

# The Nikkei Community of Peru: Settlement and Development

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## Introduction

In this paper I discuss the beginning of the Japanese emigration in Peru and the circumstances they faced during their settlement until today. The Nikkei<sup>1)</sup> of Peru is considered as one of the most representative ethnic minority in Peru. In spite of the fact that this recognition was already achieved by the end of the last century, pioneers faced hard experiences before finally establishing themselves in what was once a “temporary land” and paving the way for their descendants.

The current Peruvian population of about 27 million people (INEI, 2006) presents a complex mixture of indigenous groups, *mestizos* and immigrants. African, Chinese, European and Japanese immigrant groups that accounts for about 3% (CIA, 2006) of the population. The Spanish legacy and “whites” immigrants precede Asian and African immigration. The colonial heritage still affects more than 65 indigenous groups and the Afro-Peruvians compose the highest percentage of those who live under the poverty line (Chueca; Galvez).

Japanese immigrants have gradually acquired better social and economic status. Nevertheless, the beginning of their settlement was difficult and they were perceived as a “yellow peril” by many Peruvians. It was not until the postwar period that Japanese experienced in Peru a “climate of tolerance, wherein prejudice and discrimination are officially rejected” (Kivisto, 2002:36). Since that time the Nikkei have been granted the same rights as other nationals. The recognition of their citizenships has been one of the most important policies in the process of incorporation and political participation (Castles, 2000:93) for the Nikkei in Peru.

In terms of assimilation as discussed by Takenaka (2004) and Thompson (1974), the Peruvian Nikkei are economically integrated into the wider society, but they are still perceived as a close-knit ethnic group that has resisted social assimilation into Peruvian society (Takenaka, 2004:77). According to the study of assimilation (Price, 1969), the *Issei*<sup>2)</sup> were pioneers in a new land; their children the *Nisei*<sup>3)</sup> as the bridge generation achieved better status and made possible the improvement of the position of their descendants. However, third and younger generations have not yet arrived at maturity.

The 2.5 million Nikkei in the world are considered as “bridges between their adopted countries and Japan” (MOFA, 2006). Nikkei communities overseas have increased in significance and in demographic terms. Their members have participated as promoters of mutual understanding

between both countries, and, in the Peruvian case, have built a “well-established ethnic community that has grown rather than diminished in each generation” (Takenaka, 2003: 467).

This paper provides an overview of the Japanese immigration in Peru. These immigrants first came in response to a local shortage of labor, they faced discrimination and racism in the process, but today are finally recognized in Peruvian society. It should be noted that the Japanese government and other institutions have been the main supporters of the community. I will discuss how this sense of “Japaneseness” is still maintained after 107 years of settlement and the factors that influence this identification.

### **A review of the Japanese Diaspora**

The Japanese human dispersal in the Americas began at the end of the 1800s as part of the government policies to control the increasing population and to promote its territorial expansion (Befu 2002; Takenaka 2004). The Meiji government (1868-1912) supported the overseas *dekasegi*<sup>4)</sup> under its policies of modernization and industrialization. Seclusion policies and death penalty in relation with attempt at immigration applied during the Tokugawa Shogunate were abolished (Tigner, 1981). Under the umbrella of controlling the population, the government tried to get rid of impoverished farmers providing work for them in countries overseas. Japanese policies focused on “civilizing those low-class citizens” those “low-class laborers... whose poverty would pose a national threat” (Takenaka, 2004: 79).

In addition, there were economic advantages to be obtained by the government through remittances that emigrants sent to Japan (Tigner, 1981). According to the statistics (Fukumoto, 1997:49) from 1926 to 1937 remittances accounted for more than 281 million yen. Furthermore, migration promoted Japanese trade through exports to Latin America of manufactured goods and commodities of light industries (Normano and Gerbi, 1943: 10-17). Expansionism was another reason to promote emigration, used as a tool to extend Japanese territories basically in the United States of America (USA). Patriotism and expansionism were the labels used by statesmen and scholars involved in colonial projects.

