001, 74-94, Roth 2002, 92-117; Tsuda 2000, 64-7). My research suggests that musicians have responded to the *dekasegui* phenomenon by exploring Brazilian musical forms, and that these explorations have become important ways that these musicians reevaluate their ethnic identities. And while we might expect the increased Brazilian national sentiment among Japanese Brazilians to lead to a decreased interest in Japanese musical forms, this does not seem to be the case. Two of the groups I studied use Japanese musical instruments and Japanese-influenced musical styles, while the third incorporates Japanese language texts into their Brazilian musical repertoire. This indicates that for these musicians and their audiences, Brazilian nationalist sentiments are not mutually exclusive with a continued identification with Japanese cultural forms. Rather, I suggest that while previous generations of Nikkei Brazilians tended to see Japanese and Brazilian cultural characteristics and musical forms as mutually exclusive, this *dekasegui* generation of musicians takes a more flexible approach in their musical borrowings, approaching musical performance less as the demonstration of “authentic” Japanese identity than as a celebration of the multiplicity of Japanese identities in the diaspora. Indeed, many of the musicians in my study have begun to explore what we might refer to as “intermediate styles” which may indicate that articulating double identity has become more important for Nikkei Brazilians as a result of circular migration between Japan and Brazil. Specifically, Setsuo Kinoshita has combined Japanese and Brazilian drumming styles,

while Zhen Brasil has introduced Japanese texts and costumes into their performances of Brazilian musical forms. Meanwhile, Ton Ton Mi combines Okinawan traditional instruments, texts, and styles with Brazilian rhythms. For all these musicians, stressing both the Brazilian and the Japanese components of their identity is important.

#### 1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The only researcher to produce monograph-length work about Nikkei Brazilian music is the Brazilian ethnomusicologist Alice Satomi, who is herself a talented Nikkei musician who was a co-founder of the musical group Tarancon. The latter became famous in Brazil for their pan-Latino grooves and their brave criticism of the military regime. Later, as a student of ethnomusicology at the Federal University of Bahia, she undertook two remarkable studies of Nikkei music making in São Paulo. Her first study, a masters thesis entitled, “Drops of Rain on the Roof: Okinawan Music in São Paulo”<sup>7</sup> (1998) is an encyclopedic historical study of Okinawan Brazilian music. In this well-documented study, which traces the development of Okinawan musical practice in Brazil from the first decades of Nikkei Brazilian immigration through the present, Satomi pieces together the scant references to Okinawan musical practices in Japanese and Brazilian print sources. She also undertook several months of intensive participant observation in the Okinawan Brazilian musical scene, and uses her data to describe the development of Okinawan music associations and the emergence of formalized pedagogical methods for

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<sup>7</sup> My Translation.

classical and folk instrumental and vocal styles. Meanwhile, she documents recent compositions by Okinawan Brazilian masters. A compelling part of her study is the transcriptions and lyrics for several traditional and newly composed pieces that she includes, which reveal the hopes and doubts of the older generation of Okinawan Brazilians. In the second study, “Speaking Dragon: Ethnicity, Ideology, and Cultural Transmission in Brazilian *Koto* Music” (2004) she takes a similar approach, this time focusing on Naichi Brazilian *koto* practice. Specifically, she focuses on the institutionalization of *koto* practice, documenting the emergence of *koto* schools in the pre- and post-World War II eras. Her close ties with the *koto* teachers with whom she worked as a participant observer during her fieldwork give the study a biographical depth that is lacking in the previous work. Also, in this second work, she attempts to account for differences in the ideologies and social strategies of Japanese Brazilians in different eras, arguing that *koto* music has been an important transmitter of changing cultural values. Satomi is sometimes slightly over-polite in her descriptions of power struggles and generational conflicts, perhaps because she feels accountable to the extensive network of contacts and colleagues that she created in these communities. However, this weakness is more than compensated for by the descriptive richness of her texts.

An important contributor to the field of Japanese Brazilian musical studies is Dale Olsen, who, for more than a decade, has painstakingly documented the musical practice of Japanese descendants in Latin America. His recent text, *The Chrysanthemum and the Song: Music, Memory and Identity in the South American Japanese Diaspora* (2004) is the culmination of his previous work on the topic, and includes a chapter on Japanese Brazilian musical practice that expands upon his previous studies (Olsen 1982, 1983).

This extremely impressive work is one of few ethnomusicological studies to compare immigrant music making across an entire continent, as he theorizes the similarities and differences between the music making of Japanese descendants in Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia. As in the other chapters that focus on musical activity in individual countries, his chapter on Brazil includes analysis of interview material, newspapers, archives, literature, questionnaires, and his impressions as a participant-observer in order to describe several facets of music making. Beginning with an excellent overview of Nikkei immigration, he goes on to discuss musical associations and clubs, religious music, regional styles of classical and folk music, visiting artists, local celebrations, Western classical and Brazilian musical genres, and finally, Nikkei attitudes towards music. A later chapter explores the importance of karaoke song competitions.

Ultimately, Olsen seeks a comparative understanding of how and why Japanese musical traditions have been practiced in the Americas, using a series of political and sociological categories to explain the magnitude of arts practice among Nikkei in different parts of the Americas (national origins, social class, period of immigration, location, generation, host country constraints, and host country economic and political conditions). Problematic in Olsen's model is his proposition of an inverse relationship between assimilation and sub-cultural musical practice, in this case the practice of Japanese musical idioms: "Musical awareness of a particular group of people, or a subculture, can measure the cultural identity and cultural assimilation of that group" (1983, 68). According to Olsen's model, Japanese Brazilians who practice Japanese musical idioms should be less assimilated than those who do not. Assimilation, ill defined in Olsen's study, is itself a complicated and multi-dimensional variable involving

acculturation, structural assimilation, spatial assimilation, and generational assimilation (Greenman and Xie 2005). Moreover, as my discussion of Nikkei Brazilian musical discourses shows, the relationship between a music's national origins and practitioners' attitudes about that music and toward their wider social worlds are often surprising and unpredictable.

Another related difficulty with Olsen's study is his understanding of Japanese descendants as a homogeneous group, for whom ethnic self-definition is the main axis of identity formation. This approach does not account for the subtle and multiple identifications of Nikkei Brazilians, which may or may not stress ancestral affiliations. Finally, he does not consider the impact that the *dekasegui* exodus has had on Nikkei Brazilian music making, a question that is central to my study. Despite these theoretical and methodological difficulties, Olsen's book is one of the most informative and compelling studies of Japanese Brazilian music making.

Shuhei Hosokawa, who has written extensively about Japanese music in Latin America, and about Latin American music in Japan, is notable for his theoretical sophistication. His studies of song competitions in Brazil and of Japanese Brazilian participation in carnival are particularly relevant to this dissertation. In "Singing contests in the Ethnic Enclosure of the Post-War Japanese Brazilian community" (2000), Hosokawa describes the development of song competitions since the 1950s. Particularly helpful is his discussion of the complimentary (rather than oppositional) relationship between national Brazilian cultural identity and Japanese Brazilian cultural identity, a theme I develop in this text. Moreover, his careful deconstruction of discourses of authenticity helps to uncover the ideological underpinnings of Japanese Brazilian musical

production. In “Singing in a Cultural Enclave: Karaoke in a Japanese Brazilian Community” (1998), Hosokawa describes the parallel development of Nikkei Brazilian and non-Nikkei Brazilian karaoke scenes. Particularly notable is his careful attention to issues of gender. In his article, “Dancing in the Tomb of Samba” (2004), Hosokawa documents the participation of Japanese Brazilians in carnival celebrations and the conflicting attitudes that such participation evokes. Having meticulously combed Japanese language newspapers for references about Brazil’s yearly carnival, Hosokawa describes multiple modes of carnival participation since the 1930s. He discusses the active participation of Nikkei Brazilians in street parties, as well as their creation of private, ethnically exclusive salon parties. This article is an extremely important corrective for studies that assume that Japanese Brazilians do not participate in carnival, for example Tsuda’s assertion that, “In fact, most Japanese-Brazilian migrants in Japan never participated in samba in Brazil and even scorned it as a lowly Brazilian activity” (2000, 65). Particularly compelling in this study is his attention to the multiple subject positions and cultural strategies that emerge in these debates around carnival. His discussion lays important groundwork for my own work on the Japanese Brazilians’ heterogeneous attitudes toward samba.

There have also been a few scholars of Japanese Brazilian culture who mention Japanese Brazilian music in the context of larger historical discussions. In addition to documenting several songs by early Japanese immigrants to Brazil, Handa provides valuable descriptions of early Naichi and Okinawan Brazilian musical practice (1980, 1987). Koichi Mori, a prolific Japanese scholar at the University of São Paulo, discusses

the revival of traditional Okinawan music in relation to transforming Okinawan Brazilian ethnic self-identity in the post-World War II era (2003).

Finally, several authors have stressed the importance of samba as a marker of subcultural identity among *dekasegui* in Japan. Tsuda (2003) sees samba practice by Nikkei Brazilians in Japan as a way to “resist the pressure to act according to Japanese cultural standards” which, he argues, confers psychological benefits by countering their (misguided) presumptions of Japanese prejudice (Tsuda 2003, 287). While I resist Tsuda’s thesis that Japanese Brazilians are misguided in their ideas about Japanese prejudice, I think it is useful, as Tsuda suggests, to see samba practice as an important reversal of pejorative stereotypes about Brazil. However, Tsuda’s understanding of Nikkei Brazilian samba as places too much stake in the authenticity of Brazilian samba (Tsuda 2003, 284-5).

In contrast, Roth describes the incorporation of samba into a traditional kite festival as a form of *communitas* between Japanese and Brazilian nationals: “It is a vision of a mutually enriching relationship rather than one in which one group is forcibly incorporated by another” (Roth 2002, 137). He goes on to suggest that when Nikkeijin and Japanese are differentiated from each other, it is not because of inherent cultural differences, as is often suggested, but rather, because of the effect of “mediating institutions” (Ibid., 140) that work to segment the workforce. He describes the dangers of explanatory models that focus on cultural differences while excluding the institutional bases of segregation, an observation that will guide my analysis of similar culture-centered discourses in Brazil.

Angelo Ishi's article, "In the Land of the Yen" (2003) includes several song texts by *dekasegui* musicians, which he uses to build a larger argument about *dekasegui* responses to marginalization in Japan. While he mentions the development of samba culture among these migrant workers, more interesting is an informant's suggestion that *dekasegui* musicians feel the need to create music that, unlike music produced in Brazil, responds to their life experiences: "'Our concept was that we did not want to make songs similar to what were already released in Brazil,' Assaoka said. 'We were sure that there were important things that should be told about Brazilians in Japan'" (Ishi 2003, 83). This helps to support the theory, which I will explore in the subsequent chapter, that the *dekasegui* phenomenon has impacted the musical tastes of Japanese Brazilians.

## 1.5 METHODOLOGY

I conducted fieldwork in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, from May through November of 2003. Two of the groups I studied were based in the city of São Paulo (Wadaiko Sho and Ton Ton Mi), while the third (Zhen Brasil) was based in Jundiaí, a small city to the north of São Paulo, one hour away by bus.

Between May and August of 2003, I collected data on the groups Wadaiko Sho and Zhen Brasil. Most weekdays and some weekends were spent in São Paulo where I attended *taiko* classes taught by Setsuo Kinoshita, conducted interviews with Kinoshita, his students and his producers, met with scholars of Japanese Brazilian culture, attended public and private concerts, rehearsals, and cultural events sponsored by the Japanese Brazilian community, and collected printed and recorded material relevant to my study.

During this period I also spent nine weekends in Jundiaí, conducting interviews with the musicians, producers, songwriters, and managers of Zhen Brasil, and collecting printed and recorded material about the group. I also made four weekend trips to other Brazilian cities (Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Susana, and Minas Gerais) to attend and document *taiko* concerts by Wadaiko Sho and other Brazilian-based *taiko* groups.

From September through November of 2003, I began my research with the Okinawan Brazilian group Ton Ton Mi in São Paulo, while finishing my interviews with the other two groups. I also participated in *sanshin* (the Okinawan *shamisen*) classes taught by Tieme Toma and Professor Oyakawa. I conducted interviews with the band members and their producer, attended musical and cultural events in the Okinawan community, interviewed community leaders and scholars, and collected printed and written material pertaining to Ton Ton Mi and the development of Okinawan music in Brazil. I also translated the band's Okinawan language songs, working with a translation team that included myself, Professor Tatsuo Sakima and Paulo Yamashiro.

In summary, I undertook the following activities during my residence in Brazil:

- Interviewed musicians, music students, music industry workers, community members, and academics.
- Attended and video recorded live concerts in Sao Paulo, Jundiaí, Curitiba, Rio de Janeiro, Susana, and Minas Gerais.
- Attended the practice sessions of Wadaiko Sho and Ton Ton Mi.
- Participated in group classes of *taiko* and *sanshin*.
- Visited public and private cultural events in the Japanese Brazilian community including weddings, birthdays, celebrations to mark the ninety-fifth anniversary of immigration to Brazil, and Obon celebrations.
- Collected books and articles about Japanese Brazilian immigration, culture, and musical practices.

- Collected newspaper and magazine articles about Japanese Brazilian musicians, particularly those who were the focus of my study.
- Collected concert notes, commercial and non-commercial music, and video recordings by each of the groups.
- Coordinated Translation of Japanese and Okinawan song lyrics.
- Distributed a questionnaire to *taiko* students.

### 1.5.1 Interviews

During my residence in Brazil, I made contact with musicians, music students, music industry workers, fans, academics and community members. Initial contacts were made in several ways. I contacted two of the groups, Zhen Brasil and Wadaiko Sho, before leaving the United States. I was introduced to the third group, Ton Ton Mi, by the Brazilian ethnomusicologist Alice Satomi. I also contacted American and Brazilian scholars before leaving the United States, many of whom were very generous, helping me to establish contacts within the Japanese Brazilian community. I engaged several contacts in conversation while attending music classes as a participant-observer. At concerts I also approached audience members during intermission and engaged them in conversation. Finally, social events and festivals such as weddings, birthday parties, and public festivals provided excellent spaces for making contacts, largely through introduction.

Interviewees were first engaged in semi-directed conversation, and later were invited to participate in formal, directed interviews. I conducted and recorded these directed interviews with thirty-four people in Portuguese. Four of these interviewees (Setsuo Kinoshita, Adolfo Mizuta, Kenji Toma, and Tiemi Toma) were interviewed more than once. In total, forty-two hours of interviews were recorded. The most challenging

part of doing these interviews was finding time in the busy schedules of the interviewees, many of whom work more than sixty hours a week to make ends meet in the volatile Brazilian economy. In the best cases, interviewees were able to provide quiet spaces in homes and/or offices for interview sessions. When such spaces were not available, interviews were conducted in parks, cafés, and restaurants that provided convenient access for interviewees. When possible, interviews were recorded using digital video technology. However, using a video camera and tripod was sometimes not feasible in the crowded space of bars and restaurants, in which cases interviews were documented with a tape recorder and external interview microphone.

### **1.5.2 Recordings**

While in Brazil I made sound and video recordings of musical events, including live concerts, classes, television, and radio appearances. I also collected pre-recorded materials from musicians and their fans. Video recordings were made using a Sony DCR PC100 digital camera, an external microphone, and a tripod. Specifically, I recorded six *taiko* concerts (including three performances by Wadaiko Sho), one Ton Ton Mi concert, four class sessions with Setsuo Kinoshita and Tieme Toma, and rehearsals by Ton Ton Mi and Wadaiko Sho. Twenty-seven hours of interview materials were also made. In addition to the recordings I made, I collected several hours of previously recorded performances by Ton Ton Mi and Zhen Brasil. These videos, given to me by the musicians and their fans, documented both live and television performances by Ton Ton Mi and Zhen Brasil.

I also made and collected several sound recordings. These sound recordings include 15 hours of taped interviews made with a Sony WM-DC6 stereo cassette recorder and an external microphone. Collected materials include several commercial CD's by the groups that are the focus of this study, as well as by other Japanese and Brazilian artists who have influenced the work of these groups.

## 1.6 ORGANIZATION

In Chapter 2, I discuss Zhen Brasil, a group that formed in 1998 with the aim of challenging Brazilian stereotypes of Nikkei Brazilians, and proving, against the grain of popular conception, that Japanese Brazilians have as much of a claim on the rhythms and *ginga* (swing) of Brazil as other ethnic groups. Playing samba while mixing texts in Japanese, Portuguese, and Tupí, a native Brazilian language, and dressing in costumes that parody mainstream conceptions of the Japanese (a geisha, a samurai, a sunglass-wearing business man, and a martial arts fighter), Zhen Brasil calls attention to the constructed and fluid nature of identity among Japanese Brazilians. Their ironic portrayal of Japaneseness serves to denaturalize race-based conceptions of Japanese difference, while opening the door for a new conception of Japanese Brazilian cultural identity. Through close analysis of interview material, musical texts, repertoire, style, instrumentation, costume, and performance style, I suggest that this group challenges commonsense understandings of Japanese Brazilian bodies. Meanwhile, I argue that their

music inserts Japanese Brazilians into the foundational narrative of Brazil, as they create a revisionist history that plays with the trope of *mestiçagem* that is so central to Brazilian national identity.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the performance and pedagogy of Setsuo Kinoshita, who first went to Japan in 1990. There he studied *taiko* drumming. Later, after returning to Brazil, he established several *taiko* ensembles and became a Brazilian samba percussionist. He has since made a career traveling between Japan (where he teaches and performs samba drumming) and Brazil (where he teaches and performs *taiko*). In recent years he has begun to mix samba and *taiko* drumming styles. He sees his bi-musicality as a way of bridging the two cultures for which he feels affinity. In this chapter, I suggest that bi-musicality may be an important way that some Japanese Brazilians negotiate double identity (Nettl 1983, 50), while healing the wounds of racial abjection. Analyzing performances and interviews with Kinoshita and his students, I suggest that Brazilian *taiko* offers a compelling view of embodied style as an important element of musical practice, while demonstrating the importance of musical and corporeal discourses of race and ethnicity. Moreover, I suggest that Nikkei Brazilian styles of embodiment, which I call “kinesthetic accents,” disrupt assumptions of the Japanese descendants as unassimilable.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the performance of Ton Ton Mi, a São Paulo-based band that mixes Okinawan traditional instruments such as *sanshin* and *taiko* with electric guitar, bass, and keyboard. Performing texts in Portuguese, Japanese, and Okinawan, Ton Ton Mi has found audiences in both Japan and Brazil. Recording with Okinawan musicians from all over the diaspora, and performing in both Brazil and Japan, Ton Ton

Mi has become an important symbol of the continuation of Okinawan culture in the diaspora. In this chapter I explore Ton Ton Mi's musical construction of an Okinawan diaspora. I argue that this diaspora is linked to Brazilianness through the band's exploration of the affinities between Brazilian and Okinawan culture. Specifically, they stress cultural flexibility and the tendency to hybridize cultural forms from a variety of sources as an important link between Brazil and Okinawa. Through close analysis of musical style, text, instrumentation, and extra musical performance strategies such as costume and gesture, as well as thematic interview material with the group, I provide a history of the group and an analysis of their musical strategies of constructing Okinawan-Brazilian identity as they negotiate transnational contexts and social spaces.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I summarize the musical encounters I have described in previous chapters, outlining and relating the different ways these groups musically construct Japanese Brazilian identity.

## 2.0 ZHEN BRASIL'S JAPANESE BRAZILIAN GROOVE

### 2.1 UNCANNY GINGA

Zhen Brasil walks onto the stage of “Sem Limites para Sonhar,” a talk-show hosted by the singer Fábio Jr. To their audience they are both familiar and uncanny. Their costumes cite the most familiar and toxic tropes of Japaneseness. Dressed as a rice farmer with a broad straw hat, lead singer Yuiti Shiraishi squints and bows repeatedly. The kimono and sunglass-wearing samurai, Fábio Fukuda, who serves as the band’s *pandeiro*<sup>8</sup> player and lead singer, holds himself steely erect, grasping the sword at his waist. Hugo Koike, a percussionist and back-up singer is a geisha (or “gaysha,” as the group refers to him), demurely bats his eyelashes from behind a hand-held fan, his milky white face paint setting off the rich colors of his kimono. *Cavaquinho*<sup>9</sup> player and back-up singer Andre Fujiwara’s outdated suit and suspenders mark him as a newly arrived post-war Japanese immigrant. However, the band cites these reified stereotypes of Japanese Otherness with a difference as they take up their instruments and begin to undulate to the grooves of samba. Waves of sound flow through rigid bodies, turning these exquisite statues into living challenges to all notions of what is considered “natural” to Japanese Brazilian bodies.

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<sup>8</sup> A tambourine measuring eight to sixteen inches in diameter, commonly associated with samba.

<sup>9</sup> A four-stringed plucked lute.



**Figure 1: Zhen Brasil in “Japanese” Attire  
(Photo Courtesy of Adolfo Mizuta)**

Part of what is so compelling to me about the Zhen Brasil phenomenon is that during the five years the band was together (1998-2003), their quirky samba piqued the interest of a huge fan base from all corners of Brazil, as attested to by the thousands of e-mails sent to the band. Moreover, as they toured and appeared on the most popular nationally and locally syndicated talk shows, they were, for a time, among the most well known Japanese Brazilian musicians in São Paulo. According to Fábio Fukuda, the band began to disguise themselves to avoid recognition: “After we had been playing for a year and a half, we were recognized everywhere. I had to wear dark glasses.”<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the band never sold more than a few hundred sound recordings. This is partly due to the fact that their CD had not yet been released when they first appeared on television,

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<sup>10</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

leaving them unprepared for the thousands of subsequent requests, via phone and e-mail, for a Zhen Brasil recording.

I believe that the band was able to touch so many fans precisely because their sonic interventions shaped and amplified the sounds of change vibrating through the Japanese Brazilian community, sounds that have transformed the ways Japanese Brazilians see themselves and are seen by other Brazilian ethnic groups. When Zhen Brasil burst onto the musical scene, they wanted to change the ways Japanese Brazilians are perceived both within and outside the Japanese Brazilian community. While intolerance towards Japanese Brazilians has become less vehement in recent decades, the perception that Japanese Brazilians are unassimilable continues to circulate. It is for this reason that representations of Japanese Brazilian inclusion, like those offered by Zhen Brasil, continue to be relevant in post-dictatorial Brazil. As I will show, the group's often contested sonic misbehaving provides a fertile site to explore the ways Japanese Brazilians are striving to transform the cultural and social landscapes they inhabit.

Expertly moving between the sonic and gestural vocabularies of different Brazilian subcultures, they offered a new and compelling vision of Japanese Brazilian selves not bound by deterministic understanding of the relationship between race and culture. Rather than being inherently bound by racial ties to Japanese cultural practices, as often suggested in popular discourse, Japanese Brazilians chose to engage with their own (and other) cultural heritages in different ways and to different degrees. Although Japanese Brazilians are now generally seen in a positive light by other Brazilian ethnic groups (in contrast to earlier decades, when Japanese Brazilians were the targets of substantial ethnic violence), Japanese Brazilians continue to be seen as cut-off from

mainstream Brazilian culture and unable, due to their racial heritage, to master basic tenets of Brazilian sociability. By shaking the foundations of Brazilian racialization, Zhen Brasil calls into question an entire system of cultural and racial categorization that continues to enforce limits on Brazilian citizenship, as it supports the financial and political supremacy of White Brazilian elites. While I am interested in the reasons behind the band’s ultimate commercial failure, I will be more attentive to their successes. In the five years they toured, they activated the imaginations of thousands of fans across Brazil as they found creative ways to explode commonly held myths about Japanese racial and cultural heritage, Japanese Brazilians, Brazilian national identity, and the relationship between them.

## 2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In his song “Mestiço,”<sup>11</sup> Adolfo Mizuta gives voice to the disorientation that ensues when culture categories begin to lose the ability to define Self and Other, insider and outsider:

Ja podeis <sup>12</sup> da patria, filhos	Sons of the fatherland
Ver contente o sol nascente	Contently see the rising son
Somos pardos e patricios	We are mulattos and brothers
Amarelos descendentes	Yellow descendents
Kurosawas de Colombo	Kurosawas <sup>13</sup> of Columbus
Oriundos do Oriente	We come from the Orient
Fortaleza dos quilombos	The strength of the <i>quilombos</i> <sup>14</sup>
A destreza dos kuombos	The skill of the <i>kuombos</i> <sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Mixed-race.

<sup>12</sup> In this line, borrowed from the “Brazilian Hymn of Independence,” by Evaristo do Veiga, the phrase *ja podeis* evokes the word *japones* while *sol nascente* (rising sun), the symbol of the Japanese nation replaces *mae gentil*, (gentle mother) a reference to the Brazilian motherland.

<sup>13</sup> A reference to the Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998).

<sup>14</sup> *Quilombos* were communities built by escaped slaves in the Brazilian backlands and have become an important symbol of Afro Brazilian identity.

Siamo tutti buona gente

*Siamo tutti buona gente*<sup>16</sup>

Sertanejo nascido  
Kamikaze e tapuia  
Samurai sem compromisso  
Chá e cauim na mesma cuia  
Queimo incenso no feitiço  
Sou trabalho ou desserviço  
Sou bonsai das seringueiras  
Pau Brasil das cerejeiras  
Cabraninja, sou mestiço

Born in the backlands  
*Kamikaze e tapuia*<sup>17</sup>  
A samurai without commitments  
Tea and *cauim*<sup>18</sup> in the same gourd cup  
I burn incense at the ritual  
I work and I loaf  
I am the *bonsai*<sup>19</sup> of the rubber tappers  
A Brazil wood cherry tree  
*Cabraninja*,<sup>20</sup> I am *mestiço*.

Ja nem sei mais o que sou  
Ameríndio ou hanguro  
Ja nem sou mais o que sei  
Yonsei, sambei, dancei  
No Japão sou Brasileiro  
No Brasil sou Japonês

I no longer know what I am  
Amerindian or *hanguro*<sup>21</sup>  
I am no longer what I know  
Fourth-generation, I samba(ed), I danced  
In Japan I am Brazilian  
In Brazil I am Japanese

In the last verse of his song he recalls the dilemma that has confronted Japanese Brazilians in recent years: “In Japan I am Brazilian, In Brazil I am Japanese.” Founded by Mizuta in 1998, Zhen Brasil emerged at a moment when old constructs of “Japanese” and “Brazilian” had become too rigid and oppositional to explain the complex transnational consciousness of Brazil’s 1.5 million Nikkei. For many Brazil-based Nikkei, the *dekasegui* phenomenon has contributed to a sense of belonging and allegiance to a Brazilian homeland, regardless of whether they themselves have made the transatlantic trip. Adolfo Mizuta, the founder and sometimes band member of Zhen Brasil, never went to Japan, but like most Nikkei Brazilians, he has friends and relatives who have gone in recent years. Stories of these circular migrants have influenced his

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<sup>15</sup> According to the author, Black Brazilians are referred to as *kurombos* by Japanese Brazilians, perhaps a derivation of the Japanese word *kuromero* (black) or the Brazilian word for Maroon communities, *quilombo*.

<sup>16</sup> “We are all good people” in Italian.

<sup>17</sup> Native Brazilians.

<sup>18</sup> A traditional manioc-based alcoholic beverage made by Native Brazilians.

<sup>19</sup> The Japanese art of cultivating dwarf trees.

<sup>20</sup> *Cabraninja* combines the words *cabramacho* (goat man), a colloquial word from the backlands of Brazil that means a tough guy, with *ninja* (a traditional Japanese fighter-for-hire), thereby combining two models of Brazilian and Japanese masculinity, respectively.

<sup>21</sup> While the author uses the word *hanguro* to mean “mixed-race,” this is not a known Japanese word and may be a derivative of the Japanese word of *anguro* (Anglo).

understanding of Japan, which he now sees as a place where he would not be welcome. Moreover, he imagines the *dekasegui*'s journey not as a return to an idealized homeland, but as an economic exile filled with sadness and longing for Brazil. In his song, "Saudades do Brasil Dekasegui"<sup>22</sup> he imagines the sadness of the *dekasegui*:

As vezes meu olhar	Sometimes my eyes
Puxado, castanho	Slanted and brown
Se sente muito estranho	Feel estranged
E chora só, em solo ancestral	I can only cry in my ancestral land
Brasil do coração	Brazil of my heart
Tão cedo ou mais tarde	Sooner or later
Espera e me aguarde	Wait for me
Ainda revejo seu chão tropical	I still recall your tropical land.

The song's introduction opens with the synthesized sounds of orchestral strings climbing two octaves in a series of rapid major-key arpeggios that mimic the excitement of the *dekasegui* encountering Japan for the first time. These arpeggios are then answered by the sounds of a plucked string, which, evoking the timbre of the Japanese *koto*, descend through the notes of a pentatonic scale, announcing the arrival in Japan. A slow samba rhythm, initiated mid-introduction, juxtaposes Japaneseness and *brazilidade*. The lead voice then enters and in long sentimental tones tells the story of the *dekasegui*'s plight. Despite the physical traits that mark the *dekasegui* as a Japanese descendent, he feels estranged in the land of his ancestors, indicating an interiority that does not correspond to his racially marked exterior. His blood ties to Japan have not insured a sense of belonging.

Alienated from Japan, the *dekasegui* is constructed as a loyal son returning home to the beloved Brazilian fatherland. In the final verse the *dekasegui* uses the imperative to demand that he be embraced upon his future return: "Beloved fatherland receive your

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<sup>22</sup> "Saudades do Brasil Dekasegui," from the compact disc "Zhen Brasil: Os Japinhas do Pagode." Words and music by Adolfo Mizuta and Adilson Campos, 2001, Nordeste Digital Line.

*gaijin* son.” It is this use of the imperative that captures the spirit of Zhen Brasil, who through their performance demand that Nikkei Brazilians be fully accepted as Brazilians. However, this national acceptance is in no way guaranteed. The imagined familial tie is problematic insofar as the term *gaijin* (foreigner) marks the *dekasegui* of Mizuta’s song as an outsider. Is he an outsider because he has been interpellated as such in Japan, or is he an outsider because he has yet to be seen as fully Brazilian by the fatherland that he loves? <sup>23</sup> What is clear is that *gaijin* differentiates the *dekasegui* from other Brazilian sons, and that he demands to be embraced in his difference.

Mizuta’s identification with Brazilian culture did not begin with the *dekasegui* movement. Like many children of immigrants, Mizuta has gravitated towards national cultural forms, and sought friendships and allegiances outside of the Japanese Brazilian community for much of his life. He identifies strongly with Brazilian culture and is exceptional for his depth of commitment to Brazilian regional musical forms, which spans several decades. However, during the 1990s, many of Mizuta’s Japanese Brazilian friends and acquaintances went to Japan in seek of work. During the same period, his father returned to Japan for the first time since his initial immigration to Brazil in the 1930s. According to Mizuta the trip was something of a disappointment to his aging father, whose attempts to contact family in Japan were greeted with a lack of enthusiasm on the part of Japanese relatives. The trip left the family feeling alienated from Japan, even if they continued to incorporate Japanese traditional practices into their lives, such as the tending of the family altar, which Mizuta continued to maintain after his father’s

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<sup>23</sup> Here I refer to Althusser’s theory of interpellation as the process through which ideology “hails” subjects into being. As José Muñoz explains, “For Althusser, ideology is an inescapable realm in which subjects are called into being or ‘hailed,’ a process he calls interpellation. Ideology is the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. The location of ideology is always within an *apparatus* and its practice or practices, such as the state apparatus” (1999, ii).

death. There he lights incense and brings daily offerings of food for the spirit of his now departed father. However, his experiences with Japan reinforced his sense of belonging to the Brazilian homeland, while bringing to the surface questions about ethnicity and belonging that the composer had grappled with for several decades.

### 2.3 ALLIES

The *dekasegui* movement also created a new generation of Japanese Brazilian allies, young musicians eager to immerse themselves in the practices of Brazilian musical nationalism. Mizuta was able to recruit several for the Zhen Brasil project. Of the four Japanese Brazilian band-members who brought Zhen Brasil into the spotlight—all in their twenties when they first joined Zhen Brasil—two had spent time working in Japan. All had family members who had lived there for many years. Of the four, Fábio Fukuda was particularly ardent in his belief that Japan was a hard place for Japanese Brazilians to live. A third generation Japanese Brazilian rock-n-roll fan and guitarist from Jundiaí, he had socialized outside of the Japanese Brazilian community for much of his youth. He recalled hearing a rumor that Zhen Brasil’s song, “Saudades do Brasil Dekasegui,” had evoked homesickness among *dekasegui* in Japan:

When you are in Japan, any Brazilian thing makes you cry. My cousin heard that song at a barbeque and began to cry... The barbeque ended right there. Those people work twelve hours a day in that country where everything is prohibited. If you were used to all this liberty [in Brazil] and you heard that song, it would kill you. I think lot of people returned [to Brazil] because of that music.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

Yuiti Shiraishi, in contrast, reported positive feelings about the time he spent in Japan, where he worked in a Honda factory. A second-generation Japanese Brazilian from Jundiaí, Shiraishi had participated in the activities of his city's *colônia*,<sup>25</sup> including the karaoke circuit where he had become an accomplished *enka* (Japanese popular music) singer. He found that once he had adapted to Japanese forms of socializing, he was able to make a circle of Japanese friends. He came to see his success abroad as contingent upon his mastery of Japanese language and customs.

