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**BRAZILIAN MIGRATION TO JAPAN
TRENDS, MODALITIES AND IMPACT***

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* The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The labor recruiter survey in São Paulo was conducted between January and March 1998, and involved 66 interviews with owners of recruiting agencies. We visited every building in the Liberdade

2. Phase Two (1985–89): The Shaping of recruiting networks

Though the Brazilian population in Japan remained stable until 1987, the year 1985 marked a qualitative change in Brazilian migration. During this year, the first advertisement offering job opportunities in Japan appeared in a Japanese newspaper in Brazil (Mori, 1992; p.149). This indicated that Japanese firms had ‘discovered’ Brazil as a new labor reserve, and labor recruitment from Brazil was thus institutionalized. In fact, the number of employment advertisements in Japanese newspapers exceeded one hundred in 1987. It then increased rapidly in 1988, reaching more than one thousand in the latter half of 1990 (Figure II).⁴

Networks of recruiting agents soon spread all around the Japanese communities in South America. One indicator is the year recruitment agencies were established.⁵ Those opened before 1984 were not

4. *Phase Four (1993–97): Recession and transformation of the labor market*

Long-term recession since 1993 had a significant effect on Brazilian migration to Japan. Not surprisingly, the increasing numbers of Brazilians suddenly dropped, though it may partly reflect the shortage of the labor reserve in Brazil. However, we should not overlook the fact that the size of the Brazilian population had been steadily increasing throughout this period. This can be explained by two factors: (1) new demand for flexible labor, and (2) geographical dispersion of workplaces.

First, the structure of the labor market was transformed after the collapse of the economic bubble. As mentioned previously, Brazilians had been employed as temporary workers, partly replacing Japanese seasonal migrants from peripheral areas such as Tohoku and Kyushu. But their positions in firms had changed. At the time of the economic boom, they were expected to solve the acute labor shortage. In contrast, they were employed during the period of economic stagnation as a highly flexible labor force that can easily be laid off (Kajita, Tanno and Higuchi, 2005). Figure IV shows that the majority of the 102 firms in Toyota city do not think it difficult to recruit Japanese workers. It is rather surprising that less than half of the respondents regard foreign workers as cheap labor. Instead, they employ foreign workers to respond to fluctuations of production or to replace regular members. In this way, Brazilian workers were assigned a role that Piore (1979) attributed to a secondary labor market.

Second, labor contractors responded to the sudden shrinking of the Brazilian labor market by geographical expansion. While Shizuoka and Aichi prefectures have been keeping a considerable share of the Brazilian population (Figure V), the Kanto region (Kanagawa, Gunma Ibaraki and Saitama) was exceeded by the Chubu region in addition to Shizuoka and Aichi (Nagano, Gifu and Mie). The Brazilian population in Kanto has been basically stagnating since 1991. On the other hand, many labor contractors in Aichi and Shizuoka found an exploitable labor market in semi-peripheral areas in the Chubu region.⁸ That is why the number of Brazilians has been increasing even during the recession.

5. *Phase Five (1998–present): Consequences of generation change*

The number of second-generation Brazilians has been stagnating since 1992, while the numbers of third generation and non-Japanese spouses have been increasing (Figure VI). In 1998, those with a long-term resident visa outnumbered those with spouses and children of Japanese. In the 1980s, most migrants from Brazil were first-generation return migrants with Japanese nationality, while the early 1990s saw a skyrocketing increase in the number of the second generation. The majority at present is represented by the third generation and non-Japanese spouses.⁹ This demographic change caused two problems in relation to education.

First, the proportion of children among Brazilians in Japan is getting higher (Figure VII). Children under fifteen years of age exceeded 10% in 1996 for the first time. The number of children at present exceeds forty thousand. At first, the enrollment of Brazilian students caused “multilingual” problems in

Japanese schools. As Table 7 shows, Brazilians have been the largest group in need of special assistance concerning the learning of the Japanese language, though the proportion is decreasing with prolonged stay in Japan.

But the focus of the issue has gradually shifted to poor educational attainment and the high rate of refusal to attend school. Though estimates vary, 10 to 30 percent of school-aged children are said to be absent from school. In addition, more than half of the children at the age of fifteen do not proceed to high school level because of poor educational attainment, maladjustment, or the policy of parents. This is much lower than the proportion (95–97%) of Japanese students proceeding to high school level.

Though the revised immigration law was the answer to the situation, it did not allow the formal importation of unskilled labor or legalize visa overstayers. Instead, it established roughly three legal categories concerning opportunities to work in Japan (Table 9). First, it acknowledged the status of residence to introduce more skilled workers.