According to historical data (Tigner, 1981; Takenaka, 2004; Fukumoto, 1997) emigration companies recruited mainly males between the age of 20 to 45 years to work in sugar and cotton plantations under six months to four years contracts. A large number of emigrants were originally from the southwest and Kyushu region. In 1868, the first Japanese emigrants known as *gannen-mono* (Befu, 2002; JANM, 2005) were sent to work at sugar plantations in Hawaii (150) and Guam (40). Japanese laborers were first recruited without government permission but due to slave-like treatment the Meiji government prohibited the practice. In 1885 Japan and Hawaii signed a treaty that promoted emigration and from then on until 1894 about 29,000 Japanese were sent to sugar plantations under three-year contracts. At the same time, a group of Japanese politicians, governmental officials, and intellectuals formed the “Colonization Society” in order to establish an

agricultural colony in Mexico called as the “Enomoto<sup>5)</sup> Colony”. Actually, this project did not succeed but it promoted emigration to other Latin American countries such as Peru (1899), Chile (1903) and Brazil (1908) (JANM/INRP, 2005).

The first groups of emigrants had the USA as their main destination due to higher salaries, better labor conditions, and above all the opportunity to enroll in American schools. San-Francisco and Seattle were the main objectives for the “School Boys”. Because of the increase in the number of immigrants, Japan signed the Gentlemen’s Agreement with the USA in 1907 and the following year the Hayashi-Lemieux with Canada. Finally, both countries decided to stop Japanese immigration, Canada in 1923 and the USA in 1924. With the North American doors closed immigrants turned to South America as their new destinations.

### **Peru as the Latin American Destination**

Peru was the first Latin American country to set up diplomatic relations with Japan. In 1873, both countries signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation. A. Leguia, manager of a sugar manufacturing company (later President of Peru), and T.Tanaka, agent of Morioka Emigration Company (Takenaka, 2004) were the main promoters of the Japanese migration. In 1898 the Peruvian government issued a decree authorizing the immigration of Japanese (JANM/INRP, 2005).

The “Agricultural Revolution” in the Peruvian coast created the need for numerous laborers to cover the demands in exportation (sugarcane and cotton) to the European Market. Peruvian landlords who had covered their need in labors with Chinese workers turned to Japanese workers after the abolition of the “Coolie” trade in 1874 (Takenaka, 2004).

The first type of immigration to Peru was the contract migration (1899-1923) through emigration companies that offered four-year contracts in sugar plantations, about 18,000 Japanese traveled under this type of policy (Watanabe et al. 1999: 15). Contracts signed with Morioka Emigration Co. specified a payment of 2.1 pounds (25 yen) per month and 10 to 12 working hour days. The first group of 790 Japanese left Yokohama on February 1899 arriving in Peru on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1899. The paradise advertised by emigration companies soon disappeared; differences in weather and food together with diseases (typhus, malaria, and dysentery) soon affected the Japanese in the haciendas (Takenaka, 2004: 84). Before completing their contracts 150 out of the first immigrants died due to epidemics. In 1909 death amounted to 7.5% of the immigrants (6,295).

Peruvian landlords did not fulfill most of the original conditions stipulated in the contract that caused a series of protests and unrest among the immigrants in the haciendas. Some of the Japanese run away to nearby cities, where they started small commerce that required little investment and skills. The actions of emigration companies also influenced some of the immigrants’ decisions. Taking advantage of the immigrants’ lack of knowledge of Spanish and of banking issues, they used to keep some percentages of the remittances or delayed them for their own

benefit (Fukumoto, 1997: 138).

In 1923 due to the unfavorable conditions and deaths contract migration was abolished. This situation promoted the second type of migration: the *Yobiyose* or migration by invitation (1924-1936). Immigrants who re-migrated to urban areas and established their own small businesses called their relatives and friends to work with them. From 1924 to 1930 about 7,900 Japanese arrived to Peru this way. Most of the immigrants called their families who had remained in Japan to join them (Fukumoto, 1997). The *Yobiyose* migration also included the future wives for Japanese in Peru. Through the *shashin kekkon* (marriage by photograph) system, relatives in Japan introduced the “candidate’s” picture to the bride and after mutual acceptance they married by proxy in Japan. After the marriage the wife traveled to join her husband in Peru.