If Brazilians have problems [in Japan], it is because they don't learn Japanese. I wouldn't expect to go to the United States and not want to learn your customs... They say that the Japanese are cold. Actually, most are receptive, but in their own way. You can't go to Japan and do the same things you would do here in Brazil. Like give hugs and kisses. They don't have that in Japan... Japan was always very isolated, because it is an island. It is very homogenous. Everything is the same. But today, the Japanese are receptive. The young people are receptive, even if the older people are reserved. And the majority of people are receptive to Brazilians.<sup>26</sup>

Upon returning to Brazil, Shiraishi found himself exploring new aspects of Brazilian culture. He took an interest in the then-popular music known as *axé*, a highly percussive genre from Salvador da Bahia associated with Afro Brazilian culture. Ultimately, he became an *axé* dance instructor, teaching the stylized choreographies that accompany *axé* songs, sequences of African-influenced moves culled from several sacred and secular Afro Brazilian dance traditions.

While they differ in their competencies and commitments to Japanese culture and social worlds, what these musicians share with Mizuta is the understanding of how deeply they have been imprinted by their Brazilian upbringings. For some, this

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<sup>25</sup> The term *colônia* is used by Brazilians of Japanese and non-Japanese descent to refer to Japanese Brazilian communities in Brazil. Henceforth I will use the terms *colônia* and colony interchangeably.

<sup>26</sup> Yuiti Shiraishi, personal communication, August 19, 2003.

understanding has foregrounded feelings of belonging to the Brazilian nation-state. However, this identification with Brazil is not a simple re-idealization of nation like previous idealizations of Japan, but rather involves a critical reevaluation of the exclusionary tendencies of the Brazilian racial formation, accompanied by a deep suspicion of cultural categories that have excluded Nikkei Brazilians from full belonging in both the Japanese and Brazilian contexts. According to Yuiti Shiraishi, Brazilians see Japanese Brazilians through a narrow set of categories that ultimately exclude them:

Japanese have to be either reserved and proper, or funny. They play the role of the comedian so people can make fun of them. That is what Japanese are for Brazilians. If you turn on the television you will just see satires of Japanese who are dry cleaners or pastry chefs. That is why Japanese [Brazilians] don't like Brazilians. People make fun of the Japanese. The way they talk, "ne, ne, ne," that is what Japanese don't like. What we [Zhen Brasil] did was to call attention to the Japanese. Japanese are not just that proper thing; we are also Brazilian. We are [Japanese] descendents but we are also the Brazilian people.<sup>27</sup>

An example of one of many dizzying shifts of subject positions that took place during my conversations with members of Zhen Brasil and other Nikkei Brazilians, here Shiraishi refers to himself and other Japanese descendents as "Japanese" in order to mark the prevalent exclusion of Nikkei Brazilians from full Brazilian status. His description of the televised images of Nikkei Brazilians calls attention to the ambivalent nature of media representations, which present a consistently split view of Japanese Brazilians. Shiraishi resists these representations, which, at their best, present Japanese Brazilians as hardworking, honest, traditional, and hopelessly square, and, at their worst, as buck-toothed immigrants, who inspire ridicule with their excessive smiling, bowing, and broken Portuguese.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Even when Japanese Brazilians are described in positive terms by other Brazilian ethnic groups these descriptions are a double-edged sword. Indeed, the very qualities that are admired in Japanese Brazilians also mark them as Other and perpetuate a notion of their not-quite-Brazilian status. Reserve, seriousness, and dedication to work are constructed as binary opposites of those character traits that are widely understood to be essential to the Brazilian national character: sociability, happiness, and the appreciation of leisure. As De Carvalho suggests:

It is interesting that the adjectives used to describe the *Nikkeijin* (hard-working, reserved, responsible, etc.) were those least chosen to describe the Brazilians. In this regard, it should be noted that many *Nikkeijin* do not like being identified with the stereotype, however positive, precisely because it contrasts with the stereotype of the Brazilians (extroverted, cheerful, relaxed, etc.). (2003, 65-66)

Likewise, in their compelling analysis of print media images of Nikkei Brazilians, Lesser and Mori note that beginning in the 1960s, Japanese and Japanese Brazilian immigrants often appeared in commercials to suggest quality and hard work. They go on to link the proliferation of these media images in the 1970s to Brazil's economic miracle, suggesting that Japan became a model for Brazilian economic success.

Certainly the explosion of images in the seventies is linked to Brazil's so-called "economic miracle" and the attempt to suggest that this "miracle" would lead Brazil to a level of international success and wealth similar to that in Japan, whose economic miracle occurred only two decades earlier. (Lesser and Mori 2003, 26)

In the current moment, Japanese Brazilians continue to be seen as model minorities, possessing qualities such as honesty, dedication to work, and technological know-how. Japanese Brazilians are often represented in print media as the symbols of modernity and technological progress. However, this model minority status also casts a shadow, as Japanese Brazilians are constructed as perpetual outsiders and continue to be

objects of ridicule both in the media and in everyday encounters with their non-Nikkei compatriots. As De Carvalho reminds us, “The stereotype of the Japanese and Nikkeijin in Brazil in broadcast commercials and as characters in Brazilian soap operas is of characters who are constantly smiling and bowing, speaking Portuguese haltingly and looking foolish” (2003, 65). Moreover, quotidian violence continues to erupt into the lives of Japanese Brazilians. In my daily passage through the streets and subways of São Paulo, I often witnessed acts of subtle and not -so-subtle violence against Japanese Brazilians. A group of young men riding bicycles through Ibirapuera park pause to circle a Japanese Brazilian man and shout gibberish “Japanese” at him while he tries to escape their circle. In a downtown subway station, young men bow and pull back their eyes with their forefingers, while banging on the window of a subway train to get the attention of a seated Japanese Brazilian man.

Although many of the community members with whom I spoke did not feel themselves to be the focus of ethnic-based prejudice, many could remember individual experiences when they had been touched by violence. This discrepancy may be partly an issue of semantics, as discussions involving the words “prejudice” and “racism” have been largely foreclosed in the Brazilian context by the myth of racial democracy, which has perpetuated the idea of Brazil as a patrimony where miscegenation has eradicated racial inequalities. Fábio Fukuda recalls different kinds of violence that band members encountered when they went out to local clubs:

I have had strange experiences. You are going to flirt and a girl says, “I don’t like Japanese guys.” People confuse us [with other people] all the time. One time this guy came up to me and said, “Mario! Why didn’t you tell me you were back from Japan? How long have you been back?” So I said, “a week.” “Something is different about you,” he said, [so I told him] “I got a tan.” ...Cassio, Brother, and I went to this cowboy joint and a big

guy with a hat said, “Hey, Jap, you have the face of a fag,” ...so I head-butted him. We work these things out. There is no other way. Sometimes people walk by us and laugh. I don’t take it. Hugo doesn’t take it. Andre keeps cool, so does Yuiti. So we were balanced in our reactions.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, Yuiti Shiraishi argued that, in fact, he and his friends were so weary of being laughed at when they went to São Paulo nightclubs, that they tended to go to nightclubs that catered to the Japanese Brazilian community:

People in the colony are still Japanese because we don’t feel good in other places. It's the way that people look at you. Here in São Paulo there are bars just for Japanese [Brazilians]. Why? Because they feel bad when they go to other discotheques.<sup>29</sup>

Stereotyped in Japan as “Brazilian” Others and in Brazil as “Japanese”

Others, many Japanese Brazilians struggle to find space between the hyphens as living, breathing transnational subjects, shrugging off the fixity of the cultural stereotypes that interpellate them both in Japan and Brazil. However, to abandon the cultural categories through which one has understood Self and Other is not a simple matter, but rather a path of disorientation and doubt that has contributed to the alarmingly high rates of depression and other mental illness among *dekasegui* who return to Brazil (Debieux Rosa 2002).

Mizuta’s song “Mestiço” hints at this disorientation, which leaves the narrator in doubt about his own identity and the ability of knowledge to adequately describe an emergent self that exists in excess of that which can be known (“I don’t know who I am any more/I am no longer what I know”). Here Mizuta uses aporia, or the expression of doubt about his identity, to begin the work of destabilizing stereotypical constructs of Japanese in Brazil. Negotiating social constructs that interpellate Nikkei as Japanese and

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<sup>28</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Yuiti Shiraishi, personal communication, August 19, 2003.

un-Brazilian, the song binds together elements of Japanese and Brazilian culture that are commonly seen as contradictory. For example, the song's Japanese Brazilian subject is both "hardworking and a man of leisure" (*trabalho ou desserviço*), "a samurai without commitments" (*samurai sem compromisso*), and as such combines stereotypically Japanese and Brazilian cultural prerogatives. This gesture of grafting together cultural elements that have been cast as binary opposites is symbolized by the image of the (Japanese) cherry tree made of *pau brasil*.<sup>30</sup> In binding together these contradictions, Mizuta threatens the integrity of exclusionary understandings of Nikkei Brazilian selves, and, in the process, shatters social models that have become too antiquated and brittle to explain the living material they are meant to describe.

In "Mestiço," as well as in Zhen Brasil's performance, this binding together or mixing of cultural icons, which we might refer to as a strategy of *mestiçagem*, takes many forms. As I will show, it is informed by majoritarian strategies of nation building, as well as by ethnic challenges to elite models of nation. However, in order to provide the context for Mizuta's eclectic *mestiçagem*, I will now take a more in-depth look at Mizuta's musical biography, which I believe provides an important corrective to previous musical ethnographies of Japanese descendants in Brazil that have tended to frame Japanese Brazilian music making as sub-cultural musical spaces that are separate from other Brazilian musical currents (Hosokawa 2000; Olsen 1982,1983). Likewise, those studies of recent transnational migration between Brazil and Japan that have touched upon *dekasegui* engagements with Brazilian musical forms such as samba have tended to see such musical experiments as Japanese Brazilians' first encounters with Brazilian

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<sup>30</sup> Pau-brasil is a hardwood that was the first natural resources to be exported on a large scale by early explorers and was the genesis of the term "brasileiros" used to refer to merchants of pau brasil wood.

genres. Indeed, *dekasegui* have been described in the literature of transnational migration as outsiders to Brazilian culture who imperfectly recreate Brazilian musical forms only after leaving Brazil for Japan. Tsuda, for example, argues that participants in the Japanese Brazilian samba parade in Oizumi Japan demonstrate a “lack of proper cultural knowledge about samba” (2003, 284). However, Adolfo Mizuta’s rich life history demonstrates the complex and diverse cultural competencies that Japanese Brazilians may call upon as they redefine their national affiliations. Indeed, Mizuta’s life-long encounter with Brazilian musical genres underscores the great diversity of musical experience among Japanese Brazilians, as well the largely undocumented musical encounters that have sometimes taken place between Japanese Brazilians and other Brazilian ethnic groups.

## 2.4 BIOGRAPHY

Mizuta was born in Nova Horizonte, a small town in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Mizuta’s father, a Japanese immigrant from the Fukuoka prefecture, came to Brazil as a teenager in the early 1930s to work in the agricultural sector.



**Figure 2. Adolfo Mizuta Playing the Triangle  
(Jundiaí 2003)**

Later, he married Mizuta’s mother and the family opened a laundry business in the town of Tapas. Mizuta recalls: “My parents say that I spoke Japanese until five but then, because there were no Japanese around, I lost it. My father spoke Japanese. He also taught himself to write Japanese very well.”<sup>31</sup> Of his mother: “She was happy and whistled all day. She sang a lot and learned guitar on her own without any [formal] musical training. She was a Japanese in a strange country. She liked music. She smoked, which was not very common.”<sup>32</sup> According to Mizuta, she accompanied herself as she sang Japanese language songs and later encouraged Mizuta himself to study music. Mizuta knows little of the family history before their trans-Atlantic journey but suspects that his name, Mizuta, which means river, provides evidence of the humble origins of the

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<sup>31</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

clan: “In Japan...the common people did not have last names. When they came here [to Brazil] they needed last names, so they chose names that have to do with nature.”<sup>33</sup>

Later, the family closed their laundry business and made a series of moves in search of agricultural labor, eventually finding more permanent work on the rice and tomato farm of a maternal cousin. He recalls: “Because we lived in small towns in the interior where there were few Japanese, I always lived alongside Brazilians.”<sup>34</sup> Most of the Japanese descendants with whom Mizuta had contact were family members, except during the period that the family worked in Juarez: “It was there that I learned to live with Japanese. There is a big Japanese community there; they even have a baseball team. They had a school where they learned Japanese.”<sup>35</sup> However, Mizuta remembers building his most influential childhood friendships with the northeasterners with whom his father labored. He remembers that in the country, the co-existence of Japanese and Brazilians was common, with many migrants from the northeast of Brazil finding employment on Japanese-owned farms. Moreover, he suggests that it was not unusual for these employees to gain some knowledge of Japanese language and cultural practices:

There are many Northeasterners who worked with Japanese and learned to speak Japanese and eat Japanese food. I have a friend who is a photographer and a [non-Japanese] Brazilian and speaks Japanese with me. When I asked him how he learned he said, “working with Japanese people.” You find many Brazilians here who speak Japanese because they lived in close proximity with Japanese [descendants].<sup>36</sup>

However, the cultural exchange was not unidirectional. Indeed, Mizuta’s first awakening to music was inspired by the musical styles that he learned with these northeastern migrants: “I liked to learn their music, *bãio*, *forró* [Northeastern musical styles]... The

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Northeasterners also like to sing *música caipira* [country music]. They were all *caipiras*. From a young age, even when I lived in the city, I liked *música caipira*.<sup>37</sup>

When Mizuta was fourteen the family moved to the town of Jundiaí, where he still lives today. “I lived in a neighborhood with lots of Blacks who played samba. It was then that I began to like samba and learned to play with this really fun Black guy who showed me how to play the *pandeiro*...I studied samba more or less from 1966 to 1977.”<sup>38</sup> It was also during this period that Mizuta learned guitar. “I learned with friends in school and with a Black neighbor who liked to play.”<sup>39</sup> Among his school friends, Mizuta learned the hits of internationally known English language acts, primarily the Beatles, as well as Roberto Carlos and other musicians from the popular *Jovem Guarda*, the first nationally based rock-n-roll movement to hit the Brazilian soundscape. Later, Mizuta would come to see this rock music as simplistic as he began to admire the poetic and musical explorations of MPB (popular Brazilian music) artists.

I began to like the quality of the music of Chico Buarque and Geraldo Vandre. And then I didn't want to hear more from singers like Roberto Carlos, because I thought they were very mediocre. I even gave up English and American music as well, because I thought that the quality of the music and the poetry was very poor.<sup>40</sup>

As a teenager Mizuta began performing MPB at music festivals sponsored by his high school, and he remembers shocking his White schoolmates by sharing the stage with Black musicians.

I studied in an all-White school and the elites there sponsored music festivals. I brought the Blacks to play at the festival, which caused a stir.

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<sup>37</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 25, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 25, 2003

<sup>40</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication August 25, 2003.

People were not sure what to make of this Japanese [guy] who was mixed up with a bunch of Blacks and playing samba to boot.<sup>41</sup>

However, as his wife Antonia remembers, he repeatedly won over audiences and judges, winning prizes at several festivals. Encouraged by his success, Mizuta went on to form an ensemble of *música caipira* called Vento do Sul, which toured in São Paulo state between 1973 and 1980.

I like samba, but I really like music from here in São Paulo, *música de raiz* (roots music), *música caipira*...In 1973 we formed a regional music ensemble that had more to do with things here in São Paulo State. We played well. We had a drummer, a bass player, and a guitarist [*viola caipira*<sup>42</sup>]. The other musicians were all White. Two sisters, who were friends of ours, played guitar and sang well, so they sang backup for us.<sup>43</sup>

During the same period, Mizuta, now in his twenties, began a career in local politics, working at the town hall as campaign advisor and a city council member, an elected position that he held off and on over the next thirty years. It was there that he met his wife Antonia, a Brazilian of Italian descent, with whom he had two children. He also formed a close friendship with a young mayor who shared Mizuta's enthusiasm for music, and the duo began play *música caipira* and *sertanejo* at local bars. For Mizuta, *sertanejo* is a commercialized and modernized version of *caipira* music.

Caipira music was an older roots music that was what turned into *sertanejo*...*Sertanejo* began in the 1970s...It became *sertanejo* when it entered into the big urban centers and was dressed up in modern clothes with more sophisticated arrangements. *Caipira* [music] was sung by country people who were agricultural workers and is a very rustic style.<sup>44</sup>

According to Mizuta, *sertanejo* is usually sung by duos or trios and features the rhythms of romantic pop or the Paraguayan polka, and, like *música caipira*, features voices that

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<sup>41</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> A ten-string guitar.

<sup>43</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 25, 2003.

sing in parallel harmonies, a third apart. He describes in value-laden terms the language of *caipira* as that of “humble” country workers and “full of mistakes,” and contrasts this rural dialect with the language of *sertanejo*, which “is more sophisticated, with more correct Portuguese.”<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, “*caipira* is sung much more clearly, more slowly...and tells sad stories.”<sup>46</sup>

Eventually Mizuta’s musical experiments with the mayor attracted the attention of a television show host who featured their music on a weekly show.

There was a television program that featured *sertanejo* music. We presented there, and then they began to invite us to sing every week. We didn’t know why, but later they told us that it was because we got a big audience. People called in to say that they liked us...Because it was different, the mayor playing with a Japanese guy.<sup>47</sup>

Mizuta composed several songs for their performances, some of which were noticed and recorded by popular musical acts of the day, such as Selma e Selia. Meanwhile, Mizuta opened a family-run bar in Jundiaí, which showcased local artists. Later, during the early 1980s, Mizuta opened an English language school in a nearby town approximately 80 kilometers from Jundiaí. “There I formed a chorus made up of a group of students who liked to sing...They sang *farró* at shows and festivals.”<sup>48</sup> Mizuta closed his language school in 1985, and it was not until a decade later that he again became involved with musical production.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 25, 2003.

## 2.5 NEW BEGINNINGS

“The next time I got into music was with Zhen Brasil.”<sup>49</sup> In my discussions with him, Mizuta cited many reasons for wanting to start the group, both commercial and social. While his previous musical projects had been basically local in scope, Mizuta hoped to hit upon a musical formula that would find national success. He explained:

I created Zhen Brasil at a time when *pagode* [samba] was popular. My idea was to make a band that was different. Because at that time *pagode* bands were basically Black... I had this idea at the end of [19]97. When I saw [*pagode*] bands, I couldn't distinguish between them, only their names [set them apart]. So I said, let's make a really different kind of band that surprises people. The truth is that the first idea was to put together a group of [Japanese] descendents, Chinese, and Koreans... we wanted to form a *pagode* group made up of Asian descendants who would play samba. But the Japanese colony is bigger here, so it is easier for you to find Japanese [musicians]. Asians do not have a strong presence in samba here in Brazil, and so it would be something different. I was completely convinced that it would have a big impact, and that is exactly what happened. And we learned that it wasn't enough to have a novel image—there had to be talent...it wasn't enough to sing and dance, we had to be able to play as well.<sup>50</sup>

Mizuta hoped to capitalize on the novelty of an all-Asian band playing *pagode*, a musical genre that has been traditionally associated with Afro Brazilians.

*Pagode* is a style of samba that emerged in the 1970s as a response to the commercialization and exclusivity of the Rio de Janeiro samba schools. During the 1960s and 1970s, the samba schools no longer served exclusively as neighborhood organizations as they were joined by members of the Brazilian middle class and elites who had begun to see them as important symbols of regional and national culture (Raphael 1990). Neighborhood samba school members found it harder to participate in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 25, 2003.

all levels of samba school activities, and the schools ceased to function as local gathering places for community music making. The *pagode* movement of the 1970s sought to create new spaces for community music making and revitalize the samba form.

According to Galinsky:

The original *pagode* epitomized resistance on several different levels. As we have seen, the movement responded to the manipulation that musicians and other participants faced in the samba schools by forming a new space for the genre which geographically, economically, and culturally opposed Rio's official culture. Stressing the informal, spontaneous, and communal aspects of the samba, the *pagode* initially defied elite commercialization and co-optation through not having admission fees at its events and remaining first and foremost a community affair in its neighborhoods of origin. (1996, 140)

This Rio de Janeiro-based samba revival both explored neglected samba forms while introducing a new configuration of instruments, which relied heavily on a combination of three percussive instruments, the *tanta* (a small conga-like drum), the *repique-de-mao* (a tenor drum) and the *pandeiro* (tambourine). Played in small gatherings, these drums lend *pagode* a “more intimate sound than the hard-edged *batucada*” of the samba schools (Galinsky 1996, 128). Various string instruments were added to the ensembles, including a four-string banjo, a *cavaquinho* (a small, four-stringed guitar) and guitars. The slower rhythm of *pagode* (as opposed to the carnival samba style) allowed players to explore subtle rhythmic textures and to accentuate the improvisational aspects of the style.

Several recordings of *pagode* were released during the 1980s, and by the second half of the decade, the style had achieved popularity among a wider audience, in Rio de Janeiro and beyond. Performed in concerts and festivals, the new style found commercial success as it was disseminated through radio and record sales (Perrone 1988). Riding the wave of this commercial success came a new wave of *pagode* bands that sought a more international style as they moved away from the intimate, improvisational neighborhood

feel of the roots revival movement. While the earlier wave of *pagode* musicians sang about the daily lives of people in the poorest neighborhoods of Brazil, the later wave of *pagode* became a romantic genre that is less local in its textual references. While the instrumentation of these new groups varies, many have imported electric keyboards, guitar, and bass, as well as brass instruments, particularly in the case of the São Paulo groups, which have developed a style known as *suingue* (swing) or samba-funk, which is strongly influenced by American funk. In contrast to the lush interwoven rhythms of the earlier *pagode* style, this newer style features a thinner percussive texture built on the sounds of the drum set, *pandeiro* and *surdo* (a bass drum hit with a mallet). Moreover, the call-and-response patterns of the more traditional *pagode* were replaced with unison singing (Galinsky 1996).

In the early phases of the Zhen Brasil project, Mizuta contacted an old friend and music collaborator, Adilson Campos, and the two began to put together the songs that would later be compiled as part of Zhen Brasil's first CD project. While the two first intended to work primarily in the *pagode* genre, they ultimately added several tracks interpreting other Brazilian genres. While the diversity of music on the album reflects the composers' eclectic musical tastes and experiences, it also grew out of their concern that *pagode* would be a passing fad that they hoped their band would outlive. "What if we did only *pagode*, and tomorrow *pagode* stops being popular?"<sup>51</sup> Moreover, they worried that if the band was successful, others would attempt spin-off projects to capitalize upon their success: "And we also thought that if we only did *pagode*, tomorrow there would be a

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<sup>51</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

Japanese band playing *farró*. Someone could take advantage of the concept and play *farró*.”<sup>52</sup>

While the composers were, in part, motivated by entrepreneurial concerns, their focus upon national and regional musical genres—including *pagode*, *sertenejo*, and *farró*—is also inspired by a belief in the value of domestic musical practices. Indeed, Mizuta believed that putting together a Japanese Brazilian band that played Brazilian musical genres would be:

A way to bring the beautiful things we have here to the attention of the Brazilian people. We don't have to import things from the outside. These days Brazilians no longer value the things they have. For example they put a guitar in the middle of the *farró*. It is not that I have anything against the electric guitar, but that they should work harder to integrate [the instrument]. Electric instruments are fine, but you should also make children want to play the triangle. Instead of just using the guitar, you can use the guitar and the triangle. You need Japanese [Brazilians] to do these things because Brazilians [of non-Japanese descent] would not be as noteworthy.<sup>53</sup>

While Mizuta is not against the diffusion of international musical genres, styles, and instrumentation, he feels protective of his Brazilian musical heritage. Like many in the *caipira* music scene, Mizuta sees imported music as a threat to traditional musical styles (Dent 2003). He sees himself as a guardian of a musical heritage and feels a responsibility to introduce future generations to Brazilian instruments, repertoires, and musical styles.

The composers modeled Zhen Brasil's instrumentation upon popular São Paulo *pagode* bands, adopting both electric and brass instruments. However, the musical texts and call-and-response patterns that form the vocal lines recall an earlier wave of São Paulo samba from the 1940s, specifically that of Adoniran Barbosa, as interpreted by the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

group Demônios da Garoa. Chronicling, among other things, the lives of Italian immigrants, Barbosa's humorous sambas showed the underside of modernization, while revealing the contradictions of elite discourses of "progress." According to Mizuta:

We were inspired by the São Paulo based samba music of Adoniran Barbosa...[The Demônios da Garoa] are very irreverent and talk about a lot about things from the periphery of São Paulo. [They sang about] the *favelas* [shantytowns] and the lives of common workers, who ride the metro but with lots of humor and happiness.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, the use of irreverent humor allowed Zhen Brasil, like their Italo Brazilian predecessor, to critique Brazilian cultural conventions. In Andre Fujiwara's words, "We made fun of everything. We had a guy dressed like a geisha—we broke some taboos. Although the older generation was resistant, the younger generation thought it was fantastic."<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Fábio Fukuda recalls that nothing was sacred for Zhen Brasil:

We always used double entendre. No matter what you would say, there would always be someone making a joke. You might be talking about something serious, but someone would always make a joke in bad taste. We made fun of Orientals, of them having small penises. We made fun of Black music, of *sertenejo*, of rock.<sup>56</sup>

The band's universal satire of Brazilian social types left no stable position from which to survey the Brazilian social landscape or to draw the insider/outsider line, a form of humor that James English has referred to as (self) parody:

The ethos of such parody is by no means neutral; the element of mockery, of ridicule, has not lost its bite but merely its supposed stability of orientation. The imitated text or genre is made to look ridiculous, but at the expense also of the mimic, who finds herself always somehow implicated in the ridiculous object of her mimicry. (1994, 202)

This strategy of (self) parody is valuable in that it constitutes a site in which the "categories and contradictions of community" can be worked upon as the "fundamental

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<sup>54</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Andre Fujiwara, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

political operations of inclusion and exclusion, identification and otherization” are performed (Ibid., 209).

Turning now to a closer analysis of Zhen Brasil, I would like to tease out some of the overlapping moments of humorous *mestiçagem* in the band’s musical performance which, I will argue, complicate monolithic understandings of *mestiçagem* as a cultural strategy. Indeed, I will suggest that the *mestiçagem* employed by Zhen Brasil pulls in radically different directions, sometimes reasserting the possibility of adequately knowing and representing Japanese Brazilian selves, and at other times calling into question the very processes of signification that seek to establish and reify minoritarian subjects and to constitute the limits of community belonging. We might think of this diverse use of *mestiçagem* as a shuffling back and forth between modern and postmodern strategies of identity formation, a complex dance that answers the contradictory interpellations that call Nikkei Brazilians into existence. What I will refer to as “restorative strategies” involve the restoration of a knowable self out of the shards of previous social models. In contrast, I will use the phrase “postmodern strategies” to refer to artistic responses that are underwritten by a deep suspicion of the ability of social models to adequately describe Japanese Brazilian subjects. While the band makes use of both of these strategies, I will argue that ultimately the postmodern *mestiçagem* of Zhen Brasil tends to amplify rather than foreclose aporia.

## 2.6 PERFORMANCE

Zhen Brasil appeared twice on Fábio Jr.'s talk show as part of "Japanese" theme days, where they performed alongside other guests with some link to Japan and/or Japanese culture (including an Afro Brazilian samba group that toured Japan, Japanese Brazilian hip-hop and belly dancing ensembles, and a Japanese Brazilian soccer player). What the guests share in common is their treatment as oddities that must demonstrate their strange skills to a titillated public. "Did you know that Japanese can dance samba?" Fábio Jr. asks his audience, his quizzical expression making it clear that he is himself skeptical at best. "Japanese samba? I don't understand a thing," he declares. Like many of his compatriots Fábio Jr. refers to his Japanese Brazilian guests as Japanese or simply "*japas*" (Japs). Indeed, even third- and fourth-generation Japanese Brazilians are regularly called *japas* by Brazilians of other racial groups, an ahistorical conflation of Japanese and Nikkei Brazilian culture that sustains the continuing outsider status of Nikkei Brazilians.

Zhen Brasil arrives, dressed appropriately in "Japanese" attire, ready to take up the challenge. Before the band has played a note, Fábio Junior wants to know, "Can you dance with just the *pandeiro*?" as he calls his kimono- and sunglass-garbed namesake onto the stage to demonstrate his skills as a samba dancer. "Hold my sword," demands the UV protected samurai, a phallic offering that a knowing Fábio Jr. refuses with a hearty chuckle. Accompanied by just the rhythm section, Fábio Fukuda proceeds to shake out a respectable if excessive samba, replete with spins and flirty leg flashes that he achieves by pulling back his kimono. His intention, he later explained to me, was to parody the ornate dance styles of Black Brazilian *pagode* performers.

This performance fragment offers a glimpse into the imbedded cultural stereotypes with which Japanese Brazilians must contend on a daily basis. By questioning the group's ability to samba, Fábio Jr. reinforces a widely held view that Japanese racial difference is mutually exclusive with qualities that are understood as essential to *brasilidade*. When Mizuta formed Zhen Brasil, he wanted to show the world that Japanese Brazilians were as Brazilian as any other ethnic group in Brazil.

The deeper message of Zhen Brasil is that people with slanted eyes of the yellow race can play typical Brazilian instruments. This is [the band's] biggest social critique... We wanted to show the ability of these people of Asian descent to acculturate the melodies, rhythms, and instruments of another culture.<sup>57</sup>

On the surface Zhen Brasil's social critique is straightforward. Encountering a racial formation that constructs them as fundamentally un-Brazilian, they set out to prove that Japanese Brazilians can take part in the most Brazilian of music making. While the original aim of the band was to perform many types of regional Brazilian music, it soon became clear that audiences were most impressed when the Japanese Brazilian band played samba. Repeatedly, it was the ability of these musicians to interpret samba grooves that surprised and amazed Brazilian audiences, who had long internalized a notion of Japanese Brazilian culture as diametrically opposed to African-influenced Brazilian culture forms.

A central facet of Brazilian racial discourse is the idea that Japanese bodies lack the groove or swing that is a part of the definition of the Brazilian national character. Repeatedly the band members told me that Japanese are seen as lacking *ginga* (swing). The concept of *ginga* is an African retention in contemporary Brazil that is, among other things, a marker of physical grace and dexterity on and off the dance floor, and a mode of

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<sup>57</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

personal comportment that involves being quick on one's feet and able to respond effectively to the uncertainties of life (Lewis 1992, 97-98). Likewise, this ability to move gracefully is intimately tied to Brazilian concepts of physical beauty, and it should therefore be no surprise that Japanese Brazilians (particularly men) challenge Brazilian aesthetic ideals. As Fábio Fukuda argues:

If you watch television here you see Blacks, you see blondes, and you see Whites, but you never see Orientals. Not playing the protagonist. In thirty or forty years of television there was never an Oriental playing the role of the heart-throb, of the hero. Or a singer of a band that makes the girls yell. Aesthetically Japanese does not please, unfortunately.<sup>58</sup>

For Fábio Fukuda, part of what was so important about the Zhen Brasil project was that for the first time, Japanese Brazilians were being shown as graceful and sexy as they demonstrated the swing that is so important to Brazilian ideals of beauty. Fábio Fukuda became the object of the rapt attention of audience members, particularly the screaming girls who swooned as he came near.

Seizing upon the commercial potential of Afro Japanese musical performance, the group began to bill themselves as “Os Japinhas do Pagode” (the little Japanese of *pagode*) and to emphasize, particularly during televised performances, samba songs that allowed the group to demonstrate, again and again, the wonder of Japanese Brazilians performing with the *ginga* of Black Brazilians. According to Mizuta, “They thought it was bizarre. Could it be that Japanese people are playing samba? They were always doubting, they had to see in order to believe.”<sup>59</sup> Likewise, according to Adilson Campos,

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<sup>58</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

Adolfo Mizuta's co-composer for the Zhen Brasil compact disk project, "We wanted to show that Asians can play rhythms of African origin with ease."<sup>60</sup>

Why should it be so unbelievable that Japanese Brazilians could be capable of playing samba? Samba still carries some of the burden of representing the Brazilian nation both internally and abroad. For this reason, it is particularly loaded for Japanese Brazilians to claim samba culture as their own. Insofar as samba and Brazilian national identity are irrevocably intertwined, to do so goes against deeply ingrained ideas of national belonging and exclusion. In the act of playing music, then, Zhen Brasil pushes towards a general inclusion of Japanese Brazilians within the cultural frame of what is understood as essentially Brazilian, i.e. samba culture.