Second, the “trainee” status was partially amended so that firms can hire manual workers for one year. This is a *de facto* importation of unskilled migrants and the technical internship program was established in 1993 (and partially amended in 1997) to extend their stay for three years (Ministry of Justice, 2000).¹⁰

Third, the most important in this context was the establishment of the “long-term resident” status of residence. Those with this status are allowed unlimited scope of activities and are able to renew their visa. Although this status is also applied to (mostly Indochinese) refugees and those granted special permission for residence, most are third-generation descendants of Japanese nationals from South America, China, Indonesia and the Philippines.

2. *Legal status of two ‘descendants of Japanese nationals’*

So far, establishing the long-term resident status of residence has been understood in the context of the acute labor shortage of the late 1980s. For example, Cornelius comments as follows:

Numerically the most important of Japan’s side-door mechanisms for labor importation has been the policy of allowing the descendants of Japanese emigrants to Latin America (is d - isson h.9(r)8.9()10natT

When the 1965 treaty normalized the relation between South Korea and Japan, Koreans were allowed permanent residence in Japan. The bilateral treaty also stipulated that the status of the third generation be renegotiated by 1991.¹¹ In fact, the formal negotiation between the two governments started in 1988 and was based on the Agreement on the Legal Status and the Treatment of Nationals of the Republic of Korea Residing in Japan. In the end, a memorandum was signed by the Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea in 1991, which resulted in the promulgation of the Special Law on the Immigration Control of Those Who Have Lost Japanese Nationality and Others on the Basis of the Treaty of Peace with Japan to establish the “special permanent resident” status for resident Koreans and their descendants.

But this is not the whole story. On the one hand, third-generation Koreans can be seen as “sociological Japanese” born and socialized in Japan (Kajita, 1998). The Ministry of Justice took it for

solely in recruiting workers. Brokers are not registered as travel agencies; they help provide employment opportunities in Japan and buy air tickets from other agencies.

This market-mediated migration system has proliferated all around the Japanese community in Brazil. In fact, Table 11 shows that two-thirds of the respondents experienced the first trip to Japan using loans from recruiting agencies. This means that the majority of Japanese Brazilians depended on labor recruiters for places to stay and work after emigrating, instead of family members or kinsmen.

At the same time, Table 11 also suggests those with higher education were less dependent on recruiting agencies, while family migrants tended to rely on the agencies. The more educated may be able to afford the initial cost of migration. In addition, they can look for jobs and housing by themselves through their greater financial resources. Meanwhile, 77% of family migrants used recruiting agencies, while half of the family reunification cases migrated with the help of the agencies. Family migrants seem to avoid the risk of uncertainty and prefer to secure jobs and housing before departure.

But the system of labor brokering does not favor Brazilian workers. Though recruiting agencies finance all of the travel expenses to Japan, these expenses are later deducted from the salaries of Brazilian workers. The total expense depends on how many mediators detailed in Figure VIII are involved in the brokering process.

If a Japanese-Brazilian potential migrant makes contact with a promoter, then he or she will be taken to a broker or travel agency. If the potential migrant does not find a job at the first agency, they may be introduced to another agency to be offered a job.¹² The candidate has to pay commission for each mediator if he or she eventually finds a job in Japan. This is represented as Case 1.

Cases shown below detail variations of travel expenses and mediators involved in the process. Though commission for each mediator depends on the demand and supply of labor, there are three discernible trends: (1) commission for promoters is increasing because it is getting more difficult to employ workers, (2) commission for promoters are higher in São Paulo than in Paraná, because the labor shortage is more serious in the former region, and (3) young women are the most highly valued as shown in Case 3, since Japanese firms are keen to employ young women as a tougher and cheaper labor force.

Case 1: Migrant	à Promoter 1	à Promoter 2	à Broker	à Travel agency	
	\$500	\$200	\$600	\$1500 (airfare + visa)	Total \$2800
Case 2: Migrant	à Recruiting agency				
	\$2300 (airfare \$1400, visa \$100, commission \$800)				Total \$2100
Case 3: Young female	à Promoter	à Broker	à Travel agency in SP		Total \$3750
migrant	\$1000	\$600	\$2150 (airfare \$1400, visa \$150, commission \$800)		

Figure IX illustrates the distribution of travel expenses in Paraná. Standard minimum prices range between \$2000 and \$2800 U.S. dollars. In terms of the maximum price, it is clear that \$2500 is the standard price.