### Re-migration to urban areas

After the experience in the haciendas, urban areas were the best option for the immigrants to survive. Once they had called their families and friends by the *yobiyose* system and even if they proved unable to accomplish their aim, the original goal of returning became more and more distant. The “target-earners” who were not able of saving enough money extended their temporal stay into an ever more permanent one (Castles, 2003: 31).

The Japanese strengthened their group solidarity in Lima and in other cities where they settled. The need of representation in the haciendas pushed them to form *nihonjinkai* (Japanese association) that increased in number in urban areas. The diversity of commercial groups in addition to social associations influenced the gradual development of the Japanese community. This expansion is demonstrated by the number of small businesses established during the 1920s and 1930s, such as grocery stores, barbershops and bazaars.

Based on the statistics of the Peruvian government in 1930, the foreign population in Lima counted 30,049 people, 6.7% of the total population. Japanese composed the largest number (9,782), followed by the Chinese (5,704) and Italians (3,853) (Fukumoto, 1997). In Lima where more than 80% of foreigners were established, the Japanese were mostly concentrated in food services and commercial activities. Their success was basically due to some “positive” characteristics of the group as their hard-working spirit, their purpose in saving money, family labor and group solidarity (Watanabe et al. 1999; Takenaka, 2004). The monetary basis, small capital for investment was provided through the *tanomoshi* (small rotating credit unions) within the group because Japanese did not have access to loans from Peruvian banks.

Since the beginning of the Japanese settlement, these associations were the core of their social life, and still is one of the bases of the current Nikkei community. In 1911 the *Nihonjin Kyokai* (the Japanese Association) was formed, followed by the *Nihon Doshikai* (Japanese Society) one year later. In 1917 both groups were unified into the *Chuo Nihonjinkai* (Central Japanese Society). Other social institutions were based on the *furusato* (hometown). They gathered Japanese in their

*Kenjinkai* (prefectural or regional associations). Through their associations Japanese immigrants were able to express their culture and maintain relations with home, but to some extent they also constituted “isolation sites” from the Peruvian society (Fukumoto, 1997: 208). That membership was limited only to Nikkei made Peruvian nationals to perceive them as potential threats.

### **Discrimination and prejudice**

The concentration of Japanese in urban areas and their gradual success in commercial activities increased their perception as competitors by nationals. As Takenaka (2004) shows the fact that Japanese changed their condition from that of poor agricultural laborers to members of a “successful middleman minority... led to their racialization, which accelerated discrimination.” Additionally, as Mishima (2004) stresses, migration is a “social invention” which states manipulate for their own benefit and where immigrants are excluded from the receiving Nation. After opening the doors to cheap labor the Peruvian government enacted several restrictions aiming to reduce the number of immigrants due to the decline of labor demand (Takenaka, 2004), and to avoid further competition with national workers.

With the fall of President Leguía’s government, the Japanese lost their main support. During the following governments of General Sanchez Cerro (1930-1933), and Benavides (1933-1939) Japanese were focus of direct attacks. For example, Law 7505 enacted during Sanchez Cerro’s regime stated that any business owned by foreigners should include 80% of Peruvian nationals as its employees. The law affected directly the Japanese because most of them employed relatives and friends. Then, the 1936 Decree limited to 16,000 foreign citizens per nation, which was equivalent to a complete ban on immigration since the number of Japanese already exceeded: 22,650 (Fukumoto, 1997). Additionally, naturalization procedures were cancelled to prevent Japanese from obtaining the Peruvian nationality.

The media also played an important role in spreading anti-Japanese feelings. Peruvian newspapers supported governmental decrees, laws and rumors. In 1934 “La Prensa” spread the idea of “Japanese Infiltration” and focused on alerting the population on the danger of the Japanese who were affecting the Peruvian economy. The same newspaper published in 1937: “the Japanese danger is based on the settlement of an organized Japanese nucleus helped by their government...They are focused on monopolizing the Peruvian economy, this is very dangerous as they want to take possession of the Peruvian land and settled in Peru” (Fukumoto 1997: 91).