The original premise of the band, then, was to insert Japanese Brazilians into the mainstream social milieu by accentuating the Japanese racial heritage of band members who would seamlessly perform samba music and dance. Moreover, a closer look at the content and contexts of this samba performance reveals that the band also attempts to rework majoritarian constructs of a homogeneous Brazil built upon the cultural and genetic mixing of three races. Excavating multiple strategies to confront a national myth that excludes them, Mizuta and Zhen Brasil offer alternative versions of *mestiçagem*. If the majoritarian version of *mestiçagem* involves the mixing of three races to form a unified Brazilian race, Zhen Brasil offers a series of restorative *mestiçagens* in an attempt to re-write Japanese descendents into the Brazilian patrimony. These strategies, which I will examine in turn involve: 1) redefining *mestiçagem* as a mosaic in which ethnic minorities co-exist in a state of differentiated multiculturalism, 2) hybridizing Japanese and Brazilian cultural icons based upon constructions of cultural affinity, and 3)

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<sup>60</sup> Adilson Campos, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

imagining filial ties between Native Brazilians and Japanese, so that Japanese Brazilians enter into the African/European/Native Brazilian racial triad.

In “Tem Purê no Tempurá”<sup>61</sup> (“Mashed Potatoes in the Tempura”) we see examples of strategies that we might think of as mosaic and affinity approaches to *mestiçagem*, respectively. A mosaic approach shows Japanese and Brazilian culture existing in tandem but retaining their original attributes, while the affinity approach proposes similarities between the two cultures.

“Tem Purê no Tempurá”

Ele foi tirando o sapato como manda a tradição E ela já sambava pela casa com os pés no chau Ele preparou sakê, missô e sashimi prá ela E ela pôs azeite de dendê na cama de panela	He takes off his shoes as tradition demands And she sambas around the house in bare feet He makes <i>sake</i> , <sup>62</sup> <i>miso</i> , <sup>63</sup> and <i>sashimi</i> <sup>64</sup> And she puts dende oil in the bed of the saucepan
Eles misturaram cama, mesa, banho e frigideira Ele é japonês e ela é brasileira E na hora do amor ele diz meu suchi quer brincar de sumô E ela dis aikidô, aikidô, aikidô Oi que eu dou Oi que eu dou	They mix bed, table, bath, and frying pan He is Japanese and she is Brazilian When they make love he says My sushi wants to play sumo And she says aikido, aikido, aikido Oh how I give Oh how I give
Ela descobriu que bacalhau em japonês é tara E ele de cachaça e feijoada foi enchendo a cara Ela logo foi se acostumando ao broto de bambou E ele arumaou o prato de dela com tutu e tofu	She discovered that cod in Japanese is <i>tara</i> And he stuffed his face with <i>fejoada</i> <sup>65</sup> and <i>cachaça</i> <sup>66</sup> Later she got used to the bamboo shoot And she filled her plate with <i>tutu</i> <sup>67</sup> and <i>tofu</i> <sup>68</sup>

A medium paced samba, the song comically tells the story of a mixed-race couple each bringing their own culture to the marriage. Indeed, the song writes Japanese Brazilians into the “foundational fiction” of Brazil to borrow a term from Sommer (1993), substituting a Japanese Brazilian coupling for the European/Native Brazilian

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<sup>61</sup> “Tem Purê no Tempurá” from the compact disc “Zhen Brasil: Os Japinhas do Pagode.” Words and music by Adolfo Mizuta and Adilson Campos, 2001, Nordeste Digital Line.

<sup>62</sup> A fermented rice beverage.

<sup>63</sup> Fermented soybean paste.

<sup>64</sup> Thinly sliced raw fish.

<sup>65</sup> A white rum.

<sup>66</sup> A dish with a base of black beans and meat.

<sup>67</sup> A mixture of beans, bacon and manioc flour.

<sup>68</sup> Japanese bean curd.

coupling that was so idealized by the Romantics. The marriage works as a symbol for a form of cultural parallelism in which two cultures occupy the same space while remaining differentiated. In this house/nation, Japanese foods such as *miso* and *sake* are consumed along side dishes such as *feijoada* that, since the Vargas era, have been understood as icons of *brasilidade*. According to Andre Fujiwara, who sees “Tem Purê no Tempurá” as a “felicitous” union of Japanese and Brazilian culture, the song works against commonly held ideas of Japanese and Brazilian culture as mutually exclusive: “[Tem Purê no Tempurá] took the stereotypes of both Brazilians and Japanese and showed them living side by side...Some people think it has to be one thing or another.”<sup>69</sup>

In addition to creating a space in which Japanese and Brazilian cultures can coexist in an easy interdependence, the song’s text constructs affinities between the two cultures by accentuating points of intersection. For example, while the Japanese husband removes his shoes upon entering the house, his Brazilian wife dances barefoot with her feet on the floor (*pés no chão*). Later, musical and semantic plays likewise aim at uncovering cultural affinities. Specifically, the chorus incorporates a triple play that articulates linguistic and cultural affinities between Japan and Brazil. Here I refer to the moment of erotic climax when the wife cries out the Japanese word “aikido.” Aikido is a Japanese martial art that uses the energy of an oncoming attack in order to control or throw an opponent. In “Tem Purê no Tempurá” both the squeaky timbre with which the word is sung, and a downward melodic leap of an octave between the syllables “ai” and “ki,” evoke the sounds of the *cuica* drum, which commonly accompanies samba performance. The *cuica* is a friction drum with a stick attached to the skin which, when rubbed up and down with a damp cloth, creates a grunting or squeaking sound that is

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<sup>69</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

evocative of sexual penetration. The first part of this word/sound play, therefore, involves sexualizing and Brazilianizing the word “aikido” by linking it to the sound of *cuica*.

In the next line of the melody this play is extended. A shift into a more open throated timbre and the addition of “eu” converts “aikido” into, “oi que eu dou” (I give). Here “to give” refers to the sexual role that in North American parlance is commonly constructed as the passive role. As Kulick explains, “a male who penetrates another person (male or female) is said to *comer* ‘eat’ that person, and that person is said to ‘give’ to the male who is penetrating him or her” (1998, 130). In this sexual economy, the “giver” is far from passive, as it is they who have the ability to “cut off the flow of goods and services that she supplies to the ‘eater’” (Ibid.) The chorus therefore links the sounds of Japanese and Brazilian utterances to each other, and to the musical sounds of the *cuica*. However, this word play also explores a cultural affinity involving constructions of “passivity” or receptivity as an active and powerful stance: both the aikido practitioner and the sexual giver find their power in guiding the momentum of corporeal energies that engage them. I will return later to this image of the power of the receptive, but for the moment I want to note that by exploring affinities between Japanese and Brazilian culture, the song seems to suggest that Japanese and Brazilian cultural elements can co-exist as separate yet intertwined entities, and that commonalities between the two cultures make this co-existence all the more felicitous. Moreover, by constructing this mosaic version of *mestiçagem* that allows for Japanese Brazilian inclusion in Brazilian national identity, Zhen Brasil excavates a strategy that Jeffrey Lesser has referred to as a hyphenated Brazilian identity:

My analysis of these disparate positions suggests that *mestiçagem*, which many scholars have taken to mean the emergence of a new and uniform

Brazilian “race” out of the mixing of peoples, was often understood as a joining (rather than mixing) of different identities, as the creation of a multiplicity of hyphenated Brazilians rather than a single, uniform one. (1999, 5)

As Lesser shows, this reinterpretation of *mestiçagem* as hyphenated identity gained momentum in the Japanese Brazilian community in 1930s in response to racist nativist opposition to Japanese immigration (Lesser 1999, 122).

“Tem Purê no Tempurá” therefore challenges majoritarian ideas of homogeneous *brasilidade* by showing Japanese Brazilian culture existing in tandem with Brazilian culture, and by reworking the sexual imagery that has been so foundational to Brazilian nationalism. However, *Zhen Brasil* suggests an even more radical undermining of the triadic myth of identity, as a brief return to my discussion of the song “Mestiço” will reveal. While “Tem Purê no Tempurá” destabilizes triadic understandings of a Brazilian race by inserting Japanese sexuality into the mix, “Mestiço” redefines the very terms of the triad. In “Mestiço,” Mizuta constructs a Japanese Brazilian self that is *hanguro*, a mixed race Japanese that can claim Native-Brazilian ancestry (“Ameríndio ou hanguro/Kamikaze e tapuia”). These claims of dual ancestry are based on Mizuta’s revisionist ideas of immigration to the Americas. Specifically, he argues that Native Brazilians and Japanese share a common ancestry in China. For this reason: “It was not...the Portuguese who discovered this country [Brazil]. This country is Chinese, it is Japanese.”<sup>70</sup> Likewise, he argues for the existence of a Native Brazilian/Japanese connection based upon similarities of language and appearance. Kinship with Native Brazilians has been repeatedly asserted by Japanese Brazilians during the past century as a creative answer to a national myth that excludes them. According to Hosokawa:

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<sup>70</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

If the Tupi [native Brazilians] were recognized as constituent to the Brazilian nation, their brother race by definition becomes truly Brazilian. What is at stake is the imaginary bond with the Japanese as evidenced by physical appearance and endorsed by linguistic compatibility. (2003, 27)

What distinguishes this “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) of Japanese and Native Brazilians from other myths of Brazilian national identity is not its facticity as a historical ancestral bond. Indeed, the majoritarian myth of triadic ancestry is itself constructed upon a highly problematic erasure of slavery and the history of Native Brazilian genocide, and of the vast linguistic and cultural diversity of Native Brazilians who are represented monolithically as “Tupí.” Rather, what distinguishes these two myths of origin is the extent to which the latter’s momentum as a cultural myth renders the Native Brazilian/Japanese link unnatural to common sense knowledge.

Taking their inspiration from modernist models of nation building, these three strategies of restorative representation (which I have called mosaic *mestiçagem*, cultural affinity, and construction of common ancestry) have in common a faith in the fidelity of representation, and in the ability of musical performance to offer alternatives to majoritarian constructions of Nikkei Brazilians. But what Zhen Brasil soon discovered through their musical experimentation was the power of reception to mark Japanese Brazilian bodies as Other. As Yuiti Shiraishi explained to me, when the band first formed, they tried to offer a more-or-less straight performance, without much of the parody that they later introduced. For example, they originally performed in brightly colored button-up shirts, imitating other popular *pagode* bands. However, their performances were repeatedly met with laughter as they found themselves unwittingly read in terms of comic stereotypes of Japanese Brazilians. Indeed, Japanese Brazilian bodies are so intractably marked as non-normative that at the moment of reception they

are read through familiar tropes of Otherness. Shimakawa traces the fraught path of counter-representation in her discussion of Asian American theatre when she argues:

To directly challenge current abject/stereotypical constructions of Asian Americanness by presenting a wholly contradictory construction would be to suppose that one could somehow stand outside that process, at an objective distance, in order to critique it and then *choose* a different cultural identity. (2002, 101)

Shimakawa argues that despite ethnic minorities' best intentions to work outside of hegemonic stereotypes by creating alternative, positive representations, and continue to be seen through the skewed logic of these constructions and must find head-on ways to content with racist tropes.

Encountering a social formation that marks them as Other, Zhen Brasil entered into a series of polemic discussions. One faction argued that the band should continue to strike a serious tone in their performance as they created counter-constructions of Japanese Brazilians, while other members sought more subtle ways to take on the toxic stereotypes that interpellated them. According to band members, discussion centered around the ironic use of "Japanese" costumes and the parodic humor of Japanese and other ethnic stereotypes. According to Andre Fujiwara:

The first group was the most [traditionally] Japanese, the most conservative. The idea of dressing in kimonos existed from the beginning, but they didn't want to do it. They thought that it was foolishness...they were afraid that they would not be seen as serious musicians...The first formulation of the group was very serious and staid, with dress-shirts and ties. But later people began to change their minds a bit. Those who didn't have the Zhen Brasil mentality left the group.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Andre Fujiwara, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

## 2.7 JAPANESE BRAZILIAN MIMESIS

The musicians who stayed with Zhen Brasil until the band broke up in 2003 shared a style of parodic humor that irreverently reflected back distorted and exaggerated versions of the Japanese types that circulate in mainstream media. It was during this period that the band began to abandon their conventional pagode attire, first experimenting with karate-like outfits and later settling on the four hyper-Japanese costumes that I have described above. As Andre Fujiwara, the group's cavaquinho player, explained the costumes of geisha, samurai, rice planter, and immigrant were chosen because those are the “main [Japanese] characters that are known to Occidentals.”<sup>72</sup> When I asked Andre if their intent was to “break” the stereotype of Japanese Brazilians, he responded, “I don’t think we wanted to break it exactly. When someone has a big nose and starts to make fun of the nose, it ends up being smaller. You exaggerate so much that it ends up being a small thing.”<sup>73</sup> While dismissing the possibility of completely dismantling these stereotypes, Fujiwara argues for a more limited but affective agency in exaggeration. This strategy is something like the mimesis explored by Irigaray, who argues that the only way for women to self-represent within the logic of a discourse that seeks to erase them is to find excessive ways to inhabit the role of the feminine:

They should not put it, then, in the form, “What is Woman?” but rather, repeating/interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a disruptive *excess* is possible on the feminine side. (1991, 126)

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<sup>72</sup> Andre Fujiwara, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Encountering the limits of *mestiçagem* strategies that seek to answer the question, “What is Japanese Brazilian?” Zhen Brasil reached towards a mimesis that works against discursive logic in which Japanese Brazilian is always defined as a lack or the negative of *brasilidade*.

While the counter-images of Japanese Brazilians that I discussed in the previous section work on a principle of offense, attempting to forcefully displace “false” stereotypes, critical mimesis is a defensive strategy, working to channel and displace the social energies that attempt to reify Japanese Brazilian subjects. Indeed, the sexually infused image of *aikido* from the song “Tem Purê no Tempurá” hints at the power of such defensive strategies, a corporeal metaphor that models a defense against the disciplining of racialized bodies. The power of *aikido* lies precisely in using the force of the attacker in order to undermine the power of the attack. It is precisely the transformation of conventional conceptions that Zhen Brasil reaches towards as they irreverently mime the worst stereotypes of Japanese Brazilians.

This strategy of mimesis is particularly visible in the band’s rendition of “Kapotaro Nomato.”<sup>74</sup> To explore this moment of post-modern *mestiçagem*, let us return once again to the set of “Sem Limites para Sonhar,” where the band performed a particularly compelling version of this song. “Kapotaro Nomato,” the band’s most requested song, reworks a joke that according to Mizuta was popular two decades ago,

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<sup>74</sup> “Kapotaro Nomato,” from the compact disc “Zhen Brasil: Os Japinhas do Pagode.” Words and music by Adolfo Mizuta and Adilson Campos, 2001, Nordeste Digital Line.

although it still circulates today and is commonly cited on web-based humor publications.<sup>75</sup>

“Kapotaro Nomato”

O meu família era bóia-fria	My family were laborers
Trabalhava no roça todo dia	Working in the fields every day
Nóis não tinha Domingo nem feriado	We didn't even have Sunday off
Mas nós era feliz e esforçado	But we were happy and hardworking
Aí meu pai morreu <i>derame</i>	Then my father died <i>derame</i>
Também mamãe morreu <i>derame</i>	And my mother died <i>derame</i>
Tudo irmãos morreu <i>derame</i>	All my siblings died <i>derame</i>
O meu vovó morreu <i>derame</i>	My grandmother died <i>derame</i>
O meu cachorinha <i>derame</i>	And my dog died <i>derame</i>
E meu garinha morreu <i>derrame</i>	and my chicken died <i>derame</i>
Nóis vinha do roça e não sabe dize	We were coming back from the fields
Coçando o saco e tomando sakê	Taking it easy and drinking <i>sake</i>
No curva tinha buraco fundo	There was a deep hole in the curve
Capotô caminhão e deramô todo mundo	The truck rolled and everyone spilled out

The joke pivots upon the double meaning of the word *derame*, which literally means “to spill out” but is commonly used to refer to a stroke, evoking the image of blood overflowing from a burst vessel. In the joke, a Japanese–Brazilian immigrant recites, in heavily accented Japanese, the improbable list of family members who have died “*derame*.” His interlocutor is confused about how an entire family could die of stroke until he is informed by the punch line, that, in fact the family died when an airplane headed for Japan turned over and they “spilled out.” In the Zhen Brasil version of the joke, the family dies when the truck carrying them home from the fields turns over upon hitting a pothole.

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<sup>75</sup> A version of this joke titled “Derrame” can be found at [www.piadas.com.br](http://www.piadas.com.br) (accessed December 1, 2007).



**Figure 3. Zhen Brasil Performing “Kapotaro Nomato”  
(From the left: Hugo Koike, Andre Fujiwara, and Yuiti Shiraishi)**

The title “Kapotaro Nomato” is therefore a Japanized version of the phrase *capotaro no campo* (crash in the country). In the joke, we find a faithful citation of the Japanese Brazilian immigrant mangling the Portuguese language. The joke also demonstrates the ease with which violence to Japanese Brazil bodies become fodder for humor in popular discourse. A perpetual immigrant, he is often portrayed as lacking the basic linguistic and cultural skills to fully integrate into Brazilian society.

In a video recording of their performance, the camera jumps repeatedly between Shiraishi, who takes the lead voice, and the band members, returning often to the image of the *ton ton*-wielding geisha, Hugo Koike. Her hefty drum is stamped with the band’s logo, a Japanese flag painted with the colors of Brazil. When Yuiti Shiraishi sings the verse, which describes his happy, hardworking family returning from the country, he squints his eyes, keeps his upper torso still and bent over in a slight bow, and takes small

timid steps through the space. He sings in a heavy Japanese accent, pronouncing his l's as r's and using a nasal timbre. Similarly, with downcast eyes, the geisha takes gentle and precise steps from side-to-side, coyly imitating traditional Japanese dances learned from grandparents. The first verse tells of the family returning from the fields, hardworking and happy laborers. The slow, measured rhythm of the bolero that accompanies the verse seems to sonically mimic the slow, steady ways of these simple country folk. While the text is generally congruous with the stereotypical image of the heavily accented, hard-working Japanese laborer, the band members embody Japaneseness with such exaggerated gusto that the stereotype is rendered completely ridiculous. Their over-the-top costumes, combined with exaggerated gestures and speech render the band members cartoon-like in their mimetic engagement with toxic conceptions of Japanese Brazilians. Here the "attack" of toxic interpellation is parried with an defensive excess that deflates the stereotype.

An even more radical rupture of Japanese stereotypes takes place at the transition into the chorus, when the rhythm switches from a slow bolero into a boisterous samba. The geisha is transformed, her coyness completely gone as she assertively beats out samba rhythms, her head now erect. Gone are the "feminine" guiles of the geisha, replaced by a "manly" affect that is incongruent with Koike's hyper-feminine attire. Likewise, farmer Yuiti Shiraishi's affect changes completely as he begins to move more expansively around the space executing basic samba steps. Fluid undulations pass through his hips and torso, breaking the rigidity of his previous stance. Meanwhile, he sings the dark lyrics of the chorus, which recount the list of family members and pets who have died "*derame*." Here again, exaggeration is at play. Transforming the original

joke by adding a dog and chicken to the list of departed family members, the band members fall to the floor and act out the dying pains of these beloved pets. Meanwhile, a smile has replaced the scowl of Shiraishi's earlier persona as he abandons his nasal timbre for a more robust singing voice. Suddenly relaxed and cheerful, he demonstrates his ability to embody the most Brazilian of qualities. Likewise, his back-up band undulates to the rhythms of samba, which they beat out and strum their instruments with seeming ease. Here Brazilian cultural imperatives are performed by kimono-wearing bodies, self-consciously flaunting the markers of Japaneseness. This rhythmic rupture has begun to transform the reified image of the Japanese family. In the second verse, when the bolero rhythm returns, the hard-working family (*esforçado*) that we first met is now "*cosando o saco*"<sup>76</sup> and drinking sake. Here we have a coming together of two cultures—the Brazilian appreciation of leisure is enhanced with the most Japanese of cultural icons, sake.

In the final moments of their performance, Zhen Brasil adds yet another layer of parody as they jump into a rap interlude. Imitating the hand gestures and wide-legged stance of Brazilian hip hop artists and singing in a deep chest voice, Shiraishi transforms the hit song, "Um Tapinha Não Dói," ("A Little Slap Doesn't Hurt), made popular by As Meninas. In the Zhen Brasil version, the title line is transformed into "Um Japinha Não Dói" ("A Little Japanese Doesn't Hurt"), a line that is delivered as the band members measure out an imaginary (small) phallus between their thumbs and index fingers. Working against a cultural logic that feminizes Japanese Brazilian masculinity through a mythology of deficient sexuality, the band cites the stereotype of the small Japanese penis and turns it on its head. Like the *tapinha* or "little" slap that is lauded in the original song,

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<sup>76</sup> A colloquial term meaning hanging out which translates as "scratching ones balls."

the Japanese penis is transformed into a source of violent pleasure. Problematic in so far as it reasserts a heterosexual gender norm that links violence, sexuality, and masculinity, this performative gesture reifies heterosexual masculinity in the interest of destabilizing race-based prejudice.

However, at other moments, the band's gender play seems to work in the opposite direction, as the geisha's drag performance denaturalizes heterosexual gender roles.

Butler explains the potential of drag performance to subvert:

It serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized and undermines their power by virtue of effecting that exposure. (1993, 231)

In the case of Zhen Brasil, the geisha's gender code switching parallels a racial subversion that calls into question the "mundane impersonations" through which Japanese Brazilianness is performed and understood. Like the gender transformations of the geisha, the rapid code switching between "Japanese" and "Brazilian" expressive conventions works towards the de-essentialization of racially marked bodies.

Encountering a social formation that reifies them as stiff and formal, they perform other ways to inhabit Japanese bodies. As the musicians move between musical genres, their body language and emotional affect changes to mimic the conventions of the subcultures they parody. The point of this post-modern *mestiçagem* is not to join together different cultural strains in a felicitous union, but to create a shocking rupture at the moments of rapid-fire code switching. And by using excessive parody to juxtapose stereotyped cultural norms, they call attention to the constructed nature of these norms of expression, while disavowing any necessary link between "Japaneseness" and any particular form of cultural/corporeal expression. This play aims not at asserting ontological truth about

Japanese Brazilians, but rather throws us into an aporia of misrecognition as we are asked to ponder these processes of normalization.

## 2.8 A COMMUNITY DIVIDED

Zhen Brasil's post-modern *mestiçagem* was highly controversial within the Japanese Brazilian community. While some, particularly younger spectators, felt that the band's iconoclastic message worked in positive ways towards a counter-public discourse, others could see no difference between the band's parodic citation of toxic stereotypes and the original versions that circulate in public discourse. Auslander speaks to this problem of post-modern representational strategies, arguing that they can "turn into their own opposites by reifying the very representations they supposedly deconstruct" (1992, 27).

I spoke with the band members about this resistance. Several band members encountered resistance from older family members, who argued that the band was disrespecting their Japanese cultural heritage and perpetuating humiliating stereotypes of Japanese Brazilians. Several band members won the ire of family members for their participation in the Zhen Brasil project. While the immediate families of Andre Fujiwara and Fábio Fukuda generally supported their sons in their musical exploration, extended family exerted pressure to have the project stopped. Fábio Fukuda explained:

In my family, the only people that supported me were my mother and father...Orientals are generally upper-middle class. You don't usually see Orientals sweeping trash in the streets. That does not exist. The parts of my family that are in São Paulo and Rio [de Janeiro] have attained a high [economic] status and are executives. They were the people that came to Jundiaí and gave me a hard time. When they saw me on television they would talk to my father and tell him, "You can't let your son do this." It

was so intense that after awhile, my mother came to me and said, “Maybe you should rethink what you are doing, maybe you are making fun of the race.” I had never seen it that way, but when so many people are talking, there comes a moment when even the family begins to question.<sup>77</sup>

In the case of Yuiti Shiraishi and Hugo Koike, the families strongly opposed their son’s continuing participation with Zhen Brasil. Fábio Fukuda recalls:

Hugo’s mother didn’t like it because he was dressed as a gaysha... His mother went crazy watching her son dressed like that. Yuiti’s father abandoned him. His father is working in Japan. He saw a program [with Zhen Brasil] in Japan and didn’t like it. His grandparents stopped washing his clothes.<sup>78</sup>

According to Yuiti Shiraishi, his father called the band “the biggest mistake”<sup>79</sup> he had ever made in his life. While Mizuta’s family did not object to his project, he encountered resistance from other quarters:

There were people from the older generation that did not like our joking, but young people accepted us well. We heard from family members that people didn’t like it... They didn’t like the jokes that we made or the outfits, or songs that messed with Japanese traditions—that thing of the geisha—a geisha who samba(ed) and showed her leg on television. That wasn’t the [proper] image of a geisha.<sup>80</sup>

Likewise Fábio Fukuda reported that the band “got many e-mails saying ‘you should stop this, you are denigrating the colony. You are dirtying the colony. This is not a good thing.’ In Jundiaí, lots of people liked it, but many did not. They thought we were making fun of the race. It was the dancing geisha, the ninja, and the rice planter.”<sup>81</sup>

Repeatedly the band members framed community resistance to Zhen Brasil as an intergenerational problem. Yuiti Shiraishi argued that it was primarily older Japanese Brazilians who took offense at the costumes that referenced Japanese “types.”

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<sup>77</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Yuiti Shiraishi, personal communication, August 19, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Adolfo Mizuta, personal communication, August 24, 2003

<sup>81</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

The older people didn't like it because they thought we were making fun of the Japanese colony. It's because of the clothes. But for us it was a homage intended to show that we are Japanese.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, Andre Fujiwara argues: "Although the older generation had resistance, the younger generation thought it was fantastic."<sup>83</sup> From Zhen Brasil's perspective, it was the non-traditional display of traditional Japanese costumes, like that of the geisha, which offended older Japanese Brazilians. They saw the critiques against them as a form of entrenched and antiquated reverence for frozen symbols of a Japanese homeland, such as the samurai and the geisha.

While these symbols of Japaneseness do indeed have cultural currency for older Japanese Brazilians (for much of his childhood, Shiraishi's father proudly declared the pure blood of his samurai ancestry), the critiques against the band were more complex than the group acknowledged in our interviews. First, while the band had supporters among younger generations of Japanese Brazilians, some of the most acerbic critiques of the band that were transmitted to me came from people in their twenties and thirties. For one man, a radio producer in his early thirties, Zhen Brasil had been at fault, not for defiling Japanese traditions, but for replicating the kinds of toxic stereotypes that have circulated in the Japanese Brazilian media: "Japanese Brazilians are hardly ever on television, and when they are, they play the buffoon. Zhen Brasil was popular because they got up there and laughed and made jokes. I would like to see a serious Japanese Brazilian band succeed."<sup>84</sup>

While the strong internal solidarity of the band allowed the members to weather this criticism for a time, eventually it took a toll. Although they continued to stand by the

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<sup>82</sup> Yuiti Shiraishi, personal communication, August 19, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Andre Fujiwara, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Anonymous, personal communication, October 10, 2007.

artistic goals of the band, they began to tire of the strife that their musical sojourn was causing in their family lives. Again, Fábio Fukuda recalls: “Zhen Brasil had many difficulties, both with our families, and being Oriental in the artistic world—the envy. We put forward a happy face. But sometimes we took two steps forward, and one back. We would think to ourselves, ‘If I say this, I will have problems.’”<sup>85</sup> Family disapproval and the economic hardships of making a living as touring musicians ultimately led to the end of the Zhen Brasil project in 2003. However, all of the musicians look back to their Zhen Brasil experience as a fertile time in their lives and stand by the aims of their project.

Repeatedly, when I asked the band what they wanted to accomplish, they would talk about the sonic interventions of Os Demônios da Garoa. Performing the Italo Brazilian samba of Adoniran Barbosa, this Paulista band gave voice to the experience of the poor in the city of São Paulo. As I have already argued, there are obvious parallels between the parodic and ethnically self-conscious samba of Zhen Brasil and Os Demônios da Garoa. However, a more interesting parallel involves the ways that each of these groups critiqued modernity. As Francisco Rocha argues, the songs of Adoniran Barbosa, made famous by Os Demônios da Garoa, made fun of the “concept of progress and modernity that was fomented as part of the consolidation of our [Brazilian] urban industrial society” (2002, 94). In the songs of Barbosa, the elite exaltation of labor as the foundation of a burgeoning new society is parodied as the underside of “progress” (or “progréssio” in the words of Barbosa’s Italo Brazilian protagonists), revealed in lucid descriptions of São Paulo’s homeless, displaced by modernization.

A questioning of the relationship between laboring bodies and progress links the performances of these two bands that are separated by so many decades. Remember that

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<sup>85</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

Japanese Brazilians are often constructed as icons of technological progress, who can model for Brazil a path towards Brazilian economic success in the global arena.

Returning for a moment to the song “Mestiço,” Mizuta’s answer to aporia, “Ja nem sou mais o que sei” (I am no longer what I know), is to assert the ontological presence of the body, which provides an alternative form of knowledge. His lovely assertion “Yonseï, sambei, dancei,” translates literally as, “Fourth generation, I samba(ed), I danced.”

However, in Portuguese, the final syllables ring out “sei” (I know), as though knowledge infuses the body of this fourth-generation Japanese Brazilian alight in dance. What is this knowledge of the dancing body? As David Palumbo-Lui asserts:

The body is a multiply inflected sign and a somatic entity demanding sustenance and satisfaction for its particular needs. The fulfillment of those needs and desires is in turn implicated within the discursive formations that award recognition to that body across and within a racialized social logic. (1999: 138)

Here I am reminded of the joyful samba of Zhen Brasil, whose most dramatic intervention is to demonstrate that Japanese Brazilian bodies are not, as they are so often seen, efficient and technologically advanced working machines dutifully answering the imperatives of progress, but rather, somatic beings that move to the rhythms of their own needs and pleasure. Often cast as efficient if uncreative technocrats, their sexually infused improvisations in dance and wit demand that Japanese Brazilians be recognized as desiring beings who refuse to stand as reified signs of technological progress. In the next chapter I will examine the issues of music and embodiment as they related to the *taiko* practice of Setsuo Kinoshita and his students.

### 3.0 SETSUO KINOSHITA AND SAMBA *TAIKO*

#### 3.1 AFRO *TAIKO* INCURSIONS

While counting out the rhythm in Japanese, “ichi, ni, san, si,” Kinoshita introduces his students to the side-to-side dance steps that will accompany the *matsuri* (festival) song he is teaching. There is a great deal of giggling and laughter as Kinoshita introduces the dance steps. On their first attempt to replicate the dance, the rhythm collapses into a chaotic cacophony. It is their first new song in almost two years, and the students are soon energetically practicing the two-part, duple rhythm while joyfully (if awkwardly) stepping from side-to-side. Their feet mark the main beats of the rhythm as they step right-together-left-together in a cycle that corresponds to two repetitions of the main rhythmic cell of the *matsuri*. The step is pretty basic but hard to coordinate with the *taiko* strokes that, even after two years, demand a great deal of care and attention to execute correctly. Most in their late twenties and early thirties, the nine students who have come to class call themselves the *turma da quinta* or Thursday crew, which refers not only to the night of their weekly practice but also to the strong bonds of friendship they have secured over the past two years of playing together. All second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilian descendants (with the exception of one Euro Brazilian player) they have been brought together by their mutual interest in Japanese *taiko* percussion. Facing

the stage, a row of six students play the two *shime daiko*<sup>86</sup> (see Figure 4), three *ko daiko*<sup>87</sup> and *hira daiko*<sup>88</sup> that sit at the edge of the stage, slightly inclined toward the players as they are held by small stands.



**Figure 4: A Shime Daiko from Setsuo Kinoshita's Ensemble**

At the back of the stage, four more students rotate between two *shime daiko*, a *hira daiko*, and two *okedō daiko*.<sup>89</sup> Now, ten minutes into their practice of this new song, the students have begun to synchronize their movements with each other. However, there is a

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<sup>86</sup> The small *shimi daiko* is constructed from straight staves and has two heads that are stretched over iron hoops and then tied to the body of the drum with ropes. Before performance the drum is tuned by tightening the ropes that lace the heads of the drum to the body, a process that is repeated, in reverse order, at the end of rehearsal.

<sup>87</sup> A small drum of the *byōuchi daiko* (non-tunable) class, which, hollowed out from a single log, has drum heads at either end that are stretched over a rim and then tacked into place.

<sup>88</sup> A medium-sized *byōuchi daiko*, which is wider than it is long, giving it a stout, flat appearance.

<sup>89</sup> A larger (deeper toned) version of the *shimi daiko*.

complex array of micro differences in their interpretations of the song. The unbent knees of several of the students give the dance a solid, shuffling quality. Other students alternate between bent and straight knees, adding a notable bounce to their interpretations. Still others try to lift their knees into the air at the moment when the other students are bringing their feet together, completely omitting two steps of the overall pattern. At first they are unsure and a bit awkward as they attempt to synchronize their bodies with the pulse of the music. As they practice, laugh and joke with each other, someone mentions Olodum, the premier Afro Bahian percussion group, whose choreographed *axé*<sup>90</sup> rhythms are the latest Brazilian craze (Guerreiro 1999; Gerischer 2006).