On May 3, 1940 *La Tribuna* a clandestine newspaper of the *Aprista* Party claimed that Japanese were organizing a group of espionage. Flyers accused them of having weapons in the intention of taking over Peru. A group of students from *Guadalupe* school started an anti-Japanese march on May 13, 1940 that turned into direct attacks to Japanese commerce; the anger of the mass increased, followed by a series of assaults and arsons that lasted for two days. The 1940 lootings damages accounted for 6 million US dollars, about 620 families lost all their properties, half of them

returned to Japan, 200 people were injured and 10 were killed. These lootings are remembered as one of the most traumatic events for the Nikkei community in Peru. Besides material and physical attacks, moral injuries were difficult to heal. After a protest by the Japanese government, the Nikkei received a partial compensation that covered only one fourth of the total damages (Fukumoto, 1997:247).

### **The Nikkei community during WWII**

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor marked the beginning of a period of uncertainty for the Nikkei in Peru. Controls imposed upon them ranged from confiscation of their properties, closure of institutions to the limitation in their activities. The Peruvian government was under the protection of the USA and based on agreements of Continental Unity, all Nikkei irrespective of their citizenship were considered as enemies (Fukumoto, 1997; CCCIJ, 1999). In 1942 President Prado supported the USA in breaking off diplomatic relations with Japan, Germany and Italy. Peru let the USA government to build up a military base in Talara, and received in exchange a loan of US\$29 million in armaments after the conflict with Ecuador (Morimoto, 1999:109; Masterson et al., 2004:159).

Japanese institutions including schools and associations were shut down and the Peruvian government took possession of their assets and bank accounts. Meetings of more than three people were prohibited and Nikkei were also forbidden from speaking Japanese (Fukumoto, 1997; CCCIJ, 1999). Without a state that respected their rights most of the Nisei who were born in Peru, were in risk of being deported. Some of them were hidden friends who were Peruvian nationals or changed their family names, while others decided to hide in other regions or return to Japan (CCCIJ, 1999: 80).

On April 14, 1942, deportation program started sending the leaders of the community to the USA. About 1,500 Japanese were taken to detention camps in the USA where they remained until February 1945 (Fukumoto 1997: 249). Most of the Japanese from Latin America were sent to Montana (Missoula) and Texas (Kennedy, Seagoville and Crystal Centers). The population in these centers also included non-Japanese, for example Germans, and Italians. These detention camps were similar to small villages including schools, shops, hospitals and sports areas, but detainees were prisoners watched over guards.

Compared to other Latin American countries a high percentage (70%) of all the Japanese deported to the USA came from Peru (Fukumoto, 1997: 249-250). Leaders of the Japanese community, businessmen, teachers and individuals without any political links were deported. The main reasons why the Peruvian government supported the USA were to avoid the entrance of more immigrants and to get rid of all the Japanese and their descendants. In fact, there were no legal reasons to transfer the Nikkei from Latin America to detention camps in the USA. No “conclusive proof was ever found” of the incrimination of threats to national security (Masterson et al.,

2004:162). In addition, Morimoto (1999) and NG (2002) mention that it was due to security concerns about the Panama Canal and to the possibility of exchanging the detainees for prisoners of war by the USA government. About 80% of the “dangerous” Nikkei were arrested and deported to the USA and held without trial in Department of Justice camps (NG, 2002: 52).

### **The Post wartime period**

At the end of WWII Japanese Latin Americans in the USA were considered as illegal aliens as their passports had been confiscated when they entered the detention camps, as a result they were subject to deportation and repatriation. Peru accepted only Germans but refused the return of Japanese (Morimoto, 1999:111). Some of them were sent to Japan and 365 stayed in the USA where a number of Japanese-Peruvians were detained against their will. 110 people including men, women and children were paroled and moved to Seabrook Farms in New Jersey. In 1953, the deportation orders of the Japanese Latin Americans were canceled and one year later, they were eligible to obtain US citizenship (NG, 2002: 52-53). Less than 100 Japanese-Peruvians deported to USA were allowed to return to Peru (Masterson et al., 2004).

Based on the criteria that they were illegal aliens Japanese deported from Latin American countries were not included in the redress payments under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. They were not USA citizens. The “Campaign for Justice” achieved a partial response decades after the end of WWII. Less than 400 surviving internees were compensated and received the reparation sum of \$5,000 including an apology from Clinton administration in 1998 (NG, 2002; Masterson et al., 2004).

The situation for the Nikkei who remained in Peru was uncertain and confused. The idea of Japan had surrendered was difficult to accept. However, as time passed immigrants in Peru realized that Japan had lost the war and the idea of returning to Japan was put on the back burner. In 1951 Peru and Japan signed the Peace Treaty of San Francisco and diplomatic relations were re-established but the situation remained difficult. During the government of Manuel Odria (1948-1956) on the grounds of their “non assimilative character” (Fukumoto, 1997) Japanese were denied naturalization. Furthermore, the Nisei who went to Japan to study before the war were not allowed to return to Peru. Some of them tried in vain to enter Peru from Bolivia and Brazil to meet their families.

### **Nikkei Institutions and the Recovery period**

At the beginning of the second term of President Prado (1956-1962) Nisei were initially refused Peruvian identity cards that constituted the proof of their Peruvian citizenship, but finally succeeded thanks to the support of some Peruvian scholars (Fukumoto, 1997) who appealed to the authorities. Prado tried to improve the relations between Peru and Japan. During his government



there were official visits from both countries, visits to Japanese relatives were permitted and immigration was opened to a limited number. These measures led to the gradual recovery and development of the Nikkei community.

With the reopening of their institutions the community re-emerged with new leaders, younger and more independent members compared to the group of the prewar period (Fukumoto, 1997). One of the most representative organizations was the *Taiheiyō Kurabu* (Pacific Club) founded in July 1948 (Sakata, 1992). Its members organized the exhibition of the Japanese Swimming Olympic Team in the Nippon Pool. After several years the Japanese flag was hoisted and the Japanese hymn was played in honor of the guests (Sakata, 1992). Based on donations the Pacific Club managed to open the Stadium *La Union* in 1953, which has been one of the centers of the community in Lima.

The reopening of their newspapers was an important event for the Nikkei. The need for communication and freedom of speech returned after WWII. In 1950 the first edition of *Peru Shimpō* (Peru Progress) was published. Regular editions have included Japanese and Spanish versions (Fukumoto, 1997). Until now, *Peru Shimpō* represents an important means of information and of cohesion of the group, focused on promoting social, cultural, and sports activities among its members.

Given their concern in education, the Issei founded schools in the haciendas and in urban areas, which were based on Japanese programs (Fukumoto, 1997; Watanabe et al. 1999). At the beginning of WWII, there were about 22 Japanese schools in Peru but they were closed in the series of repressive measures imposed on the Nikkei community. During the postwar period schools that had not been confiscated reopened under different names, for example the Callao Japanese School changed its name to *Jose Galvez del Callao* and *Jishuryo* became the Santa Beatriz School (CCCJJP, 1999). The reopened Nikkei schools were based on Peruvian programs including few hours of Japanese language. *La Union* School founded in 1971 was the first school to include secondary education. Gradually, Nikkei have been enrolling in different private or public schools, and parents' decisions are based mostly on the location, cost, and prestige of the institution instead of Japanese culture or language programs.

The 1960s represented a time of compensation and re-emergence. There was an environment of democracy and development in Peru during the government of Belaunde (1963-1968) (CCCJJP, 1999). One of the major achievements of the Nikkei community was compensation for the schools expropriated during WWII. In 1967 thanks to donations and the support of its members, the Japanese government, Japanese companies in Peru as well as the Central Japanese Society, the community opened a Cultural Center in Lima in the area reserved for the confiscated schools. The recovery of the community was not possible without financial support, and during the 1970s the traditional *tanomoshi* groups turned into formal financial cooperatives (Fukumoto, 1997).

The Peruvian Japanese Association (Asociación Peruano Japonesa - APJ) has been the central and representative institution of the community. APJ administrates the Cultural Center in Lima which has social, educational and cultural activities. It regroups about 67 associations and



institutions in Lima and the provinces. Its objectives are focused on promoting cultural exchange between Peru and Japan, fostering mutual understanding and support to Nikkei and Peruvian society. All services are opened to all public, however membership to APJ is selective based on ethnicity “core members who occupy leadership and important positions are almost always economically privileged members, many of whom maintain Japanese racial heritage on both parental lines” (Takenaka, 2003).