Monica, in the front row, has been stepping on straight legs, with her hips in a straight line underneath her torso so that her body holds a single erect line throughout the sequence, while her center of gravity is maintained along a central axis through the center of her core. She steps on the main beats of the rhythm, giving her dance a solid, heavy feel. Suddenly she stops dancing as if resetting her kinetic approach, and when she begins again, she has found a different groove. Now she has begun to bend and unbend her knees, introducing a bounce between her steps. The bending of her knee (and accompanying downward movement of her core) syncopates with her footfalls. This shift frees her upper body, which now begins to hold a gentle pulse as her shoulders roll back and forth in a fluid undulation. Meanwhile her torso snaps forward at precisely the moment her foot hits the floor. Likewise, her hips are now free to move more fluidly and

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<sup>90</sup> A style of Bahian pop music derived from samba-reggae, popularized in the 1990s by singers including Daniela Mercury and Margareth Menezes.

undulate front and back, breaking the straight line of her body. Her center of balance is now in continual movement as her body adjusts to the shifting axis of her hips and torso.

In short, Monica has incorporated circum-Atlantic corporeal technologies into her movement, giving her dance a hip-hop or *axé* feel. Her bent knee approach mirrors that described by Thompson as central to Africanist movement styles: “Dance with bended knees, lest you should be taken for a corpse” (1974, 9-10). However, this bent knee posture alone does not distinguish her style from more conventional *taiko* practice, which also makes use of a bent-knee stance: “The basic stance, regardless of drum size, involves spreading one’s legs two or three feet apart on a forward-to-back diagonal with the forward left knee bent” (Tusler 2003, 236). In fact, this bent knee stance, which involves lowering one’s center of gravity is encouraged by Kinoshita. Instead, what distinguishes Monica’s approach is the regular, syncopated bounce she brings to her playing, the multiple centers of movement that flow through her body, and the shifting axis of her center of gravity. In her description of Africanist movement imperatives, Gottschild refers to several of these body techniques. For example, she argues that “asymmetricality” that plays with the center of gravity and “flexibility” are central to much Africanist dance (1996, 17). Moreover, speaking of the democracy of body parts present in much Africanist dance, Gottschild asserts:

Africanist dance idioms show a democratic equality of body parts...The Africanist dancing body is polycentric. One part of the body is played against another, and movements may simultaneously originate from more than one focal point (the head and the pelvis, for example)...The component and auxiliary parts of the torso—shoulders, chest, rib cage, waist, pelvis—can be independently moved or articulated in different directions (forward, backward, sideward, or in circles) and in different rhythms. (1996, 8-9)

Now fifteen minutes into their practice of the *matsuri* song, other students have begun to find their respective grooves. Xiomara uses less torso motion than Monica, but like Monica, she has begun to bounce. This gives her motion an appealing snap that accents what is otherwise a smooth side-to-side bounce. Like Monica, her descent (onto a bent knee) in between the main beats of the rhythm produces syncopation in her movement. She stands next to Henry, who, along with several other students, has rejected the Africanist approach of his colleagues and intensified his commitment to a non-syncopated interpretation of the rhythm. With great energy he steps down on a straight or slightly bent knee on the main beats of the rhythm. This has the effect of accentuating the main beats of the musical phrase.

The contrast between these two approaches is not only visual, but it sets up a microtonal difference in their interpretation of the music also well. For example, although both Henry and Xiomara must bring their sticks down on the one-beat of the musical phrase, Xiomara's downward moving stick hits the face of the drum just as her body snaps upward, giving her stroke a precise "thwack." Meanwhile, Henry's arm and body are both moving down towards the one-beat. The downward motion of his body adds a momentum and strength to his stroke when it finally impacts the head of his drum. However, his stroke is also delayed slightly with respect to Xiomara's. His strokes, therefore, have a different sound/feel than Xiomara's. Her more metronomically precise, snappy interpretation contrasts with his somewhat louder, heaving feeling strokes.

What are we to make of the different, unpremeditated interpretations of *taiko* that come so immediately to these Nikkei Brazilian students? What questions do these different corporeal strategies raise about the limits and creative potential of cross-cultural

musical pedagogy? How do culturally specific modes of embodiment and embodied musicality impact musical practice? And finally, in what ways do these embodied strategies undermine academic and popular conceptions about ethnicity and embodiment, particularly among groups that have been displaced from their nations of origin?

The pedagogical situation that I have described undermines several popular conceptions about Japanese Brazilians that shape intercultural relationships among Brazilian ethnic groups. Specifically, in the Brazilian context, Japanese descendants are understood by most Brazilians (including many Japanese Brazilians) to lack the basic musical-corporal technology needed to successfully interpret Brazilian musical idioms. As I discussed previously, the phrase, “Japanese in the samba” is commonly used to describe an incorrect interpretation of a samba rhythm. Insofar as Brazilian music has been elevated to the status of a national metaphor, musical ineptitude is paramount to lacking Brazilian soul. How surprised many Brazilians would be to discover that the Nikkei Brazilians who I will discuss in this chapter demonstrate their embodied knowledge of Brazilian musicality even at the moments when they explore idioms such as *taiko*, which they themselves often think of as quintessentially Japanese. One of the central facets of this study will be to show that exclusion from this national musical metaphor is a form of exclusion from full cultural citizenship. In this chapter, I will take up this question by exploring how the presence (and absence) of *ginga* (swing) enters into Brazilian understandings of race and nationality.

Moreover, I will suggest that if we pay close attention to diversity of corporeal styles and microtonal interpretations that these students bring to their interpretation of *taiko*, we might be forced to acknowledge the internal differentiation within the category

of people that I have hitherto referred to as Japanese Brazilian and become uncomfortable with the homogenizing sleight of hand that such a category accomplishes. As I indicated in the introduction, previous work on the music of Japanese Brazilian communities has tended to focus on the use of music as a way of defining an ethnic identity apart from the mainstream of Brazilian society (Hosokawa 1998, 2000; Olsen 1983, 1983, 2004).

Previous studies have focused on the production of difference through music, seeing Japanese Brazilians' fascination with such genres as *minyo* and *enka* as a way to maintain a distinct micro-cultural identity. Such micro-cultural politics rely upon notions of difference between "us" and "them" that are akin to the modes of inclusion and exclusion that are the basis of national identity formation. Indeed, both models of identity formation are built upon reified, stereotyped conceptions of self and other. However, I will show, somewhat counter-intuitively, that when Japanese Brazilians engage with Japanese musical genres, part of what is produced is their own Brazilianness, a process that involves breaking down cross-cultural boundaries, healing the traumas of ethnic exclusion, and finding new ways to inhabit the Brazilian homeland.

### 3.2 THE STUDENTS

When I visited Setsuo Kinoshita in the summer and fall of 2003, he had approximately fifty-five students attending his classes, who were grouped loosely by age and according to the amount of time they had played. They practiced in one of five weekly classes offered at a regional Japanese community center and participated in demonstrations at festivals and community centers all over the state of São Paulo. Classes took place at

Associação Akita Kenjin do Brasil, one of several neighborhood associations sponsored by descendants from particular regions of Japan, in this case, from the city of Akita in the Honshu region. The Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday groups had the most seniority, having begun their *taiko* training in the fall of 2001. While the Tuesday and Thursday groups had retained most of their original students, the Wednesday group had a much greater turnover rate, and therefore consisted of more advanced players as well as those who had been practicing for as little as two months. The Friday group had begun to practice six months before my arrival. The Monday class began during my first month in Brazil, allowing me to participate in the first phase of *taiko* training while observing the other, more advanced groups.



**Figure 5: Setsuo Kinoshita Taiko Ensemble  
(Japan Festival, São Paulo, 2003)**



**Figure 6: Setsuo Kinoshita Taiko Ensemble  
(Japan Festival, São Paulo, 2003)**

On the first night of the new class, Setsuo Kinoshita and Mitsue Iwamoto, his teaching and performance associate (and wife), inspired the neophytes with a brief presentation. Bouncing off the cement walls of the small studio where the rehearsals take place, the drum sounds penetrated the students' sitting bodies, inspiring their awakening interest. During the first class students are taught to carve their own sticks or *bachi*, a labor-intensive activity that is designed to help promote respect for the sticks and drums. Soon after, the students are plunged into *taiko* training. Each class begins with a series of stretches led by Kinoshita, in Japanese, followed, sticks in hand, with a series of strikes to the air as the students count to ten in Japanese. Having removed their shoes, the students then mount the stage at one end of the room where they are taught to prepare the *taiko* drums through a series of tightening and knotting motions executed in pairs. Eventually the students will be expected to arrive early and prepare the drums for class on their own.

Through the help of Japanese sponsors, Kinoshita was able to purchase and import a set of fifteen *taiko*, a considerable investment considering that individual drums can cost several thousand US dollars. His teaching ensemble includes four *shime daiko*, five small *ko daiko*, two medium-sized *hira daiko*, and two *okedō daiko*. In addition to these drums, his performance ensemble also makes use of a *nagadō daiko*<sup>91</sup> (see Figure 7) and an *ōdaiko*<sup>92</sup> (See Figure 9).



**Figure 7: Nagadō Daiko from Setsuo Kinoshita's Ensemble**

Unlike many of the North American groups in which students begin their training by playing on tires, students are immediately allowed to play the drums in Kinoshita's

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<sup>91</sup> A medium sized barrel-shaped drum of the *byōuchi daiko* (non-tunable) class of drums.

<sup>92</sup> Made of a single tree trunk, the *ōdaiko* is the largest of the *byōuchi daiko* class of drums.

classes. Kinoshita favors a “holistic” teaching style comparable to that of Seiichi Tanaka of the San Francisco *Taiko* Dojo (Tusler 2003, 256). Rather than mastering techniques by practicing individual strikes repeatedly (before practicing larger compositions), students learn techniques in the process of practicing longer rhythmic units, specifically the four sections that make up the composition, “Hyuga,” a composition by the Nara-based group Wadaiko Yamato (who gave Kinoshita his training). Rotating between instruments, students become familiar with a range of timbres and techniques early in their training. Unlike North American *taiko* ensembles, which typically introduce students to a varied repertoire of pieces (Tusler 2003, 33), Kinoshita has chosen instead to focus on this single song in his classes.

Mostly middle to upper-middle class Japanese descendants, students range from twelve to sixty-four years in age. Women outnumber men (see Table 1), but this gender disparity is more pronounced among the older students. Spanning the *nisei*, *sansei*, and *yonsei* generations, the participants are students, homemakers, and professionals from a variety of fields (lawyers, architects, politicians, doctors, computer analysts, civil engineers, graphic designers, etc.).

**Table 1: Ethnic and Gender Distribution of Thirty-Five *Taiko* Students**

Generation/Ethnicity	Number of Participants	Male	Female
Nisei	12	3	9
Sansei	16	6	10
Yonsei	3	2	1
Hapa <sup>93</sup>	2	1	1
Euro Brazilian	2	2	0

While the students, all Japanese descendants (with the exception of two Euro Brazilian students), share an interest in *taiko*, they vary greatly in their cultural backgrounds. For some, whose families engaged little with the Japanese colony and have had little contact with other Japanese descendants, participating in Kinoshita's *taiko* class is a weighty and sometimes fraught first encounter with Japanese and Nikkei music and culture.<sup>94</sup> Marcelo, who was thirty-three when I interviewed him, had not spent much time with other Nikkei. His grandparents spoke Japanese exclusively, and the fact that he never learned to communicate with them is a source of much sadness for him:

My family didn't really hang out in the Japanese community, so I didn't have much contact. Starting *taiko* was a way to get more interested in Japanese culture. I was always curious about my grandparents' life in Japan. I couldn't talk with my grandparents. They died without me ever being able to learn about their lives. I see this [*taiko* playing] as a way of learning about them... In my family it was just my mother, my sister, and me. My parents separated, and we were totally cut off from Japanese culture. I had family, my grandparents, and aunts, but aside from that, nothing, just a bit of food. All that stuff about the associations and going to Japan to study, I never had any of that.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Mixed-race person with one parent who is Asian (or Asian American) and another parent who is non-Asian.

<sup>94</sup> I have used pseudonyms for the Setsuo Kinoshita's *taiko* students (but not for his co-teachers and ensemble co-members). The students were occasionally very candid in their criticisms, and I hope to relay their sentiments without inciting unnecessary conflict within the community.

<sup>95</sup> Marcelo, personal communication, September 6, 2003.

His grandparents' death initiated a personal crisis that kindled his desire to learn more about Japanese culture. After finding Kinoshita's class on the internet, he went, with some trepidation, to his first class:

I had that vision of the Japanese as a very closed people who don't open to outsiders. I know I am a descendant, but I don't speak the language or anything. I thought I would be discriminated against...I walked in and there were lots of Japanese ladies on the side of the room speaking Japanese along with Setsuo and Michang [Mitsue Iwamoto], who are more or less Japanese themselves, and I said, "I knew it." When I saw that scene full of older people speaking Japanese, I thought it would not work out...I asked [one of the other students], "Do you speak Japanese?" She said, "No," and I said, "Thank god." Then Setsuo explained that he would teach in both Japanese and Portuguese.<sup>96</sup>

Marcelo eventually overcame his fear of the class, becoming one of Kinoshita's most dedicated and accomplished students, later stepping in for his *sensei* (teacher) in practice sessions when Kinoshita returned to Japan for his yearly sojourn several months after the class began.

Similarly, Renata, a twenty-three year old *sensei* women who had begun to train shortly before me, felt that her upbringing set her apart from the other students.

I am the granddaughter of Japanese, a *sensei*. The only Japanese people I had contact with were my cousins. I didn't really have Japanese friends in school...We never participated in the associations. I am super Brazilian, but I wanted to know the Japanese side...Most of the people who do *taiko* speak Japanese. They are more into the culture. I feel like a fish out of water. Not because of the language, but because my upbringing was different.<sup>97</sup>

For Renata, it was not only her lack of Japanese language abilities that contributed to her sense of discomfort. Rather, she felt that her upbringing outside of the colony by *nisei* parents had given her a cultural perspective that made her feel different from her colleagues in the *taiko* class. Even Japanese language skills are no guarantee of an easy

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Renata, personal communication, October 23, 2003.

entrance into Nikkei social worlds. Monica, for example, who spoke Japanese at home with her *issei* parents, had the Japanese language skills that some of her colleagues lacked. However, her intimate knowledge of Japanese language and culture had not inoculated her from a sense of ambivalence towards her Japanese heritage. Recalling moments when she had been referred to as a “Jap” on the street, Monica noted: “When I was younger, I wasn’t proud to be Japanese. Maybe because of this I never looked for Japanese friends.”<sup>98</sup>

Other students think of themselves as colony insiders. Ricardo, for example, grew up in a small agricultural town with a large Nikkei population.

I came from a colony in the interior that was more closed, restricted. Here in São Paulo, descendants study in Brazilian schools and have Brazilian friends. There in the interior we only have Japanese friends. In the interior our training is different... Where I come from the parents... wanted you to marry other Japanese. It is a question of physical characteristics and culture. Japanese are never sure how a Brazilian has been raised. Japanese children are brought up never to raise their voices to their parents. Brazilians were more free... It was very segregated.<sup>99</sup>

It was only when he came to São Paulo at age nineteen that Ricardo began to have friends outside the Nikkei community. However, even among the students who had grown up in São Paulo, many had grown up socializing primarily with other Japanese descendants and participating actively in Japanese associations.

Coming from many different cultural backgrounds, the students had varying levels of previous experience with Japanese culture in general and Japanese music in particular. They also had a wide range of musical tastes (see Table 2 below).

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<sup>98</sup> Monica, personal communication, September 6, 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Ricardo, personal communication, August 6, 2003.

**Table 2: Musical Preferences of Twenty-Five *Taiko* Students  
(see Appendix A)**

National Origin	Genre	Number of Student Fans
Japan	<i>enka</i>	5
	<i>j-pop</i>	5
	karaoke	1
	anime	1
Brazil	samba	1
	MPB	7
	Country	2
International	new age	3
	classical	9
	Celtic	1
	rock n' roll	11
	hip hop	1
	punk	1
	heavy metal	2

Ten of the students I surveyed reported liking Japanese musical genres, including *enka* and *j-pop* (see Table 2 above). While many of those who had strong ties with the colony had previously participated in the karaoke competition circuit, and several had experience playing instruments, few had experience with Japanese instruments. Ricardo, who had spent several years singing karaoke before he began to study with Kinoshita, felt that, compared to the karaoke world, the *taiko* community allowed him to create more intimate friendships with people his own age. Accordingly, he enjoyed the communal practice sessions of *taiko* more than the isolated singing classes.

Several students, particularly those who had little interaction with the colony, cited the desire to *rescatar* (reclaim) their Japanese heritage as their main motivation in studying *taiko*. However, their interest in things Japanese did not necessarily correspond with a desire to become acquainted with Japan itself. As Renata explained:

I am not interested in going to live in Japan...Since I was very young, my uncles have been going to work in Japan. And they were miserable,

because they left their families behind. And so I began to see that place as a country of suffering where people go to work, make money, and buy a house. And the family separates. I see that as suffering. Family is the basis of everything.<sup>100</sup>

This marked lack of idealization about Japan is typical of young Nikkei Brazilians who have grown up hearing stories of *dekasegui* hardship like those of Renata's uncles. A similar ambivalence permeates the stories of the several *taiko* students who had gone to Japan, not as factory workers but as exchange students. Monica for example, who studied Japanese and later worked in a Japanese company, deplored the "coldness" of Japanese urbanites.<sup>101</sup> However, these less than positive evaluations of Japan do not in any way diminish these young Brazilians' interest in their Japanese heritage.

An equally important motivation for joining a *taiko* class, particularly for students who have not socialized with other Nikkei in the past, is the desire to build community among themselves and other Nikkei. Several of the class groups socialized outside of practice and had formed strong bonds with each other. The Thursday class in particular took pride in the mutual respect and affection that had grown among them. According to Fernando, "The Thursday group is a really strong group. We do things together outside of class...we have barbeques at each other's houses." According to Ricardo, part of what brought the group together was their similar life circumstances:

I have become closer to this group than any other. It is amazing. In the Thursday group there are people who are more or less the same age, between 25 and 35. We have all finished university and have a certain financial stability. Some are married. We have sort of gone through the first hard part of life and found some stability... We identify with one another.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Renata, personal communication, October 23, 2003.

<sup>101</sup> Monica, personal communication, September 6, 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Fernando, personal communication, August 13, 2003.

For those who spent much of their lives trying to disassociate themselves from other Japanese descendants, this identification may represent a break from early social habits. The strength of these group connections may also create a level of dedication to the rigorous *taiko* practice that Kinoshita demands. Over the years, Setsuo Kinoshita has begun to see his *taiko* pedagogy as a way of healing the wounds that Japanese Brazilians incur growing up in a racial hierarchy that constructs them as Other. And interestingly, for him, *taiko* is as much a discovery of one's Brazilian identity as it is a reclaiming of one's Japanese roots, as I explain in the next section.

### 3.3 BECOMING BRAZILIAN



**Figure 8: Setsuo Kinoshita, Tokinonagare Tour (São Paulo, 2003)**

For Kinoshita, a Japanese Brazilian who first went to Japan in his early twenties, what he saw as his students' "Brazilian" ways of interpreting *taiko* were initially a source of great frustration. It was only after he had begun to deconstruct his own assumptions about ethnic identity through travel and study that he began to appreciate the power and beauty of what he labels Brazilian-style *taiko*. While musical borrowing and hybridity is common among cosmopolitan musicians, Kinoshita's story helps to uncover the emotional stakes of intercultural musical production, which may work against deeply held conceptions of Self and Other, past and present, and the status of ethnic identity in the contemporary world.

A Japanese descendant from São Paulo who was thirty-five when I interviewed him during the summer of 2003, Kinoshita grew up speaking Japanese in his home. His father, the son of an immigrant from Tokushima, was born in Brazil but spoke more Japanese than Portuguese. Kinoshita related that, "when he met my mother they spoke Japanese together."<sup>103</sup> His mother, born in Hokkai, had been brought to Brazil by her parents as a young girl. His family had strong ties with the *colônia*, and he grew up listening to the sounds of *enka* and *j-pop*. Although educated in the Brazilian school system, Setsuo understood Japanese but did not learn to speak well until he went to Japan in his early twenties. However this did not stop him from becoming a skilled singer of Japanese popular song as early as eight years old. Later, as a teenager, he joined a band that specialized in *enka* and *j-pop* called *Mugen Infinito*. He also studied the Japanese martial art *kendo*. His family practiced the religion Tenrikyo and had a small chapel where they worshiped in the morning and in the evening, accompanying themselves with Japanese instruments. It was during this worship that Setsuo first became acquainted with

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<sup>103</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

*taiko*, although it did not have a big impact on him at the time, and he later regretted not having paid more attention to those early lessons.

Following his parents' wishes, Kinoshita first went to Japan at age twenty-two to study Japanese. He was not initially keen on the idea of leaving Brazil, having just finished a university degree in computer science. He recounted: "I had finished school. I had a car. I had a girlfriend. I had a good life. But I finally said, 'Let me study in the land of my ancestors for a while.'" <sup>104</sup>

My contact with Japan was through the Japanese colony...so the colony formed my ideas about Japan...But when I went to Japan it was completely different than I expected. I think we [Brazilians] preserve more Japanese culture...it was a shock when I went to Japan...it was different from the Japanese colony. <sup>105</sup>

Kinoshita spent four years in Japan on this first trip. The first two years he spent studying Japanese language and *kendo*. A third year was spent doing Tenrikyo missionary work. In his final year, Kinoshita worked with the children of Brazilian immigrants, strengthening their Japanese language skills and teaching them Portuguese.

Kinoshita had arrived in Japan in the late 1980s when the economy was strong and many of his compatriots were working in the industrial sector, saving money to establish themselves financially in Brazil. There were few Brazilians in the area of Nara where Kinoshita settled, but he did make friends with a couple of Brazilians who, having arrived in Japan before him, helped ease the shock of his transition into Japanese culture. Although Kinoshita had some knowledge of "Japanese vocabulary and food," he nonetheless struggled to adapt to the new social environment in which he found himself. One of the differences that surprised Kinoshita was linguistic:

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Today's vocabulary has many English words. Older people don't understand lots of things. Here in Brazil we use vocabulary that they used one hundred years ago. For example, the word for book; They call it *nooto*. Here in Brazil we still say *chomei*.<sup>106</sup>

However, more subtle differences in cultural expectation caused more conflict in his early years in Japan.

The cultural differences are there. You have to be careful to be prompt. Here we are used to being a bit late. But there you will get into fights if you are late. In fact, I was in the wrong...Being prompt isn't a huge thing, but there end up being so many little things that very soon your head becomes full [with the little details].<sup>107</sup>

Like many of the Japanese Brazilians I met, Kinoshita sees cultural differences as the main source of strife between Japanese Brazilians and cultural Others that he encounters. Repeatedly, time, as both concept and deed, was cited as the root of these differences. First, time, as measured in generations, is understood as a cultural transformer that has made communication difficult. Meanwhile, cultural differences in the interpretation of the time-space relationship were often cited as the most profound sources of intercultural misunderstanding. As we shall see, the idea of culture as an embodied sense of time and rhythm helps to explain the importance of the musical/cultural interventions that Kinoshita has undertaken.

During his first two years studying at a Japanese language school with other international students, Kinoshita had little contact with Japanese nationals outside of class. However, once he left the school, he began living with Japanese youth: "Young Japanese drink a lot. But they all wanted to drink in my room. We [Brazilians] end up seeming square because we don't want to join them."<sup>108</sup> However, through his encounters

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

with Japanese he had also begun to internalize a critical view of Brazilians and Brazilian culture. He believed that much of the prejudice that Brazilians experienced in Japan was a justifiable response to the criminal behavior of Brazilians who lived in areas more densely populated by immigrants: “Many of the Brazilians who go there steal cars...there are lots of assaults, so people don't want anything to do with Brazilians.”<sup>109</sup> In recent years, Japan has become rife with stories of Japanese Brazilian violence, which is perceived as a profound threat to public order and safety. While statistics show that there have been more arrests of Brazilian Nikkei than of Japanese nationals, this slight difference does not even approximate the vastly exaggerated “crime wave,” as it has been described within the Japanese press.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, these statistics are themselves deceptive, as Japanese nationals are less likely to be arrested than Brazilians.

The hysterical public reaction to Japanese Brazilian immigration is best understood as a flowering of Japanese nationalism. While Japanese Brazilians have responded in several ways to this rhetoric, many have internalized this negative view of Brazilians in Japan. Ironically, while it was the presumption of racial unity that originally led Japan to encourage Nikkei immigration from the Americas, Japanese descendants have ultimately been seen as abject in their Otherness. Nikkei Brazilians often describe their predicament as one of double identity: “In Brazil I am Japanese, and in Japan I am Brazilian” (Tsuda 2003, 246). Describing the condition of double consciousness within the US context, Dubois calls attention to the internal struggle that a multiplicity of (disparaging) worldviews may inspire in the individual: “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of xenophobia in Japan see “Foreign Criminality in Japan,” Japan Reference, June 14, 2004. [http://www.jref.com/society/foreign\\_crime\\_in\\_japan.shtml](http://www.jref.com/society/foreign_crime_in_japan.shtml) (accessed August 1, 2007).

ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (1969, 45).

In Kinoshita’s case, the time he spent in Japan inculcated him with a deep loathing for things Brazilian. By the end of his first trip to Japan, Kinoshita became so accustomed to life in Japan that when he returned to Brazil he was completely disoriented and spent several months not wanting to leave his apartment: “I felt afraid to go out. I was afraid of violence. It was very bad. I had a bad image of Brazil.”<sup>111</sup> Kinoshita’s first response to Japan was to identify more strongly with his Japanese heritage, while rejecting the Brazilian. He eventually began a course in massage and began a *taiko* group that he called Godaiko. “When I started there were only one or two *taiko* groups in Brazil. I played in a band, but they did not have *graça* (grace). The [*taiko*] sound was cool but when they played they weren’t great.”<sup>112</sup>

While *taiko* percussion had been used in religious practice and festivals in Brazil since early in the century, *kumidaiko* ensembles were not known in Brazil until the 1980s when a few ensembles were formed, including Tanguê Setsuo, Brazil’s oldest Kumidaiko group. However, these early groups trained without the benefit of a master teacher, and by many accounts lacked the energy that Japanese groups brought to the art form. Although Kodo, invited by the Japan Foundation of São Paulo, toured Brazil in 1988, until the late 1990s many Nikkei Brazilians had only seen video recordings of professional *taiko* performance. Kinoshita’s first glimpse *taiko* on television when he was a teenager had a strong impact on him: “The first time I saw a show I couldn't stop

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<sup>111</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

crying.”<sup>113</sup> In Japan, Setsuo saw a few groups that “woke up” his interest in *taiko* once again: “I tried to imitate these groups. I started a group, Godaiko, imitating the music. It was explosive, and everyone started to say, ‘Wow, *taiko* is so cool.’... We came on the scene and it exploded.”<sup>114</sup> Wanting to strengthen his skills as both a masseuse and *taiko* musician, Kinoshita returned to Japan in 1995, where he joined the group Wadaiko Yamato, a professional group from Nara that was one of the first to feature women in their stage performance. Kinoshita’s wife Mitsue Iwamoto began to study with Wadaiko Yamato shortly after meeting Kinoshita. “His eyes shone when he talked about *taiko*,”<sup>115</sup> she relates, and so she too began *taiko* study. A Korean descendant born and raised in Japan, Mitsue became the group’s only ethnic Korean participant, while Kinoshita was the only Brazilian. Kinoshita credits Wadaiko Yamato with teaching him the techniques that he would later bring to Brazil as the first *nisei* (second-generation) teacher of Brazilian *taiko*. However, musical skill was not all that he learned from his *taiko* practice. Specifically, Kinoshita had to learn to modify his “Brazilian” approach towards hierarchy. According to him, the Japanese *taiko* students did not speak at all in class except to answer *hai* (yes) when spoken to: “When they work in groups, they are quiet and only respond, ‘Yes.’ Only the leader talks.”<sup>116</sup> Similarly, some North American *taiko* schools discourage direct question by pupils (Tusler 2003, 261). “Brazilians want to be able to say, ‘This is wrong. Why are we doing it like this?’... I am Brazilian.”<sup>117</sup>

It was not until 1997 and 1998, when Kinoshita produced two Brazilian tours by Wadaiko Yamato, that the Japanese Brazilian community experienced the full impact of

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<sup>113</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

<sup>114</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003.

<sup>115</sup> Mitsue Iwamoto, personal communication, October 29, 2003.

<sup>116</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

<sup>117</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

professional *kumidaiko*. The tour, which brought the group to ten Brazilian cities, was publicized primarily within the Japanese Brazilian community, although it was open to the general public. The tour generated a great deal of enthusiasm for *taiko*. Indeed, several of the students I talked with cite the Yamato tour as their initial inspiration for studying *taiko*. Successful as it was, the tour also created new tensions between Kinoshita and Wadaiko Yamato.

There were problems in Brazil. [In Japan] when you are going to set up, people arrive on time. Here [in Brazil] sometimes people don't show up. It is the producer that ends up getting into a fight. I got into many arguments [with Wadaiko Yamato] because of other people.<sup>118</sup>

Through his work on the Wadaiko Yamato tour, Kinoshita became well known in the Japanese Brazilian community, impressing the public as the only Nikkei performing with the ensemble. As the producer he also appeared on several radio and television programs. This notoriety helped him establish himself as Brazil's first Nikkei *taiko* professor in São Paulo in 1999:

There was a lot of interest in *taiko*, people looking for classes, people trying to figure out how to get *taiko* to represent Japanese culture [in Brazil]... a lot of people believed that *taiko* could represent Japanese culture here in Brazil as a symbol, to show that [Japanese descendants] also have percussion...<sup>119</sup>

Why should it be important to show that Japanese descendants also have percussion? Here we enter the complicated web of metonymical musical meanings through which Brazilians have come to understand Brazilianness. Indeed, Brazilians often rely on musical concepts to communicate what they believe to be essential about the Brazilian way of life. Rhythmic metaphors, (particularly *ginga*, as I will discuss in more detail below), are used to communicate philosophical orientations and the life paths they imply.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003.

During the 1990s, samba culture, in the form of *pagode*, had been experiencing a revival for almost a decade. Moreover, the percussive grooves of Bahian *axé* music were at the apex of their popularity, with youth from all over the country practicing the synchronized dances that accompany *axé* songs. The power and speed of *axé* music had attracted fans all over the Brazilian diaspora, and even entered the world music circuit, popularized by Paul Simon through his work with Timbalada, the reigning kings of the Bahian sound. More than any other music of the time, *axé* was understood as the heartbeat of Black Brazil, and like many genres before it, came to represent the spirit of Brazilianness. While the recent interest in *taiko* of the past few years may be seen as an exploration of Japanese culture by Nikkei Brazilians who want to recover something that has previously evaded them, this tendency to seek cultural essence within the percussive is itself a very Brazilian mode of thinking. Indeed, according to Alice Satomi, the unprecedented interest on the part of Nikkei Brazilians in Japanese percussion was in part inspired by the overwhelming popularity of *axé* music.<sup>120</sup> If, according to popular philosophy, to be Brazilian is to be percussive, the huge boom in *taiko* practice the last few years may be as much about drumming into existence Nikkei Brazilian selves as it is an exploration of Japanese heritage.

When Kinoshita first began to teach *taiko* in Brazil, he wanted to help his student recover their Japanese heritage.

Nikkei who grow up in Brazil only learn about Brazilian culture. There are some families that teach some Japanese culture, so they know a bit. But to learn more they have to recover their Japanese [heritage]...I speak a lot of Japanese to the students. That helps them to recover their Japanese heritage. There are many parents who are happy about that, especially parents who think their kids are losing touch with Japanese culture.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Alice Satomi, personal communication, 2003.

<sup>121</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003.

However, introducing *taiko* to Brazil ultimately proved more difficult than

Kinoshita expected:

When I came back to Brazil, I wanted to put together a group and teach classes but it didn't work. It was my fault. I wanted to force Japanese culture on the Nikkei. I wanted to make a completely Japanese group here in Brazil, a totally Japanese group with [Japanese] mindset and discipline, but nobody could take it. They all stopped coming...I wanted to do true *taiko* in Brazil, and if it was not possible, I would rather do nothing.<sup>122</sup>

It took some time to learn how to adapt the *taiko* methodology that he had learned in Japan to the Brazilian context. The difficulties he encountered were both administrative and at the level of musical technique. While he was reticent to talk about details of these conflicts with his first Brazilian students of *taiko*, he did let on that some of the conflict arose from differing expectations about punctuality (i.e. students tended to be uneven about arriving on time), regular attendance, and the time and financial responsibilities incurred during out-of-class presentations. Again, time became an important model for understanding cultural differences between the (Japanese) teaching style he was attempting and his (Brazilian) students. One of his current students also reported that a more serious conflict had arisen when one of his students began to earn money from teaching *taiko* without Kinoshita's permission, a serious breach of the teacher-student relationship from a Japanese perspective.