The Nikkei community in Peru has been formed more than a century ago through a process of boundaries marking, definition of group membership and the limitation of its neighborhoods as “distinctive use of private and public spaces” (Castles, 2003). The reopening and development of Nikkei associations and institutions during the postwar period show how Japanese culture has been the basis of group identification, but at the same time a means for resistance to exclusion and marginalization. Although a high degree of integration to Peruvian society, especially in economic terms and high acculturated later generations, the Nikkei community is still perceived as a “micro-cosmos” (Takenaka, 2003; 2004).

### **The Nikkei community since 1990**

The second government of Belaunde (1980-1985) was characterized by social and economic instability, which was intensified during Garcia’s (1985-1990) government. Poverty, terrorism and increased unrest in the country marked that period and the Nikkei were not exempt from the consequence of this insecurity. The situation in Peru prompted a “return” migration to Japan during the late 1980s and 1990s, which increased in number after the amendment of the Japanese Immigration Control Act and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990 (Brody, 2002). Most of the Nikkei who traveled back to Japan belonged to the middle class and were involved in small-middle scale businesses. The fact that they often only landed unskilled jobs in Japan implied a high degree of frustration that offended the feeling of “ethnic distinction” they had kept while in Peru. However, the initial decision of going to work in Japan involved idealism and high hopes (Morimoto, 2002:143).

One of the events that took the Nikkei community away from its “low profile” was the election of Alberto Fujimori in 1990, the son of Japanese immigrants as president of Peru, which had significant even if sometimes contradictory effects like pride and fear simultaneously. Although he was not totally supported by the Nikkei, his election represented a form of recognition for the whole community: “After more than nine decades of confronting highly negative attitudes by the Peruvian people the Japanese Peruvians achieved a place of prominence” (Masterson and Funada Classen, 2004). Identified as “el Chino” (due to his Asian traits), Fujimori’s humble origin, the fact that he was a member of an ethnic minority, and a pragmatic background instead of a political one, helped him to gain a number of votes. The main achievement during his government was the defeat of terrorist groups, but it was also characterized by questionable legal methods and corruption that

forced him to leave the presidency and flee to Japan. Fujimori's Japanese ancestry did not guarantee the support of the Nikkei community. "...leaders of the Nikkei community opposed his candidacy", and a high percentage of the community did not support him for fear of an unsuccessful government due to his lack of experience in political affairs (Fukumoto, 1997; Masterson and Funada Classen, 2004).

The hostilities experienced during Fujimori's pre-election period reminded many of the 1940 riots, an episode that the community wanted to avoid repeating. Nevertheless, once he was elected the community considered it part of its responsibility to support him (Fukumoto, 1997; Masterson and Funada Classen, 2004). Several issues concerning Fujimori's citizenship arose after his fleeing to Japan. In many popular manifestations against Nikkei institutions and the Japanese embassy, the opinion was voiced that the main problems and failures of his government were due to his "ethnic origin;" the same arguments that once served him to be elected president.

### **The Role of Japanese Government**

During the recovery time and whenever political situation allowed it, representatives from the Japanese government, Japanese companies and private donors have attended official and commemorative events in Peru. The recreation of the Japanese ethnicity in Peru was not only due to the community, but also to the active support of the Japanese government. Castles (2003:39) refers to this re-creation as a "process (that) is not self-contained, (and) depends on the interaction with the state and the various institutions and groups in the country of immigration, as well as with the society of the country of origin." Although most of the re-emergence of the institutions and development of the community are due to the efforts of its members, most of the material improvement and modernization have been possible thanks to the support of the Japanese government.

Within the context of the recognition of the Nikkei communities as "bridge and promoters of mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and their adopted countries" the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad (Kaigai Nikkeijin Kyōkai), and Prefectural governments have been supporting Nikkei communities through several cooperation and exchange programs. Their activities include welfare assistance, human resources development and language programs, an extensive and valuable support, which has led to the development of the Nikkei communities.