However, Kinoshita's disappointment with the students was not just a question of their dedication to class and practice. Kinoshita soon discovered that his students played with a Brazilian style:

When a Black person plays the rhythm, he has his identity. The Brazilian has an identity. The Japanese has an identity. Japanese do not have much *ginga*, they are very solid and hard. In *taiko*, it is mostly the legs that allow

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

one to stand firmly. When my Brazilian students play, their shoulders move a bit, the hips dance a bit, so it is different from the Japanese... People from Japan who see it think it looks ugly because there is no stability.<sup>123</sup>

It is the entire body moving in concert that produces the distinctive and powerful sound of the *taiko* drums, and so this Brazilian style of playing was not simply a question of choreographed presence, as it altered the quality of the sound. Specifically, Kinoshita argued, his students were not able to play as loudly as Japanese *taiko* players, because the strength of their strokes dissipated in the swinging and bouncing motions of their bodies

In *taiko*, it is not just the arms, it is the whole body that plays... Japanese play louder; Brazilians have speed. Japanese have more power. Without the base you will not play as loud, but Brazilians can play with more velocity.<sup>124</sup>

At first, Kinoshita was taken aback by these differences in his Brazilian students' approach to *taiko* as his intention had been to "show the true *taiko* of Japan."<sup>125</sup>

Disillusioned after his first "failed" attempt at creating *taiko* in Brazil, Kinoshita went back to Japan, the first of several yearly sojourns that have become central to his artistic and financial practice. Once in Japan, he began to reevaluate his relationship to Brazilian culture and, as part of this awakening, began to study samba percussion: "After 2000, I began to like samba. I went back to Japan and started a samba school. Every time I came back to Brazil, I studied a bit. I wanted to learn to play."<sup>126</sup> This newfound interest in samba was a radical departure from his earlier musical proclivities. Indeed, when he was

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<sup>123</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, October 29, 2003.

<sup>124</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, September 12, 2003.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003.

younger he had loathed *pagode* music: “I didn’t like it. In fact I hated it.”<sup>127</sup> When I asked him to explain his strong dislike of samba he recalled:

I had a certain prejudice. Here in Brazil, the people who like samba are from the lower classes. They have problems with the Japanese colony (and with every one else as well). They make fun of us. They attack us. I don’t have this prejudice now, but at that time I had more of a problem with it...A Japanese [descendant] goes by and they say, “Hey Jap.” I am proud to be Japanese. But they speak it with a tone of, “You, Japanese, your culture has no grace, your dance has no grace and is boring, you have nothing special to offer.”<sup>128</sup>

While Kinoshita’s attitude towards samba transformed over the years, he is still bothered by the negative attention that he receives as a Japanese descendant practicing samba.

Kinoshita often felt uncomfortable at the samba schools he began to frequent, as people would yell out and laugh when he arrived. When I met him, he had recently gone to a school with some Nikkei friends: “There were some Black people who said, ‘Hey look, there are some Japanese playing samba, ha, ha, ha’ and making fun of us.”<sup>129</sup>

This view of Japanese as lacking Brazilian grace and style is unfortunately not restricted to the samba community. While Japanese Brazilians are generally seen in a more positive light now than in previous decades, a trend that has been linked to Japan’s growing economic power on the world stage (Lesser 1999), they are still imagined as essentially un-Brazilian within popular discourse and believed to lack essential markers of embodied grace and beauty. As a result, Japanese Brazilians may internalize a negative image of their Japanese cultural heritage:

There are many Japanese [descendants in Brazil] who are ashamed to be Japanese and don’t want to learn Japanese or have Japanese friends. They

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<sup>127</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003.

only want to marry with people who are not Yellow because they are ashamed.<sup>130</sup>

In Japan, working as a masseuse and continuing to deepen his knowledge of *taiko*, Kinoshita decided to work against Nikkei exclusion from samba culture, becoming an ambassador of Japanese Brazilian samba. He began a samba ensemble in Nara, which still exists today. Indeed, samba has become extremely popular in Japan with several cities hosting enormous carnivals.<sup>131</sup> Ironically, while Japanese Brazilians often participate in these festivities, it is often the Japanese participants who win judged competitions with their skillful samba choreography and musicianship (Tsuda 2000). According to Kinoshita, samba represents freedom for Japanese and is experienced as a form of “breaking out” of overly restrictive social roles:

Samba is happy. They associate the music with Brazilian culture. The Japanese are rigid and they look for something that breaks down that [rigidity]. Brazilians have a lot of freedom. The music makes you happy... People came to my group because... I was not prejudiced. I was open to them. We did shows in various places. It was fun. They are still playing. When I go back, I will bring them something new.<sup>132</sup>

This positive appraisal of Brazilian culture as a site of freedom represented a newfound maturity in Kinoshita’s thinking about ethnic identity. When he first arrived in Japan and discovered a scene of xenophobic stereotyping that was the perfect mirror of the heckling he had grown accustomed to in Brazil, Kinoshita often found himself in the awkward position of defending Brazilian culture with an idealized description of Brazilian warmth. This defensive mechanism put him at odds with a younger self who had previously engaged that same mechanism to defend against attacks on his Japanese cultural heritage.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Information about Japan’s carnival culture can be found at the “Japan Samba Home Page” <http://tanny.cup.com/japansamba/> (accessed August 1, 2007).

<sup>132</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003.

Ultimately, this contradiction cracked the compartmentalizing logic of idealization in which cultures, either demonized or idealized, become frozen, pure, separate, and timeless entities.

Having passed through a period when, in his mind, Brazil was synonymous with violence, disorder, pollution, and disrespectful human relationships, Kinoshita began to have a more balanced view of the strengths and weaknesses of each social and cultural environment.

I would be giving a massage and someone would say, “Your country is filled with thieves. Nobody does any work because you are so busy playing football all the time.” It wasn’t meanness. I used to get hurt and mad... But then I began to see the good and bad in both countries.<sup>133</sup>

Learning not to engage in idealization, Kinoshita instead began to allow for both positive and negative poles in his evaluation of each cultural milieu.

There are many good things [about Japan]. It is organized, clean, and nobody bothers you. They respect people... Brazilians are very communicative and always want to talk. Japanese won’t talk to you if you don’t know them. Japanese are more closed. When you first meet someone, they won’t open up, but when you are friends, they open more deeply than Brazilians. It is felt in silence. They will help you without saying anything.<sup>134</sup>

Instead of imagining Japanese and Brazilian culture in separate compartments, one good and one bad, Kinoshita began to break down the categories between Orient and Occident that circulate both in Japanese and Brazilian contexts. Looking through the surfaces of interaction style, he was able to see the underlying humanity and good will among people, rendering such categories as emotional “warmth” and “coldness” meaningless. Moreover, he began to individuate himself from these different cultural categories so that his sense of self was no longer tied so strongly to his national affiliation. In unfreezing

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<sup>133</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

his conception of culture, he also opened up the possibility for personal growth and change that opened up new avenues in his artistic practice.

When he again returned to Brazil in 2001, students were extremely responsive to this new approach, and when I spent time with them in 2003, Kinoshita was teaching classes almost every night of the week and had recruited several dedicated students who were performing regularly at local events and festivals. Kinoshita now travels between Brazil and Japan, where he teaches *taiko* and samba, respectively. In Japan, he continues to expand his musical knowledge, studying *taiko* and *shinobue* (transverse flute). In Brazil, Setsuo also began to study music therapy and in addition to teaching, has begun to work with hearing-impaired youth.

In recent years, he has also begun to see music in relation to the complex social identity of Nikkei Brazilians: “I thought a lot about working on the identity of Brazilian Nikkei and to work for the good of this group.” He began to see his music as a way to heal the trauma of internalized racism that his students contend with. Indeed, healing the traumas of exclusion that Nikkei Brazilians have sustained is of prime importance to Kinoshita. For him, music is an ideal form of therapy for healing the Nikkei psyche: “There are many traumas it will cure.”<sup>135</sup> Eloquently describing this process of musical healing, he argues that *taiko* practice helps to recover a “place” of confidence and emotional support:

It is important for descendants to have contact with the [Japanese] culture, very important. As a descendant people say to you, “Your culture has no grace” and when you learn that, in fact, your culture is beautiful, you say, “So, there is a place for me here.” You feel more secure. When you have no culture to support you emotionally, you feel insecure.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, July 30, 2003.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

While, Kinoshita continues to believe in the importance of reconnecting with Japanese culture, he has become critical of those (including his former self) who imagined Japanese culture as a rigid path that must be sought in a pure form. Kinoshita now favors a more integrated approach, wanting his students to “become comfortable with both sides of their identity.”<sup>137</sup> This has had profound ramifications for his teaching practice, as he no longer sees himself as the transmitter of a pure art that has to be communicated in an untainted form. Rather, he has begun to see himself as a pioneer between Japan and Brazil who is committed opening the path for Brazilian *taiko* practice.

In his performance practice, Kinoshita became interested in combining the rhythms of samba and *taiko*, a dream that came to fruition in 2003, when his group Wadaiko Sho created an original composition combining samba and *taiko* practice as part of the Tonkinonagare tour. Collaborating with Mitsue Iwamoto and two other Japanese *taiko* players, Kumiko Teraguchi and Michikazo Sasaki, Kinoshita composed and arranged the six songs that were presented as part of this tour of ten Brazilian cities.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 9: Michikazu Sasaki and Kumiko Teraguchi Perform “Odaiko”**



**Figure 10: Setsuo Kinoshita Performing “Futbol” in a Brazilian Soccer Jersey**



**Figure 11: Kumiko Teraguchi Performing “Futbol” in a Japanese Soccer Jersey**

“Tokinonagare,” according to Kinoshita, means the “passage of time,” and was conceived as a temporal journey through the past, present, and future of *taiko*. In the show the past was represented by “Yatai-Bayashi,” a regional folk song from the region of Saitama. The present of *taiko* was represented by four compositions. “Odaiko,” a solemn piece with dramatic shifts in dynamics composed by collaborator Michikazu Sasaki, featured an intricate and highly synchronized duet by Teraguchi and Sasaki on the *ōdaiko* (See Figure 9). “Hyuga” (the composition by Wadaiko Yamato that Kinoshita teaches in his classes) was performed expertly by these four former pupils of the prestigious Japanese taiko group. “Tokinonagare,” composed by Kinoshita, is the most polished and compelling piece of the show, featuring stunning, virtuosic syncopations, contrasts in timbre, and dramatic *oroshi* (drum patterns of increasingly rapid beats).

“Futbol” used the strokes of the *shimi daiko* to sonically simulate the movement of a soccer ball that is passed by members of opposing (Brazilian and Japanese) teams. Using costumes to distinguish himself from his Japanese compatriots, Kinoshita, wearing a soccer jersey with the colors of the Brazilian flag, marks himself as a Brazilian *taiko* practitioner.

Through this mimetic encounter between soccer and *taiko*, he seems to elevate *taiko* to the status of a national Brazilian pastime, while deconstructing the elision of Japanese Brazilians and Japanese nationals that is so common in popular Brazilian discourse (Figures 10 and 11). “Taiko de Samba” further reinforces this theme of *taiko* as a Brazilian endeavor. Setsuo offers this song as a vision of the Brazilian future of *taiko*, a temporal intervention that he sees as part of a larger project of healing Japanese Brazilian psychic wounds through *taiko* performance and pedagogy. I will discuss “Taiko de Samba” below in some detail but in order to contextualize my analysis I want to first elaborate the discursive logics that Kinoshita is working against, specifically those that posit Japaneseness as anti-Brazilian.

### 3.4 NIKKEI GINGA

The importance of the kinesthetic and temporal joining of Japanese and Brazilian aesthetic practice described above cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the commonsense separation of Japanese and Brazilian bodies and aesthetic strategies within Brazilian discourse. Indeed, Kinoshita had to modify his deeply ingrained ideas of what

was proper to Japanese and Brazilian bodies. Specifically, he learned to accept a different bodily approach towards *taiko*, while adopting teaching methods that were more appropriate to his Brazilian students:

So I thought since nobody can take Japanese style [playing], I will put in some Brazilian [style]...I began to work in ways that were more malleable to Brazilians...to let in some of the Brazilian way of thinking. Why does *taiko* have to be played in this [Japanese] way? Why can't we swing a bit, dance a bit? So I began to open it up...Since I have this Brazilian side, I no longer want to say [to my students] that they have to play like the Japanese. I don't want them to lose their Brazilian identity. It won't work. Their way of thinking is different, and their culture is different. I want them to keep dancing a bit...Why not play while dancing?<sup>138</sup>

As in the example quoted above, Kinoshita often talks about the embodied Brazilian movement style that his students bring to their *taiko* practice, suggesting that Japanese Brazilians have so internalized the Brazilian codes of embodied behavior that they cannot help but bring it to their musical practice. Unlike Adolfo Mizuta, who describes the intentional and arduous process through which Nikkei musicians seek to learn the embodied practice of samba culture, Kinoshita attends to the unconscious aspects of corporeal pedagogy that have shaped his students' bodies and their approaches to musical practice. The assertion that Japanese Brazilian bodies carry with them the imprint of Brazilian style is quite radical when we consider that within Brazilian popular discourse, Japanese Brazilians are unassimilable and reportedly unable to master the basic tenets of Brazilian rhythm and musicianship. In contrast, Kinoshita argues that Nikkei Brazilians have been so imprinted by Brazil that even their Japanese musical practice is accented by the *ginga* of Brazil.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

I first encountered the term *ginga* when studying the Brazilian martial art *capoeira*, where it is used to denote a stepping pattern out of which all other movements are initiated. A relaxed backwards lunge that alternates between the right and left sides as the arms sweep across the body, *ginga* keeps a player in perpetual motion, relaxed and prepared for all the unexpected moves that the game may bring. However, *ginga* is also used to refer to the relaxed and fluid motion that Brazilians may bring to any number of physical activities. According to De Tavares, *ginga*:

Designates their [Brazilian's] belongingness to the national Brazilian order either inside or outside of Brazil. So, it turns to a case [sic] that allows us to understand the popularized way by which Brazilians define the singular trace that gives to themselves the condition of being nationally or transnationally considered Brazilian, as to say that *Ginga* is one of the traces that makes Brazilians Brazilian. Usually, if you ask Brazilians what makes their Carnival somehow different from the others, they would say that it is because of *ginga* presence in Samba. If you ask what makes Brazilian soccer player different from others, they will answer that is because [of] the presence of *ginga* in their way of playing. (2002, under "The body narrative and the semiotic regime of *ginga*") [unpaginated electronic text]

*Ginga*, which is defined as "swing" by many Brazilians, is therefore much more than a description of musical practice or bodily motion. Rather, it indexes a complex of attitudes, philosophies, and tactics that are understood to define what it means to be Brazilian.

*Ginga* describes more than kinesthetic procedure. It is a type of personal presentation and intercultural negotiation grounded in flexibility and a willingness to work around problems in creative ways. Indeed, the word *ginga* came into Portuguese in the fifteenth century during the colonization of the Mbundo kingdom, which spanned parts of contemporary Angola and the Congo (Miller 1988). Some believe that the term is derived from the name of Queen Nzinga, whose warriors, referred to as "*ginga*" by the

Portuguese, fought against colonization (ibid.). The word therefore carries the semantic trace of the violent colonial encounter between Africa and Europe. However, in the Mbundo language “jinga” also defines a philosophy of fluidity in human and celestial affairs based on an understanding of unceasing movement:

...*Ginga* became a figure of speech that indicates balance through movement, stylization, negotiation, non-confrontation and something like “being in peace with God and life,” that is, a cosmic equilibrium...At the same time, it becomes a core concept that acts as a pragmatic-transcendental sense of rhythm that defines a moral philosophical imaginary...*Ginga* performs the function of mapping and making reference to how Blacks operate in Brazil in multiple worlds in their everyday life. Based on this map *ginga* may also define style, ethics, access to multiple worlds, self-presentation, self-construction, attitude, conduct and, on a very concrete level, ways of walking...“*Ginga* of Brazilians is *malandragem* (trickstering); it is the trickster formula for solving problems. It is our daily life, it is a smiling, a hip-play, it is to continue believing that the situation does get better right away even when it is very hard.” (De Tavares 2002, under “The body narrative and the semiotic regime of *ginga*”) [unpaginated electronic text]

In Brazil, *ginga* is an African-derived concept that has helped Black Brazilians navigate a social world in which the rug may be pulled out from under them at any moment. It involves creativity, flexibility and balance in the face of a hostile racial caste system. It is often connected with *malandragem*, as in the above citation, which is itself a complicated racial trope connoting trickery hidden beneath a smiling mask. Embodied in the character of the *malandro*, the mulatto folk hero elevated to national symbol, who became associated with samba culture between the 1920s and 1930s, *malandragem* involves finding ways to take advantage of even the most unfavorable situations without being discovered in one’s trespass.<sup>139</sup> As Roberto Da Matta (1991) describes in his classic text *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes: An interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*, the

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<sup>139</sup> See Jorge Amado’s (1960) story “Pastores da Noite,” Chico Buarque de Hollanda’s film (1986) *Ópera do Malandro*, and Nelson Rodrigues’ film *Boca de Ouro* (1963) for seminal depictions of the *malandro*.

*malandro* is a kind of Robin Hood figure who uses the principle of *ginga* to work around the obstacle posed by unjust authority figures and laws. Linked with Blackness, and in particular with the urban Black culture of the Rio de Janeiro samba world, *ginga* and *malandragem* are often described as central to the Brazilian character.

However, as in the U.S., Black culture in Brazil continues to be seen with ambivalence, both as a source of pride, insofar as it contributes to what is understood to be Brazilians' unique grace, beauty, and physical dexterity, and as the site of colonial disavowal, troped as primitive vis-à-vis European (and Asian) culture. As Dávila describes, early in the 20th century, a temporal hierarchy was established between the races. Race was:

A metaphor that extended to describe the past, present, and future of the Brazilian nation. At one extreme, Blackness signified the past. Blackness was cast in Freudian language as primitive, prelogical, and childlike. More broadly, while elites equated Blackness with unhealthiness, laziness, and criminality...Whiteness embodied the desired virtues of health, culture, science, and modernity. (2003, 6)

This temporal/racial hierarchy continues to hold sway within popular Brazilian discourse. In contrast, Japanese Brazilians are increasingly seen as Brazil's future. While denied a place in Brazil's imaginary past, they are understood to embody the principles of progress and modernity, and, as such, seen as the model citizens of the Brazil of the future.

Constructed as the temporal opposites of Black Brazilians, it is not surprising that Japanese Brazilians are seen as lacking *ginga* (and *malandragem*). Indeed, in my encounters with Japanese Brazilians and Brazilians of non-Japanese descent, I was repeatedly told that Japanese (and their descendants) have no *ginga* (swing). Because of this ascribed lack of *ginga*, Japanese are likewise seen as unable to master the *ginga* of samba. As reported above, the popular phrase "Japanese in the samba" is used to refer to

someone who is playing samba badly, regardless of her ethnic or racial background.<sup>140</sup>

An example is the confusion of a São Paulo resident who encountered a Japanese descendant in a bar “who knew all of the sambas that they played and spoke about the topic with the confidence of a Black who had been raised in the middle [of samba culture]:”

As I confronted this philosophical dilemma (Could the presence of a Japanese in samba be synonymous with quality within that musical context?), I imagined a being confronting a cosmic joke, a metaphysical curiosity or one of many cosmic jokes: he was supposed to be Black (Afro) but was incarnated as Japanese. Can anybody explain this?<sup>141</sup>

While it is not uncommon for White Brazilians who are good at samba to be told that they have Black blood, such claims are never the cause of alarm or amazement.<sup>142</sup> In fact, it is very common for White elites to joke about the miscegenated origins of their family. As Dávila points out, when Whites feel “secure on their perches of power, wealth, and whiteness” (2003, 236), they may claim the privilege of flirting with Blackness, a privilege that is not extended to Black Brazilians. Meanwhile, among Japanese Brazilians who have not yet attained the same level of privilege as the White elites, flirting with Blackness is not yet a possibility. Japanese Brazilians who master *ginga* continue to be seen as humorous and completely unintelligible within the racial epistemology of Brazil. For this reason, Setsuo Kinoshita’s attempts to integrate into São Paulo samba schools were met with derision and disbelief.

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<sup>140</sup> See the globo.com article entitled “Tem japonês no samba,” for a current usage of this common term <http://maisvoce.globo.com/variedades.jsp?id=10097> (accessed February 27, 2007).

<sup>141</sup> “Tem japonês no samba,” March 17, 2007. [http://osoakfields.blogspot.com/2006\\_03\\_01\\_archiv.html](http://osoakfields.blogspot.com/2006_03_01_archiv.html) (accessed August 1, 2007).

<sup>142</sup> According to Barbara Browning, “When I have danced particularly well, I have always been told that this is evidence of some Black blood. This is not a literal misapprehension of my race. It is a statement of belief that the meaningfulness of race is culture and that a commitment to culture can result in an accrual of racial spiritual energy” (1995, 19).

While demonstrating a keen understanding of both the kinetic and philosophical principles of *ginga*, several of the *taiko* students I spoke with ascribed Nikkei bodies with a lack of *ginga*:

Shanna Lorenz: Would you like to learn samba?

Henry: I don't really have the *jeito*,<sup>143</sup> I don't have the *ginga*...I would never play just samba. I don't have *malandragem*.

Shanna Lorenz: What is *malandragem*?

Ricardo: You want to take advantage of everything. *Malandragem* is when a person wants to get something from you but not to the point of causing you a permanent harm. *Malandro* is to trick the person but not to harm them.

Shanna Lorenz: What does that have to do with music?

Ricardo: Samba involves *malandragem* because it has *ginga*. A *malandro* is not straightforward; he always goes around problems. You have a certain *ginga*. It is syncopated...*Taiko* is more square... You have to dance to play samba, but not *taiko*. When you go to play *taiko*, you have to have your head attuned to that kind of music...More straight. When you play samba, you have to have more *ginga*.

For Ricardo, *taiko* is fundamentally different from samba, just as Japanese Brazilians are fundamentally different from Black Brazilians. While there are, of course, important differences between *taiko* and samba, this tendency to accentuate their incompatibility is more related to notions of Brazilian racialization than to any inherent incompatibility between the two idioms.

While Brazilians may construct *taiko* in opposition to Africanist percussion sensibilities, a brief glance back at the history of *taiko* reminds us of the Africanist imperatives that inspired *taiko* practice long before its arrival in Brazil. Daihachi Ōguchi is credited with developing the ensemble *taiko* style that would later be brought to the

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<sup>143</sup> An untranslatable term that means something like “knack” or “fix,” and, like *malandragem*, has connotations of trickery.

Americas by teachers such as Setsuo Kinoshita. As early as 1951, Ōguchi, an accomplished jazz drummer, was inspired by his jazz training to bring together *taiko* of different sizes, much like a Western drum set. Dividing up traditional *taiko* rhythms between instruments he established the basic instrumentation for what would later be referred to as *kumidaiko*. As Tusler notes:

It is an ironic twist and a wonderful example of musical interchange that jazz, an American music founded on African and European musical sensibilities, and the concept of a drum set, an American instrument invented to accompany jazz, would prove to be integral to the development of ensemble *taiko*, a genre introduced to America as Japanese music. (2003, 47)

A musical form that is built upon the confluence of Japanese, European, and African musical sensibilities, *taiko* is not the embodiment of pure tradition but rather a cultural crossroads. And so, contrary to popular opinion, there is nothing inherent in the form that resists the integration of new Africanist techniques and rhythms, such as the samba that Kinoshita sought to introduce.

And in the context of Brazil, where Africanist aesthetics in the form of *ginga* are familiar to Brazilians of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, *taiko* practice can be seen not only as the incursion of Japanese musical practice, but as an encounter between different branches of the African musical diaspora. Speaking of the diffusion of Africanist movement aesthetics in the United States, Gottschild suggest that:

Africanisms are not a choice but an imperative that come to us through culture... Africanist presence comes to Americans from home base, from the inside. Like electricity through the wires, we draw from it all the time, but few of us are aware of its source. It is marrow in the bones of our culture or, as Toni Morrison writes, “Unspeakable things unspoken (1989).” (1996, 23)

As in the United States, in Brazil, African styles or “imperatives” flow through the “bones of culture” across ethnic lines. When Setsuo Kinoshita asserts that his Japanese

Brazilian students play with *ginga*, he is acknowledging the ways that Africanist cultural imperatives flow through Japanese Brazilian bodies (working against popular conceptions of Nikkei bodies and their place within the larger Japanese cultural sphere).

### 3.5 KINESTHETIC ACCENT

Fascinating is Kinoshita's assertion that his students bring a kind of embodied Brazilian accent to their *taiko* practice, which impacts the sonic quality of performance. From an ethnomusicological perspective, his assertion has the potential to enrich our understanding of cross-cultural musical pedagogy, which needs to take into account the quotidian (cultural) gestural vocabularies that impact the ways musicians execute and stylize their repertoire. How do cultural styles of movement, such as the Africanist movement imperatives I discuss above, impact musical style? In order to explore this issue, I will refer to this embodied style, both in its conscious and unconscious aspects, as "kinesthetic accent," which I define as corporeal protocols that we learn through quotidian interactions that are intelligible within (and sometimes across) the boundaries of family, class, ethnicity, race, gender, and nation. Insofar as kinesthetic accent may shape musical style, as Kinoshita suggests, I believe that it will be useful to rethink the question of bi-musicality in relationship to kinesthetic accent. However, I want to insist that the issue of "kinesthetic accent" is important not only because it may shed light upon debates within ethnomusicology, but because in Brazil it functions as a tacit discourse about race in the absence of a national discussion about the unabated racism within Brazilian society. As I have suggested, questions of embodied style surface regularly in

conversations at every level of Brazilian society and become both an explanatory model for understanding existing race relations as well as a tool of racialization that places bodies within a racial hierarchy.

By referring to this phenomenon as the kinesthetic accent, I hope to evoke, on one hand, Joseph Roach's discussion of the "kinesthetic imagination" as "a way of thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable (1996, 27)." In thinking through the body as the site of reproduction of cultural values, Roach's work is related to early meditations upon bodily practice. Mauss (1935) advanced his idea of "body techniques" as an aspect of culture that resides in the body. They are daily practices that include bodily skills, tastes, styles, and other forms of knowledge that are taken for granted. Elaborating upon Mauss's ideas, Bourdieu (1977) posed the "habitus" (which includes bodily dispositions) as learned behaviors that have been naturalized within a class or cultural group or society. While opening up new ways of looking at embodied practice and the link between discursive (spoken) and non-discursive (embodied) knowledge, Mauss's and Bourdieu's concepts have been unduly criticized as foreclosing the possibility of individual and group agency as they stress the regularity and continuity of embodied practices within bounded social groups.

Agency is precisely what Roach wrestles from these theories of embodiment, stressing the active reworking that cultural agents do as they improvise upon inherited behavioral patterns. In formulating his concept of the kinesthetic imagination, Roach therefore instead looks to the work of Pierre Nora (1989), who stresses the oppositional potential of "living memory," the gestures, habits, and skills that are passed on through embodied practices. Specifically, Nora argues that oral and embodied traditions provide

an important counterpoint to “places of memory” (official archives and monuments) (1989, 12-13). Likewise, Roach’s concept of kinesthetic imagination involves the historical citation of past behavior found both on the stage and in everyday life performances, but, looking at the confluence of “imagination and memory” (1996, 27), he stresses the transformation of embodied traditions:

Kinesthetic imagination is not only an impetus and method for the restoration of behavior but also a means of its imaginative expansion through those extensions of the range of bodily movements and puissances that technological invention and specialized social organization can provide. (Ibid.)

Roach, like Nora, is therefore interested in the oppositional potential of embodied discourse, which may tell stories that have been forgotten or erased within official discourses.

By replacing Roach’s term “imagination” with “accent,” I mean in no way to vacate the possibility for transformation and oppositional agency that Roach supports. Indeed, I suspect that theorizing about kinesthetic accents may open new paths for understanding the kinesthetic imagination that Roach celebrates. I mobilize “accent” in order to capitalize on the multiple meanings of this word, which include, among other definitions, “a characteristic pronunciation” that is “determined by the regional or social background of the speaker” and/or “determined by the phonetic habits of the speaker’s native language carried over to his or her use of another language;” 2) “emphasis or prominence given to a note or chord, as by an increase in volume or extended duration;” and 3) “something that accentuates or contrasts something else, as a touch of color that makes the features of an image stand out.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “accent.” <http://www.bartleby.com/61/80/A0038000.html> (accessed August 1, 2007).

By using the term “accent” I hope to signal the ways that movement, like rhythm, is subject to stylistic modification. Like the microtonal variations in timing and dynamics that give a certain style or feel to a musical performance or genre, kinesthetic accents impart a style to quotidian movement that comes to be read as meaningful in a variety of social contexts. And like a “foreign” accent that marks a non-native speaker as a newcomer to a language, a kinesthetic accent involves habitual gestures that one builds up over a lifetime of communicating within a particular family, class, ethnic, sub-cultural, or national community, that may mark one as an outsider when encountering different kinesthetic communities. Of course, the import given to both linguistic and kinesthetic accents is in direct proportion to the strength with which normative behaviors are policed within any given social context. As described in the third definition above, accents derive their meaning in relation to the other (often unspoken) norms that they highlight. Meanwhile, they map a complex array of geo-political relationships that give them their relational values (i.e., in the U.S. context, a British accent resonates quite differently than a Jamaican accent, although both mark speakers as outsiders). Moreover, linguistic accents are often based not only upon the phonetic elements of language, but also involve nuanced interpretations of rhythm and tone that may similarly inflect or accent musical interpretation. We might think of kinesthetic accents as repertoires of gesture that are imported into a foreign kinesthetic vocabulary, as well as subtle differences of timing, amplitude, and interpretation of gestures that are recognizable across kinesthetic communities.

Like Mantle Hood’s concept of bimusicality, the kinesthetic accent involves a period of training (albeit through quotidian encounter rather than structured musical

pedagogy) that includes bodily behaviors. For Hood, it is not only the ears and voice that the bimusical scholar must train, but the “hands” (Hood 1960, 55). Moreover, when students import Brazilian kinesthetic accents into *taiko* practice, the result is akin to the superimposition of musical codes that Slobin defines as “a process whereby codes are layered at one and the same moment of performance” (1979, 5). As Cottrell suggests, this idea of musical textures that are woven out of the threads of multiple musical styles is like Hood’s reflections on bimusicality, insofar as it acknowledges the ways that musicians become fluent in multiple musical systems (2007, 88). However, “Hood’s notion of bimusicality was clearly based on a vision of a longer term immersion in a different music culture, something which would remain quite separate from one’s primary music culture” (Cottrell 2007, 88). Kinesthetic accent is therefore closer to the process of code superimposition that Slobin describes, in that it involves stylistic elements that emerge within a foreign gestural/musical idiom.

To return to Kinoshita’s class, while all of the students I described at the beginning of this chapter grew up in Brazil, they bring different kinesthetic accents to their interpretation of *taiko*. Specifically, I argued that some students infuse their *taiko* practice with African-influenced body techniques, including a regular, syncopated bouncing motion in their knees, multiple centers of movement that flow through their bodies, and shifting centers of gravity. Moreover, I argued that these techniques change both the visual impact and the sonic qualities of their drumming. How then did these students learn these African-influenced kinesthetic accents? While all the students I spoke with were familiar with African-influenced rhythms such as samba and *axé*, none had any formal training in African diaspora musical idioms. My impression is that those

who had grown up in the city of São Paulo seemed to have internalized Africanist style to a greater degree. Perhaps the urban upbringing enabled more face-to-face encounters with carriers of African-influenced kinesthetic vocabularies. Monica, for example, attended public schools in São Paulo, where she describes interacting with Brazilians of other racial groups, including Black Brazilians. Compared to Ricardo, who grew up in a rural area surrounded almost exclusively with other Brazilians of Japanese decent, she has a strong Africanist kinesthetic accent. However, sub-cultural musical affiliations and international musical styles may also help to form the kinesthetic accents of these students. For example, Nelson, a self-declared aficionado of hip-hop, has a *taiko* style that is informed by the Africanist aesthetics that I have described above.

However, when asked, none of these students were aware that their *taiko* practice was different from Japanese-style performance. The intention to infuse Africanist style into *taiko* was absent and so the infusion was taking place through a somatic logic that had not reached the level of conscious control. Like linguistic accents, kinesthetic accents do not come to us purely by choice. They are not entirely within our control, having been built into the architecture of our neuro-muscular systems. And yet they are subject to erosion, transformation, and change as we encounter new movement patterns and infuse them with the creative spark of kinesthetic imagination. While ethnomusicologists have been extremely attentive to the body positions that various musical idioms require for their successful execution (Hood 1960, 58, Yung 1984, 505) and acknowledge that successful code switching between musical idioms requires a shift in the “somatic states” of the body (Cottrell 2007, 99), there remains much to be said about how body techniques inflect cross cultural musical performance.

Some ethnomusicologists present an optimistic view of musical acquisition, stressing the ability of scholars and practitioners alike to master multiple musical codes.

Cottrell writes:

Bimusicality teaches us something about ourselves, about the preconceptions and expectations—both social and musical—that we bring to the study of another music culture, and that we quite probably need to unlearn, or at the very least modify, in order to participate competently in a music culture beyond our own. (2007, 89)

While Cottrell's use of the word "competence" leaves open the question of to what degree the music scholar can succeed in her execution of a learned musical idiom, he assumes that through intentional modification of learned codes, the scholar may approach competency. What remains unspoken is the extent to which one's bodily codes are not completely subject to conscious manipulation. If not a *tabula rasa*, the body is seen as largely pliable and available to new somatic/musical codes. This optimistic reading of somatic receptivity invokes a trope of mastery that can similarly be read in Titon's description of the bi-musical ethnomusicologist "figuratively stepping outside oneself to view the world with oneself in it, thereby becoming both subject and object simultaneously" (1995, 288). While I sympathize with the reflexive approach that Titon proposes, his suggestion that the way to garner self knowledge is by "stepping out of oneself" is unrealistic and misses the basic tenets of "positionality" as it has emerged in the social sciences over the past twenty years (Robertson 2002). Specifically, this idea of the self/critic that is external to one's self implies an objectivity that relies upon a Cartesian-like split between body and mind. Instead, we might choose a path of reflexivity, which, following recent insights in the fields of situational cognition (Lakoff and Johnson 1999), acknowledges the ways that our cognitive processing is always

situated within bodily practice. Rather than seeing our selves and our informants as unmarked bodies, it may be useful to remain aware of the ways we wear the marks of our personal and communal histories, kinesthetic accents that are read along with other physical markers as meaningful within regimes of privilege. By seeing the body not as infinitely pliable but rather as a repository of embodied attitudes, experiences, and dispositions that may or may not be unlearned, we stand to learn much about cross-cultural and transnational musicking.

### 3.6 *TAIKO DE SAMBA*

Kinoshita takes as implicit that fact that his Brazilian students bring Brazilian kinesthetic accents to their playing, and therefore, create Brazilian *taiko*. However, the theme of mixing Japanese and Brazilian aesthetic imperatives is explicitly explored in his piece, “Taiko de Samba,” which he composed for the Tokinonagare tour. When Kinoshita first began to introduce samba rhythms into his repertoire, dividing up the samba parts among different drums, he conceived of his work, in part, as a response to the heckling he had received at the samba school. He created his piece, “Taiko de Samba,” as a “protest against the discrimination he had received at the practice session of a São Paulo samba school.”<sup>145</sup> In “Taiko de Samba” Kinoshita distributes the parts of this carnival-style samba among the *taiko* drums. Incorporating samba techniques into his

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<sup>145</sup> “Setsuo Kinoshita vai apresentar estilo brasileiro ‘ao papá do *taiko*.’” *Journal do Nikkey*, July 31, 2004.

*taiko* practice, while adding *taiko* techniques to samba rhythms, Kinoshita achieves a creative sound he thinks of as metaphorically “planting the flag”<sup>146</sup> for Brazilian Nikkei.

Kinoshita plays the role of leader, signaling breaks in the rhythm on his *okedō daiko* and on the whistle that hangs around his neck. While the *repique* (a cylindrical two-headed drum) would usually play the role of the lead, Kinoshita does not play *repique* rhythms. Instead, he plays a rhythm that in carnival samba is usually reserved for the *surdo*, the large cylindrical drum with tight skins on each end that is the heart of the samba ensemble. Hanging from the shoulder by a strap, the *surdo* is hit with a mallet, alternating between strokes that are muffled with the player’s hand, and those that are undampened (open). Muffling the mallet stroke has the effect of lowering the pitch, resulting in a melodic alternation between two pitch levels. Applying this technique to the *okedō daiko*, Kinoshita simulates the *surdo*’s bi-tonal melody, a hand/stick technique that is not typically used in *taiko* performance. However, because he uses a stick instead of a mallet, the sound he produces is somewhat sharper than that of the *surdo*. Also, strokes on the *okedō daiko* decay more quickly, giving the drum a dryer timbre than the *surdo*. Michikazu Sasaki plays a pared-down *surdo* part on the ensemble’s other *okedō daiko*, alternating muffled and open strikes on the main (four) beats of the sixteen beat samba cycle. In Figure 12, which compares the *okedō daiko* lines with typical *surdo* rhythms, muffled tones are marked M while open tones are marked O. The symbol “⇒” indicates a note that falls between the main beats of the cycle, while parentheses indicate a note that may or may not be sounded.

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<sup>146</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

Beat	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<i>Okedō daiko</i> (Kinoshita)	M				O		O		M			O	(O)	O		
<i>Okedō daiko</i> (Sasaki)	M				O				M			O				
<i>Surdo</i> (Variation 1)	M				O				M				O	O	⇒	O
<i>Surdo</i> (Variation 2)	M				O				M				O	O	O	O

**Figure 12: Comparison Between Okedō Daiko Rhythm in “Taiko de Samba” and Typical Surdo Rhythms from Conventional Samba**

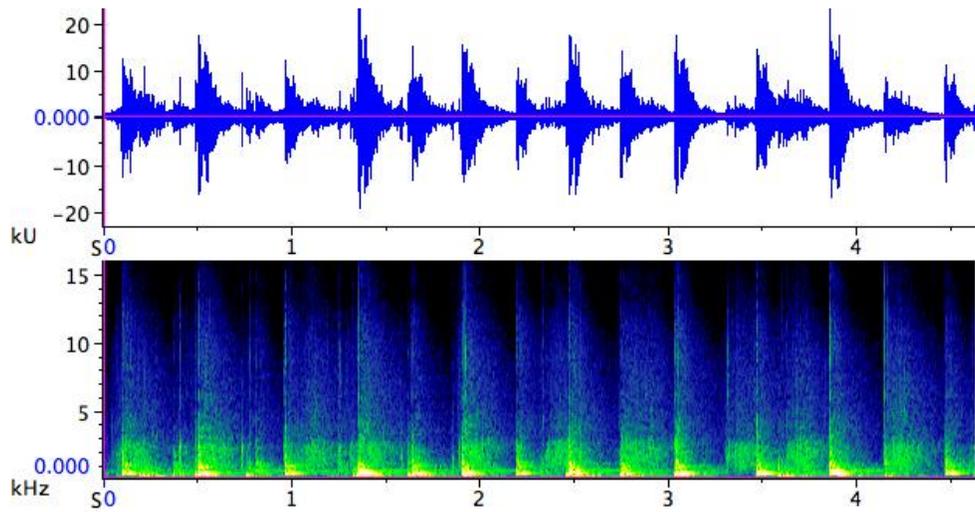
Providing the rhythmic scaffold on which the other instruments rest, and evoking the *surdo* with their booming melodic alternations between two tones, the *okedō daiko* players also establish their independence from traditional samba by introducing new timbres and attacks. Unlike the *surdo* lines of conventional *samba* (see “Variation 1” and “Variation 2” in Figure 12), which have offbeat and double-time offbeat accents, particularly in the second half of the rhythmic pattern, in “Taiko de Samba” the *okedō daiko* beats fall primarily on the main and half beats. Moreover, for much of the song, instead of varying the rhythm in the second half of the cycle (beats 9-16), as notated in Figure 12, Kinoshita repeats beats 1-8. This has the effect of strengthening the main beats, which sound much heavier than in a conventional samba. Moreover, while *surdo* players may swing beat 14, turning the second half of the cycle into an off-kilter triplet (“Variation 1” in Figure 12), or stress beat 16 (“Variation 2” in Figure 12), both techniques that build momentum towards the first beat of the next cycle, Kinoshita’s interpretation has a duple feel that does not create a sense of rhythmic anticipation.

The *shime daiko*, played by Kumiko Teraguchi, stands in for the carnival drum called the *caixa*, which is a snare drum. In contrast to Kinoshita, who imports *surdo* stick technique into his *taiko* practice, Teraguchi brings *taiko* technique to her *caixa* interpretation. While both the *caixa* and the *shime daiko* are relatively high-pitched drums, the *shime daiko* stroke is sharper as it lacks the buzzing reverberation of the *caixa*. And while both the *caixa* and *shime daiko* are played with sticks, the stick technique is quite different. Specifically, the *caixa* sound is generated largely through wrist motion, while *taiko* stick technique involves the motion of the entire arm. Likewise, *caixa* players alternate between the left and right hands, while *taiko* technique includes double strokes with a single hand, a technique that Teraguchi introduces to samba.

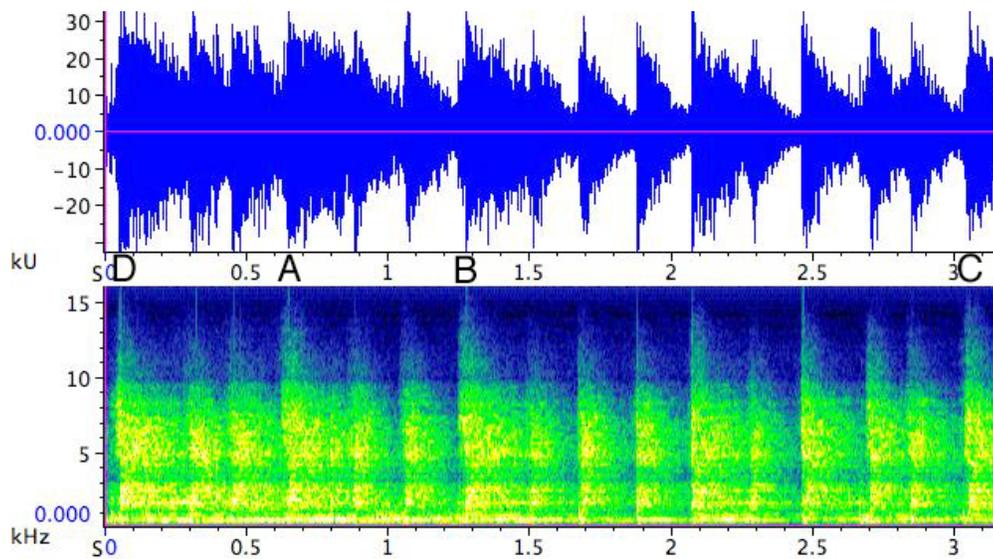
The most radical difference between Teraguchi’s “Taiko de Samba” and conventional *caixa* practice is that while the *caixa* typically sounds each beat in the 16-beat samba cycle—which gives the music a rolling, forward momentum—Teraguchi does not. Instead, the *shimi daiko* player introduces brief phrases (one two four cycles), which do not sound every note of the 16-beat cycle. As a result, the texture of her *shime daiko* line is somewhat thinner than that of a typical *caixa* line, lending less forward, rolling momentum to the music than the *caixa*. These phrases may initiate call-and-response with Mitsue Iwamoto, who alternates between the high-pitched *shimi daiko* and the low-pitched *nagadō daiko*, simulating the sound of the two-toned *agogo* bell. The combined result of these modifications is the radically different feel of “Taiko de Samba” relative to traditional carnival samba.

Figure 13 is an oscillogram and spectrogram of two cycles (32 beats) of *shimi daiko* played above the *okedō daiko*, with intermittent hand clapping by Iwamoto. Note

that compared to the 16 beat, buzzy *caixa* line depicted in Figure 14, in which the notes sound at shorter intervals and decay less quickly, the “Taiko de Samba” rhythmic texture is somewhat thinner.



**Figure 13: Oscillogram and Spectrogram of “Taiko de Samba”<sup>147</sup>**



**Figure 14: Oscillogram and Spectrogram of Caixa and Surdo Samba Demonstration**

<sup>147</sup> The oscillogram (top) measures time on the horizontal axis and amplitude on the vertical axis, while the spectrogram measures time on the horizontal axis and frequency on the vertical axis, while color-coding the relative power at each time and frequency.

Unlike the *caixa* line in which offbeat and double-time offbeat accents are often stressed (the beats marked A, B, and C in Figure 13), Teraguchi begins her phrases on the downbeat, accentuating the *okedō daiko*'s emphasis on the strong beats. This is a much different approach from conventional samba, in which melodic phrases are almost never initiated on the downbeat. And unlike the *caixa* strokes, which vary greatly in their strength, in the case of the *shimi daiko*, right hand strokes are consistently louder than left hand strokes, an effect that is not intended to impart accentual interest to the phrase. Instead, Teraguchi uses the silences between sounded beats to create dramatic tension in her rhythmic line, alternating between duple- and triple-time figures in rapid-fire succession. Finally, *caixa* lines typically include swing notes (Gerischer 2006), particularly on the offbeat notes of the cycle, a technique that can be seen at beat 2 in the *caixa* line in Figure 13 (marked D). In contrast, Teraguchi is remarkably metronomic in her execution of strokes.

To summarize, these musicians bring a variety of new techniques to their interpretation of samba, and ultimately create a new fusion genre that aims not at blind imitation of Brazilian samba practice but at a felicitous union of playing styles. The strong emphasis that the ensemble brings to downbeats, the distinctive timbres of the *taiko* drums, and *taiko* stick technique, distinguish “Taiko de Samba” from traditional carnival samba. These innovations are the result, in part, of conscious aesthetic choices on the part of the performers. However, I believe that kinesthetic accent also plays a part in the style of this ensemble. For example, Teraguchi, who dances frenetically while she plays the *shimi daiko* part discussed above, brings little of the Africanist kinesthetic accent that I described in the beginning of this chapter in my description of the *taiko*

interpretation of Kinoshita's students. Unlike Monica, who bends her knees in between the main beats of the rhythm as she dances from side-to-side, creating a syncopated bounce into her movement, Teraguchi steps down on a slightly bent knee on the main beats of the 16-beat samba cycle. This has the effect of accentuating the strong beats of the musical phrase. Therefore, her non-syncopated side-to-side motion, while not directly involved in the execution of her stick strokes, parallels her strong accentual bias towards the downbeat.

It is not surprising that there is a link between dance and percussion style, considering that the neural systems involved in motor activity are necessary to the formation of the rhythmic components of auditory images (Carroll-Phellan and Hampson 1996). Similarly, the body is implicated in short-time rhythmic cognition necessary to execute microrhythmic inflections referred to as participatory discrepancies (Keil and Feld, 1994). According to Iyer:

Cognitive structures emerge from reinforced intermodal sensorimotor coupling. In this view, short-time rhythmic cognition might include physical sensation, visual entrainment, and sonic reinforcement, unmediated by a sonic representation (2002, 396).

Iyer goes on to suggest that dance movements, such as the stomp and clap of the African American Ring Shout may provide the kinesthetic model for microrhythmic style in African American music. Specifically, he cites perceptual delays between the neural signals associated with hand and foot movements, respectively, as the source of the slight delay between the downbeat and the back beat in many idioms. As several researchers of have shown, such microscopic differences in the timing and intensity of rhythm are an important element of individual and group style (Bilmes 1993; Collier and Collier 1996). In Bahian samba, regular deviations from strict metricality (swing notes), particularly

those that create offbeat and double offbeat accents, have been implicated as an important element of ensemble style (Gerischer 2006).

Body movement undoubtedly influences the ways that rhythmic accent is incorporated into carnival samba. Accordingly, Teraguchi brings to her musical practice a style of movement or kinesthetic accent that impacts the sounds she produces, giving “Taiko de Samba” its unique sound. Unfortunately, when this new sound is received by Brazilian audiences, it may sometimes reinforce conventional understandings of Japanese Brazilian bodies. As one audience member commented, “They don’t have any swing.” By focusing on the physicality of Teraguchi’s performance, I hope to work against prevailing constructions of the physicality of African diaspora music idioms, which in Brazil (and in much of the West), are contrasted with the intellect of European (and Asian) idioms:

For disavowals and projections notwithstanding, European musical procedures likewise are steeped in images of the body. One of the ways of collapsing the old dichotomy that assigns intellect to European music and physicality to African-based styles is to reveal the ways both mind and body are drawn upon in each repertoire. (McClary and Walser 1994, 77)

When Kinoshita speaks of his creative process, it is not a tale of musical mastery or intellectual prowess, but rather an acknowledgment of a lifetime of embodied extra-musical practice that he, his students, and his co-performers bring to their *taiko* practice. And much to his credit, rather than seeing these kinesthetic accents as mistakes or counter to true *taiko* (or samba), he has come to understand them as the evolution of a new musical style. I suspect that as Kinoshita continues to strengthen and define his style, he will make a significant contribution to *taiko* practice in the Americas, while challenging what is understood to be natural to Japanese Brazilian bodies. In the next

chapter I will examine the musicking of a Japanese Okinawan group, Ton Ton Mi, who like Kinoshita, challenges notions of embodiment in Brazil and beyond.

#### 4.0 BEATING HEART/BEATING DRUM

A hand-held single-headed Okinawan *paranku* drum is raised into the air and then struck with a stick by a disembodied hand.<sup>148</sup> Used in Okinawan *Obon* festivals, the *paranku* invokes the spirits of the departed, who are thought to return to the earth for a yearly sojourn with their living relatives. After a single pulse is struck, the stick is pointed upwards at a forty-five degree angle as if describing the sonic trajectory of the *paranku* pulse. In the next scene our upward-looking gaze falls on the angular tops of two rows of palm trees. The camera then pans down the trunks of the trees to the sounds of “Hoshino Paranku,” finally resting upon the figures of Simone Zakebi, Tieme Toma and Claudia Toma.<sup>149</sup>

“Hoshino Paranku”<sup>150</sup>

Let’s play *paranku* together (chorus)  
I have as many dreams as there are stars.  
My love is as big as sky.  
People of the world unite through song.  
You return to your hometown  
Where they celebrate with *matsuri*<sup>151</sup> drumming.

The young women slowly stride down a wide path that cuts a swath through the enormous palms. Clothed in Okinawan *kasuri* kimonos, made of blue woven cloth that complements the intense blue of the sky, the girls, still in their teens, sing while

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<sup>148</sup> *Hoshino Paranku*, produced by China Sadao. Videocassette. Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1993.

<sup>149</sup> These three would later become founding members of the band Ton Ton Mi.

<sup>150</sup> Music and Lyrics by China Sadao, translation by Toshihiko Aono.

<sup>151</sup> *Matsuri* refers to festivals, rights, and ceremonies related to Shintoism. See Zabilka (1959).

accompanying themselves on the *sanshin*, the three-stringed Okinawan lute. As they interpret the Okinawan and Japanese language lyrics of this *minyo* (folksong), the melody is punctuated by the periodic sounding of the *paranku*.

Where has the *paranku* beat landed? A bucolic Okinawan park where island beauties practice the folk arts of their ancestors? In the next scene, our expectations are confused. The young women, now transported to a white-sand beach, perform with a backdrop of mulatto children who frolic in the waves with their parents. A slow pan across the beach confirms our suspicions that we are not, in fact, in Okinawa—as the dramatic peak of Rio de Janeiro’s *Pau de Açúcar* appears behind the girls in all of its stony glory, locating this transatlantic celebration of Okinawan *minyo*. “I sing ‘Kugani Bushi,’” “I sing ‘Nandya Bushi,’” chant the girls, referring to these Okinawan folk songs as the “stars of the country of *sanba/samba*.” These references to well known Okinawan songs locate “Hoshino Paranku” within a larger Okinawan *minyo* tradition, while the geographic ambivalence recorded in the visual text of the video is reinforced by the coincidental similarity of the words for the wooden Okinawan castanet (*sanba*) and the Brazilian musical genre (*samba*) within the song text. Looking a bit over-dressed next to their bikini-clad compatriots, the girls strum their *sanshin* on the beach with the waves of Copacabana and Ipanema crashing in the background. In contrast with these mulatto Brazilians who commune with the natural beauty of the local environment, their near-naked bodies displacing the water and sand in an intimate embrace, the girls seem cut-off from their surroundings in their full-length, long-sleeved kimonos. Indeed, their Okinawan dress, melody, and lyrics clash with the images of Brazil that are commonly exported to the world.

In the next moment cloudy images of Okinawa occupy the top left quadrant of the video, as if describing the girl's own fantasies of a distant homeland. A field of sugar cane, a tiled roof from the era of the Ryukyu kingdom, and a red hibiscus flower flash across the screen, all icons of Okinawan culture. These images assure us that although the young women are physically located in Brazil, they have not lost the memories of their ancestral island. The split-screen technology visually represents the nostalgia expressed in the song's text, while demonstrating an emotional landscape where it is possible to occupy both "the land of *samba*" and the "land of *sanba*." Reinforcing the dream images, the young women sing of returning to their "*furusato*" (hometown) to take part in typical Okinawan festivals. At one level, then, the song nostalgically invokes Okinawa as a place to be returned to, where typically Okinawan things (fauna, historical landmarks, artistic objects) and practices (music, dance) can be known by those who long to encounter their homeland.

When the *paranku* drum is struck again, appearing once more in the sky above the girls, the stick now points off into the distance as if anticipating the camera's next cut. Now the musicians appear at the base of Christ the Redeemer, Rio's tourist attraction par excellence. Playing their *sanshin* beneath the statue, the young women are strangely reminiscent of the holy trinity, while the open arms of Christ seem to welcome these Okinawan immigrants into this new land. However, when the *paranku* drum next sounds, we again become disoriented as the musicians appear in formal, stenciled *bingata* kimonos, strumming their *sanshin* below Japanese lanterns that hang over a busy city street. Casually dressed Japanese pedestrians walk past on the sidewalks on either side of the girls, apparently unperturbed by the performance. To increase our disorientation, the

next shot transports us to a park, where, under palm trees, a group of approximately ten men, women, and children in *kasuri* kimonos interpret an *Obon* dance while striking *paranku* drums to the song's repeated refrain "Let's play *paranku* together." Have we been transported back to Okinawa?

A new rhythmic line, introduced in a break between the last two verses of the song, reassures us that we have not left Brazil. Featuring the syncopated rhythms of the *cuica* drum, a sonic icon of samba music, we are reminded that the scenes we have viewed in fact take place in the heart of Brazil, in *Liberdade*, São Paulo's Japan Town, and in the park of Carmo, where the young women first appear. Meanwhile, the song's text now reinforces that joining of these different rhythms: "My dreams are as many as the stars/Let the music unite the hearts (*kokoro*) of the world." In the next scene, the samba line continues as the girls march up a São Paulo street, surrounded by dancing mulatto children clothed in fanciful white and yellow carnival costumes. Dancing to the mixed sounds of Okinawa and Brazil, these African, European, and Okinawan descendants come together in a joyful revelry. Unlike the first scene, in which the girls appear cut off from their surroundings, they now seem perfectly in sync with their compatriots, with the long cloth of their kimonos complementing the full-skirted dresses of the carnival dancers.

What are we to make of the juxtapositions of Okinawan and Brazilian cultural icons that appear in this video, and of their ultimate hybridization into a form that we might think of as *samba-minyo*? And how are we to understand the nostalgic images of Okinawa that are uncannily reframed in the context of Brazil? How is this nostalgia related to the Brazilian notion of *saudade*, an embodied concept for longing that united a

Portuguese diaspora? It is tempting to read this *mélange* of Okinawan and Brazilian cultural icons as the kind of anthropophagic *mestiçagem* that we encountered with Zhen Brasil in the previous chapter. Are we witnessing an Okinawan Brazilian mobilization of musical hybridity as a strategy for claiming cultural citizenship in Brazil?

In fact I think it would be misleading to read this video only in relation to Brazilian practices of *mestiçagem*; for Okinawans and their descendants have mobilized their own form of cultural mixing, referred to as *champururu*, which, as we will see, both overlaps with and diverges from Brazilian cultural hybridity. By discussing these overlapping concepts I hope to show that local actors circulate ideas about cultural mixing that both intersect with, and challenge, academic discourses on post-modern *bricolage* and cultural hybridity. I will argue that the video project which included four of the young people who later went on to form the Okinawan Brazilian band Ton Ton Mi, as well as the band's first CD *Saudade de Uchinâ*,<sup>152</sup> make use of *champururu* to mobilize longing for an idealized, but geographically indeterminate Okinawa. Furthermore, as we shall see, mobilizing this longing or nostalgia is part of a larger project of community building among members of an Okinawan diaspora located across several continents.

The “Hoshina Paranku” video project, filmed in several locations in Brazil, featured the original Ton Ton Mi members including the Toma siblings (Tieme and Claudia who appear in the video, and Fábio, who helped with the soundtrack) and Simone Zakebi, all third-generation Okinawan Brazilians who grew up in the São Paulo region and studied *sanshin* since early childhood. The Tomas first learned with their father Pedro, who had in turn been taught by his *issei* father. After mastering the

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<sup>152</sup> *Uchinâ* is an Okinawan language word for Okinawan, while *Uchinânchu* refers to the people of Okinawan descent.

technique that their father could pass on to them, they studied with Sensei Oyakawa in the São Paulo suburb of Mauá. One of several excellent teachers of Okinawan *minyo* in the São Paulo area, Oyakawa worked with the siblings for many years and eventually invited them to join the *minyo* performing ensemble Youth Group of Mauá, where they met Simone Zakabi, the fourth founding member of Ton Ton Mi. In 1990, Professor Oyakawa brought the young musicians to the Worldwide *Uchinanchu* Festival in Okinawa, and by 1991, they were regularly winning Okinawan *minyo* competitions in the São Paulo area. It was also in 1991 that the siblings first met the Okinawan musician and producer China Sadao, who was so impressed with the young musicians that he returned to Brazil in 1993 to produce the video “Hoshino Paranku.” Later Sadao would recall:

I met these boys and girls almost ten years ago. I was so impressed by the brightness of their eyes, and their attitudes as they proudly sang and played their *sanshin*. This made me feel that I would like to inspire more dreams in them. And I wanted more boys and girls of the second and third generations to know and have deep feelings about Okinawa.<sup>153</sup>

Inspired by their friendship with Sadao, the young people went on to create Brazil’s first *Uchinâ* (Okinawan) Pop ensemble in 1998. “*Uchinâ* Pop” refers to music that combines traditional Okinawan musical instruments and styles with a wide range of international musical styles including rock and roll, reggae, Hawaiian slide guitar, and Indonesian *gamelan*, to name a few. *Uchinâ* Pop has been widely popular in Okinawa, Japan and to some extent, internationally, since the early 1990s (Robertson 2003). Expanding to six members, the band has become well established within the Okinawan Brazilian community. They perform regularly at community centers in São Paulo and in surrounding towns, at private parties and weddings, and occasionally, at city festivals

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<sup>153</sup> *Ton Ton Mi*. Produced by the Toma family. Videocassette. São Paulo, 2002. Translation from Japanese by Toshihiko Aono.

where non-Okinawan Brazilians are introduced to their *sanshin* riffs. Made up of Cristiane “Cris” Oyakawa (back-up vocals and electric bass), Juliana Mayumi Aguená<sup>154</sup> (vocals, *sanshin* and *sanba*), Claudia Harumi Toma (vocals, *sanshin*, *sanba*, and keyboards), Denise Tiemi Toma (vocals and *sanshin*), Fábio Kenji Toma (vocals, *sanshin*, and electric and acoustic guitar), and Alexandre Akiho Oshiro (back-up vocals, *taiko* and drum set), the band has been lauded for creating common musical ground for the different generations of Okinawan Brazilians with skillfully balanced renditions of traditional and newly composed “island songs.”



**Figure 15: Ton Ton Mi**  
**(From the Left: Cristiane Oyakawa, Mayumi Aguená, Claudia Toma, Alexandre Oshiro, Tieme Toma, and Fábio Toma. São Paulo, 2003)**

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<sup>154</sup> Henceforth, I will refer to Juliana Mayumi Aguená as “Mayumi,” her preferred Japanese name. With the exception of Tieme, who likewise uses her Japanese name, the other band members use their Christian names, a custom that henceforth I will follow in my text.

Part of my goal in focusing on the group Ton Ton Mi is to highlight the internal differentiations within the Japanese Brazilian community that make it highly problematic to even theorize the existence of an entity that we might refer to as Japanese Brazilian. Indeed, as I will show, Okinawan Brazilians have had a changing relationship with both Japanese Brazilians of non-Okinawan descent and with mainland Japanese culture, at times insisting upon their connections with other Japanese descendants and at others, stressing the cultural practices and common historical memories that distinguish them from their Japanese-Brazilian compatriots. For many, it seemed strange that my study would include the music of Brazilians of both Japanese and Okinawan descent, reflecting the lack of a conceptual category that included the two communities. The story I want to tell is about an Okinawan-Brazilian band based in São Paulo, and it will therefore be useful to locate the music within the Brazilian discursive communities for which it is meaningful. However, the story of Ton Ton Mi is also part of the larger history of the Okinawan diaspora, which spans several continents and has, in recent years, emerged as an important cultural and economic force both in Japan and abroad. For this reason, I believe it will also be useful to consider the band and their *sanshin* riffs as part of a transnational resurgence of Okinawan *minyo* that has become an important cultural symbol for an emerging diasporic community.

#### **4.1 BEATING HEART/BEATING DRUM**

I first met Ton Ton Mi late in my pregnancy. Feeling unwieldy as I lugged recording equipment between São Paulo neighborhoods to attend *sanshin* classes and rehearsals,

Okinawan community events, and interviews, I came to appreciate the generosity of people in the Okinawan community who celebrated my soon-to-be motherhood with great enthusiasm and kindness. What I want to recall here is how my pregnancy became the occasion for reflections about “*Uchinanchu* spirit.” Repeatedly, when I attended Okinawan musical events people were pleased that my unborn child could hear the sounds of the *sanshin*. At a *sanshin* class led by Chris Oyakawa’s father, Paulo, Tatsuo Sakima spoke of the “*chimu dun dun*” or the “beating heart”<sup>155</sup> of the music which would transmit the *Uchinanchu* spirit to my unborn daughter. When my daughter was born some months later, Tatsuo-san sent his hopes that the Okinawan music I had heard and particularly, the “*chuma dun-dun*” she had felt as her heart accompanied the rhythm of “Asadoya Yunta,” would make her a “musical and happy person.”<sup>156</sup> Expanding on the meaning of *Uchinanchu* spirit, De Freitas explains: “For the descendant Tatsuo Sakima, *Uchinanchu* is a state of spirit, it is to be possessed by such a strong ‘charge’ of the values of Okinawan culture that ‘when you meet up with another, you immediately identify yourself and begin to interact” (2001, 16). “*Chimuguru*” or the Okinawan heart is cited as the source of these most revered community values including the *yuimara*<sup>157</sup> (spirit of sharing) and *icharebachyodei* (brotherhood). Clearly these concepts are utopian ideals that define the values of the Okinawan Brazilians, values that may not always be realized in practice.

For Tatsuo, the importance of the music lies partly in educating future generations in these Okinawan values. This perhaps explains the popularity of the song “Tinsagu nu

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<sup>155</sup> Tatsuo Sakima, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

<sup>156</sup> Tatsuo Sakima, personal communication, February 10, 2004.

<sup>157</sup> Arakaki Makoto describes “*yuimaaru*” as the “traditional Okinawan support system through which people in a community help each other in times of need” (2002, 308).

Haná” (The Balsam Flower) among Okinawan community members, which was a recording on Ton Ton Mi’s first album and is a favorite at Okinawan Brazilian community events: “Just as my fingernails are painted with the pigment from the balsam flowers, my heart is painted with the teachings of my parents.”<sup>158</sup>

I have returned to “*chima dun dun*” many times in my mind, because I find the phrase a compelling description of a musical tradition as a living entity, which exists as much more than a frozen sign of ethnic identity. Here the music of the *sanshin* is not only a symbol or sign of Okinawa used to construct meanings around ethnic identity, but rather, is felt as a direct experience with the very spirit of Okinawanness. Using Piercien terminology, Turino has described the ways that music and dance create an emotional charge that leads to an experience of belonging to a community (in this case a nationalist political movement):

Particularly important, while the words in propositional speech are signs *about* something else, and we often recognize them as mediational signs (we don't mistake the word *tree* for an actual *tree*). Indices are often experienced as signs of the experience or entity stood for. They are experienced as part of the reality that they signify...It is this “reality potential” of indexical signs, their intimate, personal quality resulting from dependence on individual and shared-group/ experience, and the “semantic snowballing effect” that begin to account for the power of indices to create emotion in political movements. (2000, 176-177)

Likewise, Okinawan *minyo* surpasses its role as a mediational sign insofar as it is seen as a part of, or a carrier of, the essence of Okinawanness. The music gains its meaning in relation to the shared group experience that it comes to represent in a very immediate and emotional way. Cristiane Oyakawa describes this immediacy when she

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<sup>158</sup> Lyrics from “Tinsagu nu Haná,” a public domain song translated from the Okinawan into Portuguese by Tatsuo Sakima and Paolo Yamishiro.

speaks of playing *katcharsee*, the dance songs with which Ton Ton Mi always end their sets.

The tradition of *katcharsee* is nice because you see the old people get up and dance. I loved seeing my grandparents [dance]...The first time I played it I had to stop myself from crying because I remembered her [grandmother] dancing. She didn't get to see me play [before she died]. Whenever I play it I think of her.<sup>159</sup>

Likewise, holding the family *sanshin* that was brought over from Okinawa makes her feel connected to the grandfather that she never knew. "I have my grandfather's *sanshin*. I like having it because I feel like I am with my grandfather. I never new him but it helps me to know him"<sup>160</sup> (See Figure 16).