Under the title of "A tradition of friendly relations" MOFA (2006) names the Japanese-Peruvians as active contributors to the favorable image of Japan, and points out the results of the 1995 poll where the Nikkei were considered as the most trustworthy people (71%). This has transformed the label, indeed it is now an advantage for the Nikkei to be identified as "Japanese" in Peru. Today "Japaneseness is less of an ethnic stigma to be avoided than a positive asset to be maintained" (Tsuda, 2003:65). This Japanese consciousness is based on the *ethnic attribution*

reinforced by non-members, and the *symbolic ethnicity* preserved by them. The continuous links with the Japanese government, serve to emphasize this “positive minority” (Ibid).

### Demographic and Cultural trends

The current Peruvian Nikkei population is estimated at 80,000 people, the third largest community after Brazil and the USA (JICA and KNK, 2005; MOFA, 2006). The latest census carried out in 1989 showed five generations of Japanese descendants with a high concentration in the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation (48%), while the 1<sup>st</sup> generation accounted for only 5% (Morimoto, 1992). Okinawa with (46%) was the prefecture of origin in Japan with the largest population; lower percentages were presented by Kumamoto (9%), Hiroshima (5%), and Fukuoka (5%). As for the geographical location in Peru, more than 80% of the total Nikkei population is located in Lima, followed by La Libertad (3.58%) a department that is the former location of many sugar plantations. According to the 1989 census, the economic activities of the Nikkei were concentrated in commerce and services (67%), while industry presented only 10% and agriculture 6% (Fukumoto, 1997).

Regarding education, in spite of differences within generations the 1989 census showed that the population has a high-level of education (63%) including secondary, college or graduate studies. The results also showed that engineering, accounting, medicine, education and administration are the most popular professions chosen by the Nikkei.

An interesting trend in the population is the high degree of endogamy. According to Takenaka, (2003) the level of endogamy remains as high as 60% to 65% even in the third-generation. Marriage is still considered a family issue and parents exert high pressures on their children, in most cases a Nikkei husband or wife is preferred and accepted by the family. Provinces and other departments concentrate 26% of intermarriage, while Lima, with 84% of the population only accounts for 8% of such marriages (Morimoto, 1991).

A considerable level of acculturation characterizes the Nikkei population, as shown in the results of the 1989 census, especially in regard to religion, food, and language. However, some Japanese traditions, and festivities are still maintained (Morimoto, 1999). The Issei are basically affiliated to Shinto and Buddhism religions. However most of their children and descendants adopted Catholicism as their main religion. Almost 92% of the community is Catholic, but a high level of syncretism is practiced. 32% of the Nikkei households keep *butsudan* (Buddhist altar), and/or *ihai* (mortuary tablet) while 27% of the households attend Buddhists services.

The so-called *Nikkei food* (Morimoto, 2000:141) is one of the cultural expressions that show the influence of local cultures. Typical Peruvian restaurants owned by Nikkei present a particular mix of ingredients and tastes that attract a number of customers. There are also a number of Japanese restaurants that are very popular among non-Nikkei due to health and diet concerns. The results of the 1989 census showed that 70% of the Nikkei still prepare Japanese food at home; however it is not eaten daily. 40% of the population prepares it once a week while only 2% prepare Japanese food

daily. Some traditional Japanese dishes are reserved for special occasions (weddings, funerals, New Year). Japanese food is still prepared by most of the Nikkei, but only 39% use the traditional *hashi* (chopsticks).

Concerning the use of Japanese language, during the last decades other languages, for example English, have been replacing it. Although the 1989 census indicated that 51% of the households preserve Japanese language, the survey considered as positive response households replies where at least one member of the family speaks, writes and/or reads Japanese. Nowadays, the percentage is lower due to the decrease of Issei, and especially members of younger generations who do not speak Japanese, except for few expressions used at home. In response to the situation organizations such as JICA and the KNK support training programs for teachers and students in order to avoid the complete loss of the Japanese language in younger generations.

### Conclusions

Settlement in Peru was not an easy process for Japanese immigrants. The advertisements of emigration companies clearly differed from reality; Peru was neither the land of gold nor the expected paradise. The real conditions including political, social, cultural, and language barriers had a great impact on the Nikkei community, but these obstacles did not destroy it. Gradually the Nikkei acquired a place in this new society not only in terms of physical and economic existence, but also in a social sense. After the 1940 lootings and WWII the initial idea of returning home with enough savings vanished, but these events influenced the Japanese ethnic minority to re-consider Peru as its new homeland. The Japanese immigrants have changed from a marginalized group of poor laborers to a representative ethnic community that has kept its cultural identity, while simultaneously integrating into their country of adoption in the process.