**Figure 16. Paulo Oyakawa, Father of Cristiane, with the Family's Sanshin**

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<sup>159</sup> Cristiane Oyakawa, personal communication, October 24, 2003.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

A connection with the *sanshin* and with the music of previous generations helps Cristiane Oyakawa to feel closer to her deceased relatives. For some, maintaining a connection with ancestors is more than a link with the past; it also provides the context for a continued relationship with the spirits who continue to move among the living and influence their lives. In general, my informants were not forthcoming about their religious and/or spiritual beliefs and at least in my company, they did not talk about them openly. However, in some of our discussions I was given glimpses into the metaphysical beliefs of band and community members that form part of the connective tissue of their daily lives. For Yukahide Kanashiro<sup>161</sup> it is one's duty to respect the codes of "correct living" transmitted by elders. This guidance role does not end after death, and many in the Okinawan community continue to consult *yuta*, or female shamans, who have the ability to communicate with the departed. The shamanic practice of the *yuta*, which is part of a larger female-centered indigenous Okinawan religious practice, became popular in Brazil in the post-War era in a syncretic form that borrows heavily from Brazilian religious practices including spiritism, Condomble, Catholicism and *Ubanda* (Mori 1998; De Freitas 2001). According to Pedro Toma:

There are people who are born with the ability to see dead spirits. When a person in the family who dies, we don't know what to do, so they [the *yuta*] can orient us by contacting that person and finding out what needs to be done. When you need to open a shop, or move, for example. They are consulted for everything, when you have problems or doubt. There are families that go a lot, once or twice a year.<sup>162</sup>

The consequences of ignoring the guidance of departed relatives may be dire:

[Okinawans] are only concerned with spirit. You must take care of a person's spirit. Okinawans believe a lot in the spirits of the ancestors. Our

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<sup>161</sup> A computer technician who has been an important organizer in the Okinawan Brazilian community, sponsoring the website [www.okinawa.com/br](http://www.okinawa.com/br).

<sup>162</sup> Pedro Toma, personal communication, October 14, 2003.

first task is to take care of our ancestors...If you don't take care of them they send you signals to remind you that you are forgetting [them].<sup>163</sup>

According to Alexandre Oshiro, after having a series of car accidents his cousin went to visit a *yuta* to discover what was happening to him: "He went to the spiritist [*yuta*] and she said 'you have forgotten your ancestors'...and asked him to burn incense."<sup>164</sup>

Understanding the constant transmission of "*Uchinanchu*" spirit from the living to the dead may also help to explain what is at stake when Ton Ton Mi transforms their musical traditions. Indeed, the question of how much to change the musical traditions that they have inherited is one that has troubled Ton Ton Mi and the larger Okinawan community. The issue of musical innovation is often framed as a question of differing musical tastes across the age groups that attend to their music. Ton Ton Mi see themselves as servants to their larger community and hope their music will please listeners from many generations, worrying that if they make too many changes to their *minyo* repertoire they will no longer please older audiences. However, they also see their task as one of introducing younger generations to Okinawan culture, and for this reason have been a source of much pride for the Okinawan leadership who feel their community to be in a perpetual crisis as the younger generations lose touch with their Okinawan roots. "We have old and middle aged people watching us, but there are also young people, so you have to find music that makes everyone happy. Older music for the older people and newer music for the younger people."<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Pedro Toma sees his children's "modernization" of Okinawan traditional music as the key to reaching audiences from new generations: "The older people are already gone. The people who

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Alexandre Oshiro, personal communication, October 25, 2003.

<sup>165</sup> Fábio Toma, personal communication, October 12, 2003.

came from Japan died, so those of us who are left are descendants: *nissei*, *sansei*, and *yonsei*. They like more modern music.”<sup>166</sup>

However, despite their desire to be accessible to the younger generations, singing in Okinawan language continues to be very important to the band and the community-members who attend their performance, despite the fact that few understand the words of the songs. Speaking of the older songs in their repertoire, Fábio Toma believes, “It is a different language, even old people have a harder time understanding.”<sup>167</sup> On one hand the continued use of the Okinawan language is seen as a matter of preservation: “the Okinawan language is disappearing. How will it continue if not in the songs?”<sup>168</sup> Mori sees this continued use of Okinawan language within a community that understands little of its lexical meaning as an important marking of an ethnic boundary between the Okinawan community and mainland Japanese:

Within this negotiated process of self and other, symbolic elements from Okinawna culture were mobilized to signify difference from others and reflected in speech, rituals, or events. An excellent example is the Okinawan dialect (Uchinanguchi), which many second-generation Okinawan Brazilians have little knowledge of and do not use in their daily lives. Yet many have had contact with the dialect at home or at social events, and they pepper both their spoken Portuguese and Japanese with Okinawan words to distinguish themselves from mainland Japanese (2003, 48)

While Mori is undoubtedly correct that the Okinawan language serves a symbolic function as a marker of Okinawan-Brazilian ethnic identity, my encounters with translators Paolo Yamashiro and Tatsuo Sakima, who provided me with invaluable translations of the songs from Ton Ton Mi’s first album, reveal another layer of meaning to this investment in the Okinawan language. When these two leaders of the Okinawan

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<sup>166</sup> Pedro Toma, personal communication, October 14, 2003.

<sup>167</sup> Fábio Toma, personal communication, October 12, 2003.

<sup>168</sup> Pedro Toma, personal communication, October 14, 2003.

community set out to translate a collection of well-known *minyō* into Portuguese so that they could be understood by the younger generations, a fierce debate erupted. On one side stood those who believed that the translation would foster interest in Okinawan music traditions and help to ensure their continuation. On the other were those who feared that once translated, the songs would no longer be understandable to the *issei* generation, or worse, to the spirits of the departed who are the silent spectators of *minyō* performances. Representing this first position, Paulo Yamishiro and Tatsuo Sakima hoped that translating songs into Portuguese (and later into the other New World languages of Spanish and English) would help to build connections among a diasporic Okinawan community transmitting *Uchinānchu* spirit to a transnational community of Okinawan descendants. Building alliances with Okinawans in other countries has been a priority not only for Okinawan Brazilians, but for other Okinawan communities, which as we shall see, have intensified their transnational dialogue in recent years. As, Shinji Yonamine, president of the WUB Brazil stated, “The *yuimaaru* heart is alive in the *Uchinānchu* of Brazil. I would like to share the *yuimaaru* heart with *Uchinānchu* all over the world” (Arakaki 2002, 302). Musical exchange has been an important part of sharing the Okinawan heart and, as we shall see, the *sanshin* has become an important way to describe a transnational Okinawan community. In order to understand the central role of the *sanshin* in this emerging diaspora, it will be useful to review the history of Okinawan musical practice, which is often evoked in present-day discussions as a model for contemporary alliances.

## 4.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although Okinawa is currently part of Japan, historically it has formed other political alliances both within the Pacific Rim and beyond. The era of the Ryukyu kingdom is often recalled as the most illustrious moment in Okinawa's past, and is an important focal point for contemporary meditations on Okinawan values and cultural practice.

Organizing the political, cultural and economic life of the four island groups at the southern tip of the Japanese archipelago (Amami, Okinawa, Miyako and Yaeyama), the Ryukyu Kingdom formed part of the Chinese tributary system, maintaining maritime trade with much of what is now referred to as the Pacific Rim. With no military force to support its economic goals, the Ryukyu Kingdom maintained peaceful trade for several centuries, a fact which has become a model for present day transnational alliances among the Okinawan business community. Indeed, according to Takara Kurayoshi: "Foreign trade for Ryukyu was first and foremost peaceful and friendly, as stated in the archives of the Ryukyu Dynasty...Friendly measures were the best possible means for a small state with little resources to carry on relationships with others" (Toshiaki 2003, 25).

Importing cultural resources from China, Japan, Korea, and beyond, the Ryukyus developed distinctive traditions of art and folk music. It was in this context that *sanshin* was first introduced to Okinawa. The three-stringed plucked lute modeled on the Chinese *sanxian* was introduced to the Ryukyus sometime after 1392 by Chinese settlers in Okinawa's main city of Naha, and was originally used exclusively by the male members

of the nobility.<sup>169</sup> This was the first instrumental tradition to be developed on the island and relied heavily upon Chinese playing techniques.

In 1609, after Japan's unification under Tokugawa rule, the Ryukyus were invaded and brought under Japanese control. Not only did the annexed Okinawan kingdom bring prestige to the Shimazu rulers of Satsuma, it also allowed them to keep open an illicit trade route with the Chinese (Toshiaki 2003, 25-6). Encouraging cultural distinctiveness was a strategic move that allowed Okinawans to continue their tributary relationship with China for the next 250 years, becoming an important entry point for goods to which Japan would not otherwise have had access.

Okinawa's dual status as part of the Japanese and Chinese tributary system fomented a cultural crisis, which culminated, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in a renaissance of musical activity:

Accomplishment in Chinese and Japanese arts became an essential attribute of any aspirant to government office. However, by the end of the century a cultural crisis of confidence had set in. The consequence was a self-conscious and productive attempt to uncover cultural roots and the great florescence of Ryukyuan culture during the 18th century.<sup>170</sup>

During this period the two schools of Okinawan classical music were founded, and a new form of musical theatre, *kumidori*, was developed. In *kumidori*, which is influenced by Japanese Noh theatre and Chinese musical drama, dramatizations of themes from Okinawan mythology were set to arrangements of pieces from the classical repertoire.

While Okinawans were marked as cultural others during the Satsuma era, and responded by solidifying and standardizing the modes of performance around which a unique Ryukyu identity could be constructed, during the Meiji era, these very differences

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<sup>169</sup> Grove Music Online, s.v. "Ryūkyū," (by Robin Thomson) <http://grovemusic.com> (accessed, July 28, 2007).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

were seen as the marks of inferiority. When Okinawa was joined to Meiji Japan in 1879, the terms of this annexation were Okinawa's political and economic inequality. Seen as primitive and backwards, and treated as second-class citizens (Siddle 1998; Rabson 1999), Okinawans attempted to assimilate Japanese customs and values. According to Siddle, "Elite Okinawans were divided over the meaning of being Okinawan and their place in the Japanese nation, although even those...who championed a unique Okinawan identity tended to do so within a Japanese context" (2003, 134). It was also during the Meiji period that the *sanshin*, previously an instrument of the nobility, became popular among all classes of Okinawans:

When the Ryukyu Kingdom was finally abolished in 1879, many of these fine [aristocratic] exponents of the *sanshin* suddenly found themselves not only without a kingdom, but without any means of supporting themselves and had to find a way of making a living for the first time. Some of them put their musical ability to good advantage and used the best skill they had to travel around Okinawa and the outer islands where they played music and taught the ordinary people the delights of the *sanshin*. (Potter 2001, 29)

During this period the *sanshin* became the preferred instrument to accompany popularized versions of classical dance and musical theater, including *zo-odori* dance and *ukanshin-odori*. Likewise, the *sanshin* became an increasingly important part of *mo-ashibi festivities*, outdoor festivities held in the evenings after work in which unmarried young men or women would socialize. According to China Sadao, who comes from a family of well known musicians, these parties, at which young men sang *minyo* (folk song) and accompanied themselves on the *sanshin*, were probably more bawdy than often remembered; they were more occasions for sexual rivalry than for the community-building that is often idealized in contemporary discourse (Potter 2001, 31). During this period each of the islands developed its own distinctive repertoire of *minyo*, with

“aggressively” sad songs of Amani and Miyako contrasting with the bright, lively songs of Okinawa and the “pastoral” songs of Yaeyama.<sup>171</sup> Consisting of a melody and sometimes a chorus, and making use of the pentatonic scales endemic to the islands, these *minyo* are highly improvisatory, allowing performers to experiment with both text and melody.

By the 1920s a folksong movement was sweeping the Ryukyu islands. The newly composed folk songs known as *shimauta*, or island songs, began to document the political and social upheavals impacting the lives of island people. Specifically, older folk tunes became the basis for newly composed songs, many of which were concerned with the experiences of the Ryukyuan emigrants who were leaving the islands in great numbers (Sellek 2003, 78). Originally disseminated by Fukuhara Choki of Marufuku Records, recordings of *sanshin*-accompanied *shimauta* by Okinawan artists met “the need for homesick Okinawans who wanted to listen to their own island music” (Potter 2001, 39). Soon after annexation, Okinawans began to emigrate in great numbers, both for the Japanese mainland, and for points in North and South America (including Brazil), as well as Japanese colonial areas in East and Southeast Asia. By 1938, 72,789 Okinawans had emigrated in search of labor abroad (Sellek 2003, 78).

The most significant factor triggering migration from Okinawa was economic. Owing to poor natural resources and frequent typhoons, which often destroyed crops, the problem of food production for the population was perpetual. Overseas emigration was believed to be the only effective solution to the problem of overpopulation, although it merely served as a psychological safety valve for the problem of overpopulation in the poorest prefecture in the country (Sellek 2003, 78).

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<sup>171</sup> This regional music is characterized by China Sadao as cited in Potter (2001, 35).

It was during this period that Okinawans first began to emigrate to Brazil. Okinawans made up a large number of the pre-war immigrants to Brazil. Of the 781 who made the first transatlantic voyage of the Japanese to Brazil on the ship called the *Kasato-Maru* in 1908, 325 were Okinawan (Mori 2003, 49). Okinawans were sent to work coffee plantations and like their counterparts from other Japanese provinces, they found the working conditions abysmal. Noting the disparities between advertised and actual working conditions, some were expelled from the plantations after mounting organizing disputes, while others simply fled. Although Japanese immigrants from all parts of Japan participated in this first experiment in Japanese labor, it was the Okinawans who were held responsible for the program's failure. The Japanese government instructed emigration companies to stop accepting Okinawan immigrants and by 1919, Okinawans were formally banned from immigration, blamed for the discontents of the general Japanese immigrant population. In Brazil, Okinawan immigrants encountered prejudice similar to that that they experienced in Japan. The ideas of Okinawan inferiority were widespread among mainland Japanese immigrants who saw cultural and linguistic differences as marks of inferiority, and sometimes even saw Okinawans as a different racial group, connecting them with Chinese and/or Koreans.

Many of the first Okinawan immigrants to Brazil brought their *sanshin* on the transatlantic journey and *minyō* became a source of comfort for sojourners far from home. Yamashiro, for example, reports that on the Fazenda Santa Lúcia “the work of picking coffee tires us. Almost every night we gathered at a house and sang, accompanying ourselves on the traditional *samisen* or *shaminsen*” (Satomi 1998, 66). These musical activities brought together Okinawan immigrants with local Brazilian

communities. Pedro Toma (father of the Toma siblings) was among these early immigrants, arriving in Brazil in 1919 from the region of Shuri. Of his father, Toma recalls: “For the times he played well...He would get people dancing at parties.”<sup>172</sup> Unlike many Okinawan immigrants, Toma left his *sanshin* behind in Okinawa. According to Pedro Toma, his father had “wanted to take his *sanshin*, until his father [Pedro’s grandfather] said ‘why are you taking your *sanshin*. Are you going to Brazil to work or to play’...so he left it behind.”<sup>173</sup> Like many of these early immigrants, Pedro’s parents planned to stay in Brazil temporarily, ultimately returning to Okinawa once they had earned enough money to improve the family’s situation.

In the 1920s and 1930s, many Okinawans in both Japan and Brazil strove to move past the negative stereotypes ascribed to them by mainland Japanese eliminating distinctive cultural practices. Similarly, eliminating the word “Okinawa” from associations and disdaining the use of the Okinawan language in public in favor of Portuguese and/or Japanese were measures that Okinawans took to assimilate (Mori 2003, 53). These assimilationist practices were urgent for Okinawans insofar as they were moves to eradicate restrictions upon Okinawan migration to Brazil, thereby easing the overpopulation and poverty that had stricken Okinawa. During the 1930s the nationalist policies of the Vargas regime attempted to eradicate “foreign” cultural identities, placing Japaneseness in opposition to the newly emerging “Brazilian” national identity which was constructed as a European, African, Native Brazilian amalgam (Lesser, 1999). This propelled many in the Japanese community to strengthen ties with their Japanese heritage through a renewed interest in Japanese language education and Emperor worship (Reichl

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<sup>172</sup> Pedro Toma, personal communication, October 14, 2003.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

1995; Maeyama 1979). Moreover, the polarizing discourse of the central government, which constructed Brazilian and Japanese cultural identities as mutually exclusive, tended to eclipse internal differentiations within the Japanese Brazilian community, helping to ease tensions between Okinawan and mainland Japanese (Mori 2003).

In 1976, a Brazilian branch of the *Ryukyo Minyo Kyokai*<sup>174</sup> (AMB) was established, and within 10 years, had 310 participants (Satomi, 1998). Sensei Oyakawa, who taught the Toma family, is one of seven Brazilians to have been certified as a master *sanshin* practitioner (*shihan*) by the AMB. The interest in Okinawan *minyo* was part of a larger resurgence of Okinawan ethnic identity in the 1970s, which included the selection of cultural elements from Okinawan dance, song, and instrumental music in order to create solidarity among community members. Today, between the AMB and its *minyo* associations, there are approximately seventy teachers of Okinawan *minyo* in Brazil (of which Oyakawa is one of the most respected).

Mori (2003) cites two reasons for the rise of ethnic consciousness among Okinawan Brazilians in the 1970s. First, he argues, as Nikkei's Brazilians, including those of Okinawan descent, began to leave the countryside in the decades after the war to move into the urban areas of Brazil, there began to be a social stratification among the Japanese Brazilian community. In her 1973 study, Viera interviewed Okinawans in the town of Marilla who felt that the label "Okinawano" was used to mark them as both racially different and inferior to mainland Japanese. Secondly, at the national level, Brazilian *nikkei* encountered less pressure to assimilate, as the national government adopted a style of cultural relativism inspired by the rise of ethnic consciousness in the United States.

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<sup>174</sup> Association of Ryukyuan traditional music.

### 4.3 CONTEMPORARY SOUNDS

Today, many in the Okinawan leadership fear that young Okinawans do not have a sense of themselves as ethnically different from other Brazilians and/or Japanese Brazilians, a source of much sadness among the Okinawan leadership. Speaking about young Okinawan's lack of interest in the Okinawan musical heritage, Shinji Yonamine asserts: "Today, it is hard to get your son to listen to *minyo*; he will want to listen to other things. So the picture has changed, the scene has changed, and I think the *Kenjinkai*<sup>175</sup> will have to change too" (1998, 188). I recall asking a third-generation Japanese Brazilian musician in his thirties where his ancestors had immigrated from, and only after a long pause did he reply, "I think they are from that Island in the South of Japan, what is it called?" "Okinawa?" I responded. "Yes, that's it," he said.<sup>176</sup> According to Yukihide Kanashiro "there are people who have totally lost the connection [to their roots]."<sup>177</sup>

Alexandre Oshiro recalls that in his early teens, he "didn't value Okinawan things."<sup>178</sup> When asked to participate in a class of Okinawan drumming, he initially did not want to go, believing that "it would be boring."<sup>179</sup> However, soon the *taiko* group had become the apex of his social life. "It is great to learn the culture but it is also a way to make friends."<sup>180</sup> Similarly, although Chris's father is a dedicated *sanshin* player with whom she studied from a young age, she lost interest in Okinawan music in her teens, turning first to guitar and later to the bass. At home she began to encourage her father to play Beatles tunes on his *sanshin* while he would ask her to play Okinawan *minyo* on her

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<sup>175</sup> Association of Japanese descendants from specific prefects, in this case, Okinawa.

<sup>176</sup> Anonymous, personal communication, October 24, 2003.

<sup>177</sup> Yukihide Kanashiro, personal communication, August 19, 2003.

<sup>178</sup> Alexandre Oshiro, personal communication, October 25, 2003.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

guitar. She recalls, “There was a period when I rejected my origins. I didn’t want to know anything about them...Until [I was] twenty-five years old...I was standoffish with Japanese people. I didn’t even eat Japanese food...I would say, ‘it is only my face that is Japanese. I am Brazilian.’”<sup>181</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that the Toma siblings, who continued to have a strong connection to Okinawan culture during their entire youth, are so celebrated by the Okinawan Brazilian community. Like Chris, the Tomas first studied *sanshin* with their father, Pedro, who taught them the basics in their pre-teen years. However, after learning the basics at home they went on to study for several years with Sensei Oyakawa. Claudia Toma recalls:

I started to play with my father at home. He was always playing his *sanshin*. He always played after dinner. He got that from my grandfather who [also] played a lot and was a great player. He liked to play all kinds of music but then he started to play Okinawan music. My father sings well. At home he first showed us how to sing, and then taught us to play some songs on the *sanshin*. Then he said, ‘it is time for you to start to study with a *sensei*.’ He had taught us the basics. Our cousins had already started so we went with the same teacher...Sensei Oyakawa. He gave us scores and we always played together. You have to know the music in order to play, you have to listen. He played and demonstrated until we more or less knew the music...[The ornamentation] comes later. First we learn to play and sing the basics, and then we fill it in to make it more beautiful, because it is very dry if you don't add ornamental notes.<sup>182</sup>

Before meeting China Sadao in the early 1990s, the young *sanshin* players had mastered approximately forty songs from the Okinawan *minyo* repertoire by following their professor as he played. According to Satomi this conservative teaching style is typical of Brazilian *sanshin* teachers who usually “play fifteen to twenty songs during a variable time period during which the students learn...In general, each song is practiced

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<sup>181</sup> Cristiane Oyakawa, personal communication, October 24, 2003.

<sup>182</sup> Claudia Toma, personal communication, October 25, 2003.

one time with almost no corrections on the part of the professor” (1998, 109). Speaking of the conservatism of the Brazilian *minyo* scene, Chris Oyakawa recalls that although in Okinawa music evolved:

Here [in Brazil] it stayed the same. Now because of globalization and the radio, there are better means of communication. But even a few years ago they didn't have computers. It took a long time for music to get here. It was hard to get records from Okinawa. It is still hard, but imagine what it was like back then. My grandparents taught us what they learned fifty years ago.<sup>183</sup>

Sadao had a different vision for the young people, encouraging them to form a band, which he christened with the name Ton Ton Mi, after the little fish that lives in the Pacific Ocean waters that surround the Ryukyus. Indeed, their outlook as musicians was completely transformed by their 1997 trip to Okinawa, when they recorded their first album, *Saudade de Uchinâ*. Having lost contact with Sadao for several years since the production of the “Hoshino Paranku” video, the Toma siblings were delighted to learn that they had been invited to record an album. “It all began in September of 1997, with a surprise visit by the professor of Japanese language Kioshi Uezu, who brought with him an article for the journal *Ryukyu Shima*, stating that Ton Ton Mi would be invited to record a CD in Okinawa.”<sup>184</sup> Having seen Okinawa as the source of the traditional *minyo* repertoire of their grandparents generation, they were overwhelmed to encounter the new fusion sounds of *Uchinâ* pop, which were transforming the landscape of traditional music.

Every group has a different style. Have you heard of the group Diamantes from Peru? They have a Latino style. But they still use some elements of Okinawan style. They use *sanshin*. They sing in Spanish but use *sanshin*

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<sup>183</sup> Cristiane Oyakawa, personal communication, October 24, 2003.

<sup>184</sup> Ton Ton Mi “Biography,” <http://www.tontonmi.com.br>, (accessed July 16, 2007).

and it is a way to remember our place, our origins. You don't have to be pure to remember the origins.<sup>185</sup>

Recording at the Fukuhara studios for six days, Ton Ton Mi caused a stir in the local press, performing at clubs and on television, and giving several interviews for local newspapers, such as *The Okinawa Weekly Times*, which reported enthusiastically about the transnational collaboration. In the studio they joined forces with musicians from the internationally acclaimed Nenezu, also produced by China Sadao, as well as Diamantes, and the Fere. Together they recorded several songs that they had learned with Oyakawa, as well as newly composed pieces, including “*Saudade de Okinawa*” by China Sadao. However, unlike their previous performances, combined with the sounds of the *sanshin* were electronic instruments including electronic bass, keyboard and electric guitar. Also appearing on the CD are the Okinawan *koto*, *taiko*, *sanba* and *paranku*, as well as Latin American percussive instruments including bongos, maracas, the Brazilian *agogo*, *surdo* and *tamborin*, and the violin.

The album's second track and most diverse in its musical influences, “Chichi Nagami Samba,” combines a vocal track performed by Ton Ton Mi with the virtuosic *sanshin* technique of China Sadao, supported by unlikely instruments from all over the Americas. A sonic hodgepodge, in just a few minutes the song evokes the multiple soundscapes of the Okinawan diaspora.

“Chichi Nagami Samba”<sup>186</sup>

We go together in the moonlight  
To the beach where the moon can be seen above the water  
Now we contemplate the moon, and now we don't  
We go down the beach, mischievous  
The moon neither loves, nor watches

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<sup>185</sup> Claudia Toma, personal communication, October 25, 2003.

<sup>186</sup> Public domain, Translated into Portuguese by Tatsuo Sakima and Paolo Yamashiro.

Tomorrow is another day without certainties  
The moon on the water, the moon that shines  
Let's go to the wood where the wild flowers bend

The piece opens with the booming sound of the Brazilian *surdo*, and when the melody begins, it follows the contours of the hexatonic Ryukyu scale, in which the notes fall within strict diatonic series. This call is soon answered by the voices of Ton Ton Mi who sound off the names of each band member in succession, accompanied by a boisterous samba played on the *agogo* bell, the *surdo* and the maracas. After this brief introduction which signals the Brazilian origins of the group, the melody is played first (and last) on *sanshin*, an instrumental section common to Okinawan *minyo* known as the *utamuchi*. The voices of Claudia Toma and Tieme Toma then enter using the nasal timbre of Okinawan *minyo*, accompanied by the *sanshin* which, following traditional *minyo* practice, plays an ornamented version of their melody. Meanwhile, the bass adds harmonic texture not present in traditional *minyo*.

The flavor of Brazil is still present in the open and muffled tones of the *surdo*, which marks the main beats of the song. However a 3/2 Afro-Cuban clave and maracas pulse gives a kind of geographic indeterminacy to the song. Indeed, over subsequent strophes, the Brazilian feel waxes and wanes with the intermittent sounding of the Brazilian *agogo* bell. The musical texture thickens over subsequent repetitions of the melody, as maracas, bongos, steel drums, *surdo*, *agogo*, acoustic and electric bass are added. This culminates in an instrumental coda in which a slide guitar joins the *sanshin* in a heterophonic final repetition of the main melody.

What are we to make of this samba/*minyo* fusion so different from the conservative *minyo* performances of the Japanese Brazilian community before Ton Ton

Mi made their transatlantic journey to the land of their Okinawan ancestors? In fact, when I interviewed the band several years after the video was produced, they were less than excited about samba music. Fábio for example, found samba music superficial and lacking the historical depth of *minyô*. “It is not a rich sound. It doesn’t make sense to listen to songs that have no [deeper] meaning. It has no history. The music, the rhythm, and the story are not interesting.”<sup>187</sup> While not all the band members were as scathing in their critiques of samba, only Cristiane was an enthusiastic listener. Tieme Toma conceded that she also enjoyed some samba from her parents’ generation because “they never fall out of style.”<sup>188</sup> However, she felt that contemporary *pagode* style samba is ephemeral: “The lyrics only talk about the present moment...it is not a music that endures.”<sup>189</sup> Alexandre Oshiro’s reaction was similarly lackluster. “I like some Brazilian rock and some MPB. The only thing I don’t like is samba. Actually, I don’t mind it, I just would not go out of my way to buy a [*samba*] CD.”<sup>190</sup> In Chapter 3, I discussed some of the reasons why Japanese Brazilians sometimes have strong negative reactions to samba music, which I believe articulate more than aesthetic discernments. Within the Brazilian racial formation, Afro Brazilian culture is seen as antithetical to Japanese Brazilianness, and is used to articulate a boundary of Brazilian cultural citizenship that excludes Japanese Brazilians. In this context, Ton Ton Mi’s rejection of samba culture may also gesture towards an affirmation of their Okinawan/Japanese cultural heritage that has been excluded in hegemonic representations of the Brazilian nation that have taken samba as a central icon.

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<sup>187</sup> Fábio Toma, personal communication, October 12, 2003.

<sup>188</sup> Tieme Toma, personal communication, October 12, 2003.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Alexandre Oshiro, personal communication, October 25, 2003.

Given the band's ambivalent attitudes about samba, I initially found it strange that samba rhythms had found their way into the video "Paranku Hoshino" and later, onto their first CD of Okinawan *minyo*. Why would these musicians be interested in mixing the Okinawan folk music that they have studied since childhood with a musical genre that they do not enjoy? In fact, the impulse to mix Okinawan music with samba first came from China Sadao. Indeed, the CD was a transnational production that was created at the interface of several cultural (and geographic) locations, and unpacking the overlapping meanings that the music engenders will require us to trace several cultural impulses to their sources in Brazil, Okinawa, and Japan. Specifically, we must trace the emergence in the 1990s, of *Uchinâ* Pop as a local and international musical phenomena, a musical movement that China Sadao (among others) nurtured over several decades of dedication and attention. As I will show, Okinawan samba-*minyo* emerged not as an authentic expression of Japanese-Brazilian subjectivity, but rather, through intervention of the Okinawan cultural workers who, beginning in the 1990s, began to use music as a way to invoke diaspora among Okinawan descendants across the globe.

#### 4.4 UCHINÂ POP ARRIVES

China Sadao came of age during the post World War II period when many Okinawans identified more with the Japanese than with the American occupiers, and hoped that their island territory would be returned to Japan. And although the 1972 reunification was met with widespread enthusiasm, Okinawans' hopes for economic and cultural revival were largely unrealized. Indeed, Okinawa still hosts more than seventy-five percent of Japan's

American military bases (Toshiaki 2003, 33), and pays the cost in both crimes and ecological damage brought about by military occupation. Many felt betrayed by Japan, which supports this continued American military presence:

Since the Japanese government supports the presence of the US military in Okinawa, in essence it can be regarded as complicit in the maintenance of this situation as well. Even ten years later, in 1982, impasses concerning the control of U.S. Military bases, land development and environmental damage, and economic and industrial stagnation were deepening, and the contradictions developing out of the return of the bases were growing more apparent. While pursuing implementation of the measures of the return, Okinawans gradually lost confidence and became frustrated and disillusioned. (Arakaki 2002, 297)

Responding to the large-scale immigration of Okinawans to mainland Japan following the reunification (Rabson, 2003), Chino Sadao looked to Okinawa's cultural past as a source of wisdom and strategies for affirming an independent cultural identity for Okinawans. Specifically, he combined traditional Okinawan music with the sounds of pop, rock, and international music, anticipating the eclectic sound that would become the basis of *Uchinâ* Pop decades later. Introducing in his 1976 album *Akabana* the fusion style that would become his hallmark, he combined traditional *sanshin* and vocal melodies with electric guitar, bass, and drums, as well as rock and reggae rhythms. Through this fusion sound Sadao hoped to reach out to Okinawan expatriates in the urban centers of mainland Japan: "The reason I made that album, *Akabana*, is that four or five years after Okinawa came back to Japan there were a lot of people moving from Okinawa to Tokyo and they seemed to deny their own culture...So I made this album as a message to Okinawan people in Tokyo" (Potter 2001, 64).

"Bye Bye Okinawa," which would later be performed by Ton Ton Mi, is the most musically daring of the songs included on the *Akabana* album. On this track Sadao

combined the sound of *sanshin* and reggae, suggesting a common bond among island peoples on opposite sides of the world that share similar histories of colonization and occupation. The song speaks in the voice of one who has just completed a “*tabi*” (voyage) to Okinawa, and nostalgically recalls local traditions such as *moashibi* parties, *eisa* dance, and *basha fu* (banana fibre) kimonos. One model for nostalgic recollections of traditional Okinawa is the *shimauta* of the previous generation of Okinawans who, through their island song, documented the Okinawan immigrant experience. For example, songs like Fukuhara Choki’s “Imin Kouta” (Immigrant Song) speak of the longing of an Okinawan expatriate forced to leave the island for economic reasons. And like the songs of the previous generation Sadao’s work demonstrates a concern that immigrants will forget the islands and its culture. However, in contrast to songs like “Imin Kouta,” with a reference to the important remittances sent to family members by Okinawan workers in mainland Japan, Sadao offers a more idealized view of island life, with no reference to the hardship suffered there. In fact, Sadao’s nostalgic version of Okinawan life, coupled with his use of the word *tabi* to describe this voyage to Okinawa, links his song to the idealized images of Japanese rural areas that began to circulate as part of the nationalist fervor of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Even before the Second World War, Japanese writings about Okinawa, particularly in the work of ethnographer Yanagita Kunio (Hein and Seldon 2003, 10), saw Okinawa as the original site of Japanese culture. This vision of Okinawa as an idealized font of Japanese cultural identity, which denied Okinawa’s own historical process and reduced it to a living museum of Japan’s past, was dangerous in so far as it reinforced the idea of Okinawa as eternally backward and, in the post war period, was

used to justify Okinawa's economic underdevelopment vis-à-vis Japan's other prefectures. This process of searching for the Japanese *kokoro* (heart) or essence in the imagery of Japan's pre-modern past became a central facet of the *nihonjiron* discourse of the 1970s, a series of treatises that reflected upon what it meant to be Japanese. Typical of these treatises was the trope of *furusato* (small town) as timeless location of Japanese *kokoro* (Ivy 1995), which could be uncovered through *tabi* (Yano 2003, 27).