The postwar recovery of the Nikkei community was due to the intense efforts of its members, and their sense of solidarity within the group, in addition to a favorable political and economic environment in Peru. As a result, communal institutions were reopened and reestablished in their cultural, educational, sports, social, and financing roles. Positive characteristics emerged from the success of the Nikkei at schools and in their work.

The support of the Japanese government, Japanese institutions and private companies allowed the Peruvian Nikkei community to continue its development. This tangible and intangible support, translated into a significant backing increased the sense of “Japaneseness”. The Japanese attributes of being hardworking, educated, and responsible people are factors that explain the Nikkei’s presence in small-middle businesses, its high education, and middle class status. Additionally, ethnic attribution has increased due to Japan’s image as a powerful economy with a high-technology industry.

In spite of the political turmoil of the last decades, Nikkei in Peru are still a positively valued ethnic minority. This attitude is not only that of host society, but is also shared by the group which

it identifies. This self-identification has created barriers in relation with non-members and has led to discrimination toward those who do not satisfy this positive image. In this regard, intermarriage is still evaluated for this reason and some parents attribute negative characteristics to the outsiders.

In the process of integration, most members of younger generations have been losing Japanese customs, language and traditions. In an effort to maintain them, older generations have emphasized the development of their institutions as a way of keeping their “Japaneseness” identity through the “symbolic re-creation of ethnic traditions” in cultural, social events and sports as means to “reenact and reconstruct their distinctive cultural heritage and traditions” (Tsuda, 2003).

The results of the 1989 census showed the high degree of syncretism and acculturation especially in religion, and food. Additionally, foreign languages have been replacing Japanese, and its knowledge is becoming weaker and weaker in younger generations. On the other hand, 40% of Nikkei considered Japan as the ideal country (Takenaka, 2004) due to its “the high technology and economic development” instead of its cultural values and traditions. The positive attributes that come with being identified as Japanese, usually implies more advantages than disadvantages for Nikkei in Peru. Signs of distinction and recognition are maintained and promoted by the community itself, and by the government of both Peru and Japan where the Nikkei are admitted to work.

The gradual assimilation of younger generations shows tendencies that raise several questions concerning the future of the Peruvian Nikkei community. How long the symbolic representation of ethnic traditions be preserved? How effective will these symbols be to maintain the Nikkei cultural identity? Several gaps and intergenerational conflicts have not been overcome yet, while generational cultural identities are emerging.

In contrast to the Nikkei in Peru, particular characteristics are shown in the so-called “returned immigrants” in Japan. The identity of Nikkei children who were born or mostly brought up in Japan is closer to Japanese culture, despite their parents’ pressures to keep their Latin American identity. Legally admitted and recognized as “foreigners”, the young generation in Japan seems to maintain a stronger Japanese identity than its counterpart in Peru. If the economic situation allows them to return one day to Peru according to their parents’ hopes, they could face some language barriers. This is a complex but rich scenario where former and younger generations could together contribute to recreate the Nikkei community in Peru according to the new challenges, needs and expectations of its members.

## Notes

- 1) “Person or persons of Japanese descent, and their descendants, who emigrated from Japan and who created unique communities and lifestyles within the societies in which they now live.” (Hirabayashi et al., 2002: 19)
- 2) First generation or Japanese immigrants.
- 3) Second generation or children of Japanese immigrants.
- 4) Originally referred to domestic migration in Japan. It involved agricultural laborers who moved looking

for jobs, and then returned to their hometowns. In the Meiji Era, *dekasegi* was extended to overseas migration; Japanese migrated to the Americas based on the original idea of temporary jobs. During the 1980s it was applied to the Latin American Nikkei who migrated to Japan.

- 5) Takeaki Enomoto (1836-1908) was politician during the Tokugawa Shogunate, and the Meiji Era. After leaving the government where he was Minister of Commerce, Education and Foreign Affairs and continued to promote emigration.

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