Similarly, the narrator in "Bye Bye Okinawa" travels to the Okinawan *furusato* where he can encounter traditions untouched by modernization and/or urbanization. In "Bye Bye Okinawa" the narrator is ethnically unmarked, leaving open the question of whether this *tabi* is a touristic encounter of a Japanese mainlander or a return to a previously departed homeland by an Okinawan expatriate or descendant. Meanwhile, "Bye Bye Brazil" mobilizes nostalgia for pre-modern traditions that can presumably restore something that has been lacking in urban/immigrant life. Sadao, mimicking the tropes *furusato* and *tabi* circulating in the late 1960s and early 1970s, borrows the tools of the master to evoke nostalgia for Okinawa. However, there are several key differences in the *tabi* of Japanese national projects and those of China Sadao, which undermine several key Japanese assumptions about Okinawa and Okinawans, working against the exotic descriptions of island life that form part of the web of Japanese colonial subjection. Indeed, his work invokes an alternative model of cultural roots, which he and other artists would expand upon over the next few decades. Specifically, he began to construct a counter-hegemonic concept of Okinawa as an international crossroads rather than a timeless repository of pure and originary Japanese culture. By incorporating contemporary and eclectic musical styles into his *sanshin* explorations, Sadao's musical

*tabi* seems to work against the idea of Okinawa as authentic and/or unchanging. As several authors have noted, stressing the cosmopolitan and hybrid nature of Okinawan culture has been an important mode of countering mainland Japanese constructions of Okinawa as primitive (Hook and Siddle 2003; Roberson 2001). Indeed, Sadao's overlapping musical style offers the Okinawan *urusato* as the site of both cultural heterogeneity and change, countering the idea that Okinawa is trapped in a past that is not even its own. This use of musical hybridity has been an important element of Okinawan cultural resistance in recent years.

By the 1980s, Okinawa was being actively developed as a tourist destination as things Okinawan came into vogue with a Japanese public that was offered domestic exotica without being asked to reflect on the effects of unequal economic development and the continuing Japanese sanction of the American military presence. Describing the images of an exotic Okinawa that were produced by the mainland Japanese tourist industry beginning in the 1980s, Hood and Siddle note that:

Okinawans are inscribed as the non-threatening, laid-back and relaxed islanders, ever ready to burst into song and dance, happily supportive of the status quo and the "warm" relationship with the mainland... Mainlanders can thus enjoy the exoticism of the Other within the geographically inscribed, sovereign space, Japan, without reflecting on the question mark- 'Japan?' (2003, 6)

Indeed, these idealized images of island life ignore the economic and ecological consequences of Japanese colonialism. This touristic fascination with Okinawa was accompanied by an unprecedented interest in Okinawan music by Japanese musicians and audiences. Several Japanese groups, including Kubota Makato, Hosono Haruomi, Sakamoto Ryuichi, the Southern All Stars, Soul Flowers Monoke Summit, and the Boom, recorded songs that incorporate Okinawan elements (Roberson 2001).

During this period cultural activists like Sadao began to push for an end to assimilationist policies as a means of erasing inequalities between Okinawa and the mainland. These cultural workers use three interrelated strategies of social change that resulted in a musical Renaissance that had far reaching consequences. These interrelated strategies work through and against mainland Japan inscriptions of Okinawa as exotic and involve: 1) promoting pride in alternative interpretations of Okinawan culture and history, 2) bringing Okinawan cultural products to the global marketplace and, 3) creating ties with transnational Okinawan communities.

In the realm of music, the first strategy, which already presaged the early experiments of China Sadao and Kina Shoukichi of the 1970s, involved a recovery and reinterpretation of Okinawa's distinctive musical culture. Part of this movement, in the 1990s, Sadao produced the all-women's group, Nenezu, which achieved unprecedented popularity in Okinawa, mainland Japan, Europe, and the Americas. Although some of the Nenezu repertoire included interpretations of traditional *minyo* in a more conservative style, they also incorporated eclectic sounds from Balinese gamelan, Brazilian samba, rap, Hawaiian music, and reggae. It was with the Nenezu that China Sadao first began to combine Okinawan and Brazilian musical resources.

This fusion style, referred to as *Uchinâ* pop, became internationally popular in the 1990s, interpreted by Nenezu as well as such groups as the Rinken Band, Kina Shoukichi and Champloose, Ara Yukito Parsha Club, and Diamantes. It was marketed as "world music," to make it more accessible to European and North American audiences through the introduction of recognizable Western musical elements. While some read the international marketing of *Uchinâ* Pop (the second strategy of Okinawan cultural

producers) as a concession to the colonial fascination of mainland Japan, others have read *Uchinâ* Pop as a form of opposition to the homogenizing discipline of the Japanese State:

*Uchinâ* pop music may be marketed as fun, colorful, and different—which it often is—but to view Okinawa (n music) only as an exotic landscape, reproducing mainland Japanese (American and world) desires and discourses, endangers blindness (and deafness) to the fact that *Uchinâ* pop is also an important site in the contemporary Okinawan cultural politics of place, pride and protest. (Roberson 2001, 235)

Specifically, several authors have discussed the oppositional potential of the *champurû* aesthetics of the Ryuku Pop movement (Hosokawa 2002). Taken literally, *champurû* is an Okinawan stew made of a few fixed ingredients (egg, tofu, pork and vegetables) to which other random ingredients are added as they need to be used up. For example, in their song “America Dori,” produced by China Sadao, Nenezu, singing in Japanese and Okinawan, describe the cultural and musical mixtures (“Rock, *shimauta*, rap, and reggae”) found on the streets of Okinawa as “*chonpon champurû*.”

According to Hosokawa:

In colloquial terms, “*champurû* spirit” and “*champurism*” . . . are used in the Okinawan context to designate a sort of optimistic philosophy of ‘it’s all good’, an inclination to devour and direct the foreign to accommodate it to the Okinawan way of life without worrying too much about its ‘Okinawanization.’ The fundamental result in this gastronomic symbolism is the dynamic interaction of the Okinawan with the non-Okinawan, and the control of the former over the latter.” (2002, under *Champurû*, a symbol of Okinawan hybridization) [upaginated electronic text]

*Champurû*, then, is a model for managing cultural contact with otherness in order to bring about tolerance and peaceful coexistence. *Champurû* works against constructions within *nihonjoron* understandings of Japan as homogeneous, offering an alternative, multicultural model of the Japanese nation. It is one of many elements employed in *Uchinâ* pop to distinguish Okinawa from the Japanese mainland, including use of the

Okinawan language, references to traditional Okinawan performing genres, and the use of natural and historical icons. Reasserting difference from Japan is indeed radical in the context of a national culture that stresses homogeneity, and functions in the local Okinawan context to inspire pride in things Okinawan. Meanwhile, by working within the cosmopolitan aesthetics of world music, *Uchinâ* Pop musicians entered into the global marketplace, reaching audiences for whom these local meanings were largely illegible.

#### 4.5 DIASPORIC STIRRINGS

In order to understand the transnational Ton Ton Mi project, I want to highlight another facet of the *champururu* aesthetic, specifically its role in building diasporic connections among Okinawans, the third strategy I have referred to above. In the 1990s, many Okinawans began to see the globalization of the local economy as the key to loosening Okinawa's dependence on Japanese and American capital. Discussions about *champururu* often form part of a larger narrative of the international spirit of Okinawan culture, which could serve to model an alternative mode of trade:

The narrative intertwines memories of the Ryukyu kingdom and Okinawa's great era of commercial trading with references to the achievements of worldwide *Uchinânchu*, giving birth to a self-awareness of the positive role for Okinawans in international society. The overseas migrants have maintained and are carrying the spirit of "the ocean people" into the present. The continuity of this spirit is proof that the *Uchinânchu* are an international people, and thus a positive identity for Okinawan in the present era of internationalization is being formed anew." (Arakaki 2002, 296)

Building upon this historical excavation of Okinawa as a maritime trade route, several organizations and international festivals were created which were intended to stimulate the local economy by strengthening ties with Okinawan communities abroad. Such organizations as the Worldwide *Uchinanchu* Network and the Worldwide *Uchinanchu* Business Association were formed to bring together leaders, businessmen and cultural workers from several continents. Spearheading the cultural branch of this movement China Sadao helped to organize the Worldwide *Uchinanchu* festivals, where he first invited the members of Ton Ton Mi to perform in 1990.

By building a repertoire for Nenezu, and later Ton Ton Mi, that incorporated sounds as diverse as Hawaiian slide guitar and Brazilian samba, China Sadao created a musical ideogram for the Okinawan diaspora, a symbol that could connect and contain all the cultural difference of a diaspora that has absorbed multiple cultural influences over centuries of immigration. Moreover, in addition to modeling a diverse diaspora, *chumpuru*, with its emphasis on peaceful co-existence, may also model a mode of contact with cultural others. Specifically, it is often contrasted to the prevailing models of international trade maintained, in part, through the military build-up of the world's super powers. For example, as Shinji Yonamine, vice president of the Okinawan Association of São Paulo explained to me, "The Japanese samurai reaches out with his sword, Americans reach out with weapons, and Okinawans open their path with the *sanshin*."<sup>191</sup> This comment indicates the extent to which the *sanshin*, as the carrier of *Uchinanchu* spirit, opens the path to ethical human relations which may in turn model the micro encounters of the family, the interactions of local communities, and even the larger sphere of international trade. But this comment also attests to the wide circulation of

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<sup>191</sup> Shinji Yonamine, personal communication, October 30, 2003.

these historical excavations of Okinawan tradition as a model for international trade and diasporic encounter.

In fact, Japanese Brazilians have responded enthusiastically to the call for unity among members of the Okinawan diaspora, participating in yearly gatherings of the Okinawan business associations both in Latin America and abroad, and contributing to dialogue about the spirit of Okinawanness. While *champururu* discourse is a local Okinawan model of cultural hybridity that grows out of the necessity of defining an identity that is autonomous from Japan, its similarity to the Brazilian discourses of hybridity has not been lost on Okinawan Brazilians. Okinawan Brazilians have argued that their hybrid heritage and relaxed attitude make them more akin to other Brazilians than to those of Japanese descent (Lesser 1999).

In fact, Okinawan and Brazilian discourses of hybridity (*champururu* and *mestiçagem*) are similar in so far as both developed in response to ideas of cultural purity and superiority that were disseminated by Japanese and Brazilian colonizers, respectively. However, they also differ in so far as *mestiçagem* became an official ideology in the post-independence era unlike *champururu*, which maintains its oppositional potential. Furthermore, while *mestiçagem* offers an even blending of cultural influences, in the stew of *champururu*, individual elements maintain their distinctive identity. In this sense, *champururu* is similar to the mosaic model of culture synergy that I discussed in Chapter 2.

Ironically, despite (or perhaps because of) the long history of Brazilian exploration of *mestiçagem*, it was not until *Uchinâ* Pop became an international commodity that Brazilian *Uchinânchu* became open to combining the musical resources

of Okinawa and Brazil. The musical mixture of China Sadao and others in the *Uchinâ* Pop movement sanctioned the musical experiments of Ton Ton Mi and several other local bands that have begun to fuse traditional Okinawan music with other sounds. As Tieme Toma recalls, while they were in Okinawa, “We lived with many musicians...After that we decided to add guitar, bass. Another mentality completely.”<sup>192</sup> After recording in Okinawa, Fábio began to study electric guitar while Claudia Toma took up the electric keyboard, and eventually the band added Cristiane, who had been playing for several years in rock-n-roll groups and helped the band to hone their new sound. It was Cristiane who worked out harmonies to accompany the heterophonic melodies of Okinawan *minyô*, ultimately teaching Claudia Toma to accompany on the keyboard. Meanwhile she helped Fábio Toma to adapt the electric guitar pedal to the *sanshin*, which allowed it to be heard above the electronic instruments. Meanwhile, they listened avidly to recordings of *Uchinâ* Pop, transcribing words that were often illegible, and learning the songs by ear. They have now added to their repertoires songs by Diamantes, Nenezu, and Begin, to name a few, which they will include on their second album.

On one hand, it was face-to-face interactions with Okinawan musicians that inspired Ton Ton Mi to form a band with a new sound. On the other hand, the international acclaim of Okinawan music was important to the band members. For example, Alexandre Oshiro recalled that as an early teen he did not “valorize Okinawa” and it was only after he turned fifteen that he began to “see the difference” between Okinawan and Japanese culture.<sup>193</sup> When he first learned of the Okinawan origins of the

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<sup>192</sup> Tieme Toma, personal communication, October 12, 2003.

<sup>193</sup> Alexandre Oshiro, personal communication, October 25, 2003.

Japanese pop star Namie Amuro, his identity as an Okinawan descendant began to blossom:

My brother told me she was Okinawan and that she loves Okinawa and I fell in love with her. I am her number-one fan. Then I learned that most of the really strong [*j-pop*] singers are from Okinawa. I was very proud to learn that [Okinawan] music was so strong.<sup>194</sup>

Although Alexandre (the band's drummer) had been exposed to traditional Okinawan music his entire life, it was not until he encountered Okinawan musical craft as an internationally circulating commodity that he could begin to recognize its value to him. Before encountering *Uchinâ* Pop, Okinawan music seemed backwards and “boring” to Alexandre Oshiro, but when reencountered as World Music, sanctioned by a Japanese public, the music was reinscribed as cosmopolitan and sexy.

In order to understand the impact of commercially successful Okinawan music upon *Uchinânchu* in Brazil, we must recall that in the local Brazilian context their music is basically unknown outside of the Okinawan community. Although the band occasionally appears at city festivals that are open to the general public, they believe that their music has no appeal for Brazilians. Alexandre Oshiro explains, “Gaijin [Brazilians] here don't like this music. We played one show and a [white] guy from Florianopolis came. We thought it was cool. It was very unusual.”<sup>195</sup> In general the band members are happy when non-Okinawans hear their music, but their working assumption is that only people of Okinawan descent will find their tunes interesting. The lack of recognition for Okinawan music and culture within Brazilian society may engender feelings of discomfort and isolation. Mayumi Aguená, the band's youngest member feels “a little different” than her non-Okinawan friends, “It can be difficult to talk sometimes. I will say

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

a word that they don't understand and I have to explain.”<sup>196</sup> Discovering that Okinawan music has millions of fans internationally is experienced as a healing vindication of Okinawan culture. Here then we find the interesting case of a local musical form, disseminated as World Music, helping to revive interest in traditional music by listeners in the diaspora.

It is in this context that we can begin to understand the deeper meaning of “Paranku Hoshino,” Sadao’s first collaboration with Ton Ton Mi. The video calls together a community of listeners to celebrate Okinawanness as the chorus repeatedly invites them to “play the *paranku* together.” Originally produced as the prelude to a children’s program for Okinawan cable television, the video plays a didactic function, instructing children how to hold onto their Okinawan values while venturing out into the world. And while it is like Japanese *furusato* discourse with its tourist-like gaze on both Brazil and Okinawa, it aims not to entice a non-Okinawan tourism but rather to inspire future generations of Okinawans. The video seems to attest that the *Uchinâchu* spirit continues, even as Okinawan descendants successfully take on the custom of their new countries, as symbolized by the samba revelry at the end of the piece.

However, the video also seems to insist upon a utopian potential of music to reach out to non-Okinawan listeners when the lyrics assert: “People of the world unite through song.” Indeed, unlike many diasporic communities that create clear boundaries between members and non-members, some Okinawans instead hold out the possibility for international trade based upon the spirit of assistance rooted in *Uchinânchu* values:

These memories may be brought forth in the harsh political and economic reality of present-day Japan, where internationalization is desirability. A subtle expression often heard at WUB meetings is “*Uchinânchu* at heart.”

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<sup>196</sup> Mayumi Aguená, personal communication, October 25, 2003.

Although a person may have no direct connection to Okinawan, possessing the “*Uchinanchu* spirit” is a sufficient condition for membership in the group. Consequently, rather than being a self-evident identity established by an a priori method, the *Uchinanchu* identity is confirmed by living according to “traditional” practices arising from a spirit of mutual assistance among the network members. (Arakaki 2002, 301)

When Tatsuo Sakima spoke of the *Uchinanchu* spirit that would be transmitted to my unborn daughter through the sound of the *sanshin*, he was reaching across cultural and ethnic boundaries to imagine an ethical world in which mutual assistance was the norm and not an aberration. While such a world remains illusive, Okinawan descendents continue to offer *sanshin* practice as an offering of peace towards a better world.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have examined the diverse musical practices, texts, dances, costumes, and discourses of self-definition of a group of musicians who have much to tell us about the complex ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilians in the *dekasegui* era. Zhen Brasil, Wadaiko Sho, and Ton Ton Mi differ in their social and cultural orientations, and it has been a goal of this study to highlight the cultural heterogeneity of these musicians and the communities they serve. However, as my conversations with these musicians (as well as their students, producers, and fans) reveal, they share a common commitment to a musical heritage that is both diverse and evolving. Moreover, all have been impacted by the increased transnational flow of people and culture between Japan and Brazil since 1990, which has shaped their approaches to music making. Some have gone to Japan as *dekasegui* workers, and in some cases, found in Japan a fertile new terrain for musical exploration. In other cases, the *dekasegui* phenomenon has led to profound changes in the ways these musicians embody and understand their local and national allegiances. For all of the talented musicians in this study musical performance is an important mode of world-making that challenges conventional notions of citizenship and belonging in Brazil.

Previous theorists of the *dekasegui* phenomenon have shown an increased interest in Brazilian cultural forms among Nikkei Brazilian populations living in Japan, and have documented the rise of samba culture among these circular migrants (Roth 2002, Tsuda 2003). My study has shown that Japanese Brazilians in São Paulo have also been impacted by the *dekasegui* phenomenon, and are finding new ways to engage with Brazilian musical forms. However, samba is only one site of creative exploration for these musicians, who are also experimenting with such Brazilian genres as *forró*, *sertanejo*, *música caipira*, and *axê*. However, this interest in Brazilian music has not diminished the importance of Japanese musical forms among this population. Indeed, the bands I have discussed use performance practices that incorporate Japanese approaches to costume, makeup, melodic form, rhythm, and language. However, the meanings of these engagements with Japanese culture are heterogeneous and it would be a mistake to extrapolate a lack of “assimilation” on the part of these Nikkei musicians (Olsen 2004). When Zhen Brasil incorporates Japanese scales, costumes, and language, they “disidentify” with Japanese culture, a process in which they transform these symbols for their own purposes (Muñoz 1999). Neither fully identifying nor fully counter-identifying with Japanese culture, their performance is an ironic but loving rehearsal of tropes of Japaneseness that calls into question the mechanism through which elements of culture become charged with stereotypical meanings. Similarly, Setsuo Kinoshita’s *taiko* practice is not a simple identification with Japanese culture, but rather it has also become an occasion to reflect upon and demonstrate his embodiment of Brazilian cultural values. Finally, while Ton Ton Mi’s rehearsal of Okinawan musical sensibilities does signal their strong identification with Okinawan cultural values, it also becomes a vehicle for

diasporic identifications. Moreover, their *champururu* (hybrid) aesthetic ultimately highlights the similarities between Brazil and Okinawa, countries where strategic hybridity has served as a response to colonial (Portuguese and Japanese) rule.

Likewise, when these groups explore Brazilian musical genres, the meanings of their musical engagements vary greatly, and cannot be used as simple measures of Brazilian cultural assimilation. Zhen Brasil's interpretation of the most Brazilian of genres, *samba*, *forró*, and *sertanejo*, is related to Mizuta's immersion in Brazilian culture, but it also signals his savvy reading of Brazilian market trends, specifically, his mobilization of Japanese Brazilian ethnicity as a commodity. In the case of Kinoshita's treatment of samba, I propose that his willingness to engage Brazilian music was not an outward marker of assimilation, but instead grew out of a newfound comfort with his Japanese cultural heritage. It was only after he had become established as a teacher of *taiko* and made a respected place for himself in Japanese and Nikkei artistic circles that he felt the liberty to experiment with Brazilian musical culture. And finally, Ton Ton Mi's use of samba on their CD was most definitely not a sign of assimilation, but rather, represents their acquiescence to the Okinawan producers.

Ultimately, what these groups share, is not a common artistic or cultural orientation, but rather the erasure of difference to which they are subjected by a Brazilian racial formation in which Japanese descendants are constructed as *japas* ("Japs"). While their understandings of and responses to this social violence vary, they share a common trauma of racial stigmatization, which I believe cannot be healed at the level of verbal discourse alone. The myth of racial democracy has left a deep imprint on Brazilians, and direct discussion about prejudice and racism is in many cases untenable. As Margo, a

sansei *taiko* student demonstrates, Brazilians continue to see racism as something that does not have a significant effect on social and economic station: “Racism? I thought that was only something that exists in other places like in the United States, not here in Brazil.”<sup>197</sup>

Some researchers have taken these disavowals of Brazilian prejudice at face value, ascribing a “positive” minority status to Japanese Brazilians (Tsuda 2003). Others, reading beneath the lines, have engaged these issues through creative methodologies that examine local modes of understanding quotidian ethnic violence, which often explicitly circumvent U.S. linguistic categories (Lesser and Mori 2003; De Carvalho 2003). While few of my informants were comfortable discussing Brazilian “prejudice,” all could recall incidents of violence that qualify as ethnic violence by U.S. standards. Such incidents ranged from mild (feeling like an outsider when entering into Brazilian social spaces in which being Japanese Brazilian was sometimes an occasion for laughter and disparaging comments) to severe (being called a “Japanese fag” and physically attacked in a public restroom<sup>198</sup>). And as Lesser and Mori (2003) have shown, Brazilians’ ideas about such things as beauty, national allegiance, and hospitality encode a complex hierarchy of ethnic and racial meanings that accentuate differences between Nikkei Brazilians and Brazilians of other ethnic groups.

Moreover, race and ethnicity are often the subtexts of musical discourses, which I believe stand in for more explicit forms of public discourse about race. Brazilian musical discourses encode ideas about race, ethnicity, and national belonging, and as such are an important mode of recognizing, imposing, and contesting the terms of civic participation.

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<sup>197</sup> Margo, personal communication, October 23, 2003.

<sup>198</sup> Fábio Fukuda, personal communication, August 24, 2003.

Concepts such as *ginga*, *malandragem*, and *mestiçagem* define a local (national) style that is brought to musical and social encounters, and which is extremely important in defining what is and is not Brazilian. And when Japanese Brazilian musicians find musical interventions against prejudice and exclusion, it is not an insignificant appendage to other, more direct modes of cultural activism, but a head-on encounter with the local meaning-making at the heart of how Brazilians understand difference, embodiment, and national identity. Indeed, it is precisely because music has played such an important role in defining a Brazilian national identity that those who contest the idea of Japanese Brazilians as unassimilable outsiders must work within and against the logic of these musical/corporeal discourses.

The music groups I have discussed engage these local discourses of race and ethnicity in different ways. Each defines a relationship to the overdetermined space of the samba circle, that potent metaphor for the Brazilian nation that literally and symbolically rehearses the inclusion and exclusion of potential reveler/citizens. Defining normative modes of style and embodiment, the samba circle is a key element of “somatic citizenship,” which according to Hancock refers to:

The bodily metaphors employed in discourses on socio-political identity and participation, as well as to the bodily-mediated relations between state and the populace, such as state interventions and regulations of bodily practice, but also embodied forms of resistance and accommodation to the state. (2002, 29)

Some of the musicians I have discussed figuratively enter into the samba circle in order to work against commonsense assumptions about Japanese Brazilians. As I have shown, cultural work from inside the circle may take on several forms. In the case of Zhen Brasil, demonstrating that Japanese Brazilian bodies can master *ginga* and *malandragem* was a way to embody normative modes of Brazilian somatic citizenship

and work against long-held idea of Nikkei bodies as unassimilable. We might think of this as an assimilationist model of somatic citizenship. Kinoshita similarly demonstrates the ability of Japanese Brazilian bodies to master samba rhythms and styles. In some ways this is the least radical mode of cultural activism in so far as it does not significantly expand the kinesthetic repertoire that constitutes normative Brazilian citizenship.

Moreover, it is a dangerous strategy insofar as Nikkei Brazilians who master Brazilian styles may be seen as exceptional individuals, leaving intact general assumptions about Japanese Brazilian bodies.

Somewhat more radical are these musicians' direct challenges to official dogmas of somatic citizenship, specifically their questioning of samba's unitary authority as a harbinger of national style. Such challenges do not involve entering into the samba circle, but rather invoke other, parallel circles from which they may claim allegiance to the Brazilian nation. This parallel strategy, which I have called "mosaic *mestiçagem*," is limited insofar as it relies on official epistemologies. For example, when Kinoshita "plants the flag"<sup>199</sup> of Nikkei *taiko*, he is creating a parallel version of somatic citizenship that pushes up against the limits of commonsense ideas about Brazilian bodies in motion. What he offers is a mosaic *mestiçagem* or hyphenated Brazilian identity described by Lesser as a "joining (rather than mixing) of identities" (1999, 5) that constitutes an alternative, but equally valid form of Brazilian somatic citizenship. However, Kinoshita's parallel mode of Nikkei Brazilian percussion reinforces the categories through which national belonging is established and policed insofar as it mirrors the samba circle's percussive quest for cultural essence. Similarly, Zhen Brazil reinforces official modes of nation-building in their reliance on Brazil's "foundational fiction," to borrow a term from

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<sup>199</sup> Setsuo Kinoshita, personal communication, June 6, 2003.

Doris Sommer (1991), in which the genesis of the Brazilian people is traced to the amorous coupling of Europeans, Native Brazilians, and Africans. While leaving unscathed the efficacy of the foundational fiction to establish the terms of national belonging, Zhen Brazil creates a parallel fiction in which Japanese and Brazilian coupling becomes the basis of a surrogate, mosaic national metaphor. Within this alternative nation/house, described in the song “Tem Purê no Tempurá,” Japanese and Brazilian symbols, foods, and movement repertoires exist alongside each other, while maintaining their distinctive characteristics and styles. Finally, while Ton Ton Mi creates a circle in which the group rehearses the styles and repertoire of Okinawan *minyō*, it takes up the epistemological trope of *saudade* (nostalgia), a perspective that is made explicit in the title of their song, “Saudade de Uchinâ.” Demonstrating their knowledge of Brazilian affect, which in the case of *saudade* forms an important part of how Brazilians define their national character (Da Matta 1991), Ton Ton Mi underscores their Brazilianness even as they engage cherished Okinawan traditions. And like the aforementioned reinforcements of official strategies of nation-building, Ton Ton Mi reinforces a national obsession with *saudade* as an important mode of world-making.

However, when these musicians sing into existence new circles of community, they may also blur the boundaries between their own and other, parallel communities of Brazilian somatic citizenship. Using the strategy I have referred to as “affinity *mestiçagem*,” these musicians find surprising echoes of their own musical and cultural practice reverberating through the very heart of hegemonic Brazilian culture. For example, when Zhen Brazil explores the affinities between Japanese and Brazilian constructions of passivity as power in their sonic Brazilianizing of the word “aikido,”

they collapse the difference between mainstream and Japanese Brazilian circles of activity. Similarly, Ton Ton Mi reveals the similarities between Okinawan and Brazilian style, particularly in their incorporation of a *champururu* aesthetic, which, like Brazilian *mestiçagem*, sanctifies hybridity as a core cultural value. Through their creative use of *champururu*, Ton Ton Mi underscores the similar role hybridity has played as a response to colonial assertions of racial and cultural purity and superiority in both Okinawa and Brazil. In both the Brazilian and Okinawan diasporas hybridity has become a core element of post-colonial identity. Finally, the Brazilian kinesthetic accents Setsuo Kinoshita's *taiko* students bring to their practice are a point of affinity between *taiko* and samba. And by highlighting his students' embodied Brazilian style, Kinoshita blurs the boundary between the *taiko* circle and the larger Brazilian kinesthetic community in which it is imbedded.

While the mosaic and affinity *mestiçagem* I have discussed above work by evoking sanctified tropes of Brazilianness, particularly racial and cultural hybridity, percussiveness, and nostalgia as modes of nation-building, the critical mimeses of Zhen Brasil calls these tropes into question. According to Butler such imperfect repetition of normative tropes of race and gender can help to undermine the efficacy of those tropes:

There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the "we" cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds—and fails to proceed. (1993, 124)

Like the critical repetition of heteronormative roles in gender drag that is, according to Butler “the very condition of an affirmative response to violation” (Ibid.), Zhen Brasil’s racial drag underscores the constructedness of all ethnic and racial identities.

Through their ethnomimeses of Brazilian types, which exaggerate the swagger of the white-Brazilian cowboy, and the slink of the black Brazilian *pagode* dancer, and the coyness of the Nikkei geisha, they drain the power of such stereotypes to stand for an objective, knowable reality, and to interpellate racialized Brazilian subjects. However, this cultural strategy is not without its dangers. While mosaic and affinity *mestiçagem* are dangerous in so far as they rely upon the tropes through which Brazilian national identity is reified, critical mimesis is risky insofar as there is no guarantee that audiences will engage the band’s performance with the ironic distance that is necessary to render stereotypes ludicrous. As I described in Chapter 2, many in the Japanese Brazilian community feared that Zhen Brasil’s ethnomimesis would simply reaffirm toxic strategies that the band hoped to undermine.

Clearly there are many difficulties to overcome as these musicians find diverse musical strategies to claim cultural citizenship. Rather than privileging one or the other of the strategies I have outlined, I would like to suggest that together these musicians’ performances work as a swarm or full-spectrum response, a combination of related, rapidly evolving, specialized attacks (Dominguez 2005; Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2000), which, in this case, work against racially exclusive modes of nation-building as they adapt quickly to changes in the social and cultural landscape of Brazil. Within critical race theory racism has often been understood as “an ideology that characterizes people based on the color of their skin” (Philipsen 2003, 205). Indeed, Fanon’s classic reference

to *epidermalization* is often understood as the process through which skin color comes to define human value (1967, 11). However, as Oliver notes, for Fanon *epidermalization* also denotes the process of internalizing racist ideologies:

One of the most effective weapons of colonialism is to attempt to force the colonized to internalize a value system in which they are rendered subhuman, incapable of rational thought or morality. The morality of colonialism reduces the colonized to their bodies, which become emblems for everything evil within that morality. This identification of the colonized with their bodies, and more specifically within racist culture with their skin, leads Fanon (1967, 11) to call the internalization of inferiority a process of *epidermalization*. (Oliver 2004, 30)

However, for Japanese Brazilians it is not only physiognomy that marks their outsider status. As I have shown, belonging in Brazil is also measured in terms of one's relationship to official modes of somatic citizenship, to which Japanese Brazilians may or may not conform. Ethnicity and race are read not only in terms of static physical characteristics, but also in the stylized gestures of bodies in motion. And as Setsuo Kinoshita suggests, many Japanese Brazilians internalize an image of their kinesthetic heritage as lacking beauty and grace. These negative self images, when internalized, may lead to what Oliver has called social melancholy:

Unlike classic melancholy, as described in psychoanalytic theory, which is the incorporation of a lost loved other to avoid losing her or him, what I call *social melancholy* is the loss of a positive or lovable image of oneself and the incorporation of abject or denigrated self-images widely circulating in mainstream culture. (Oliver 2004, 89)

The swarm of cultural strategies I have described work against social melancholy in different ways. Some work by creating alternatives to the abject images of Japanese Brazilians that circulate widely in mainstream Brazilian culture. Others work by questioning the very processes through which kinesthetic styles become charged with

hierarchical value. And each creates a web of social relations among Japanese Brazilians that nurture the “social acceptance and support” which “are necessary for psychic life” (Ibid.). Music is an important vehicle for these evolving modes of cultural activism. As McClary asserts:

Music depends on our experiences as embodied beings for its construction and its impact, but our experiences of our own bodies—our repository of proper or even possible motions and their meanings—are themselves constituted to a much greater extent (than we usually realize) through musical imagery. (McClary 1994, 84)

The musicians I have introduced in this text are complex beings with multiple affiliations and identification. Race and ethnicity are not the only axes of identity that define their tastes, practices, and allegiances, but as I have shown, these musicians must negotiate complex social worlds in which they are continually interpellated as Japanese, Brazilian, and Nikkei, with all of the varied connotations that these complex social categories bring. Embodying local and national styles in their music making, Japanese Brazilian musicians work through, and against conventional notions of Nikkei bodies, making use of a diverse inheritance of cultural tools to demand full inclusion as Brazilian citizens. Bodies in motion are the battlefield upon which somatic citizenship is won (and lost), and insofar as music works to constitute what we consider as “proper” and “possible” bodily motions and experiences, music helps to shape the evolving terrain of somatic citizenship in (Japanese) Brazil.



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