2. *Just-in-time delivery of Brazilian workers*

Though migrants from Brazil were at first substitutes for seasonal workers from rural Japan, they were incorporated into increasingly different segments of the secondary labor market. Most seasonal workers used to be directly employed by manufacturers, with contracts of three to six months. Such short-term contracts were compatible with fluctuations of production, enabling manufacturers to coordinate a workforce on short notice by using labor contractors. This tendency was strengthened throughout the 1990s, steadily expanding the labor contractor sector (Tanno, 1999).

According to Table 12, most foreign workers are seen in large- or medium-sized firms: 994 (67.9%) of the 1,464 total foreigners are working in a firm with a regular staff of 100 or more. In addition, smaller firms depend more on direct employment. Of the 470 foreigners working in smaller firms, 250 (53.2%) are employed directly by the firm. In contrast, larger companies prefer indirect employment: 797 (80.2%) of the foreign workers in larger companies are hired through labor contractors. Furthermore, 78.4% of workers employed indirectly are concentrated in firms with a regular staff of 100 or more, while 55.9% of those employed directly are concentrated in firms with a regular staff of 100 or more.

ENDNOTES

¹ Brazilian migration to Japan has attracted the attention of several American anthropologists, resulting in the publication of several books (Linger, 2001; Roth, 2002; Tsuda, 2003).

² Part of this paper is a revised version of Higuchi (2003) and Higuchi and Tanno (2003).

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⁴ There were three Japanese newspapers in Brazil, namely Paulista Shimbun, São Paulo Shimbun and Nippaku Mainichi. Now most advertisements are found in Notícias Japão, a weekly newspaper written in Portuguese, as well as in local newspapers.

⁵ Since this data includes agencies in existence in 1998 and 1999, they do not reflect the precise number of established agencies.

⁶ “Spouses of Japanese” are second-generation Brazilians and “long-term residents” are third-generation Brazilians or spouses of second-generation Brazilians.

⁷ In fact, the pioneers of recruitment agencies worked in Japan through labor contractors.

⁸ For example, twenty-four of the thirty labor contractors in Minowa town, Nagano prefecture, are not based on Nagano, but expanded from Aichi and Shizuoka, in which the largest population of Brazilians exists.

⁹ Figure VI also shows that the number with a permanent resident visa increased since the year 2000. This reflects the policy change of the Ministry of Justice, which tried to minimize the clerical tasks associated with visa extension by issuing permanent resident status.

¹⁰ Officially, the trainee and technical intern program is claimed for the purpose of transfer of technology from Japan to developing countries.

¹¹ The article II of the Agreement Between Japan And The Republic Of Korea Concerning The Legal Status And Treatment Of The People Of The Republic Of Korea Residing In Japan, signed on June 22, 1965, declares, “the Government of Japan agrees to enter into consultations, if requested by the Government of the Republic of Korea, within 25 years of the date on which the present Agreement enters into force, with a view to the residence in Japan of

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Ministry of Justice (2000). *The Basic Plan for Immigration Control*, 2nd ed. Tokyo: Ministry of Justice.

Table 5 Occupation and industry of Brazilian workers

Industry	Population		Occupation	Population	
	No	%		No	%
Agriculture	475	0.4	Professional/technical	2,016	1.6
Forestry	31	0.0	Managerial	147	0.1
Fishery	12	0.0	Clerical	1,735	1.3
Mining	45	0.0	Sales	1,438	1.1
Construction	3,695	2.9	Service	3,303	2.6
Manufacturing	104,394	80.9	Protective service	149	0.1
Utility	7	0.0	Agricultural, forestry and fisheries	470	0.4
Transportation and communication	2,019	1.6	transport and communications	1,011	0.8
Sales	4,208	3.3	Production process laborers	115,305	89.3
Finance and Insurance	123	0.1	Others	3,519	2.7
Real estates	27	0.0			
Service	10,543	8.2			
Public	100	0.1			
Others	3,414	2.6			
Total	129,093	100.0	Total	129,093	100.0

Source: Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, 2004

Table 6 Reasons to employ foreign workers around 1990

	Inagami et al. (N=172)		Tezuka et al. (N=152)		Tokyo Institute of Labor (N=223)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Labor shortage	132	76.7	96	63.2	139	62.3
Cheap labor	13	7.6	15	9.9	16	7.2

Table 9 Status of residence under the revised immigration law

Status of residence	Note
College Student	
Pre-college Student	New category
Tr	

Table 10 Three Types of Agencies

	Brokers	Recruiting agencies	“Pure” travel agencies
Numbers in our survey	21	68	12
Inward business		X	X
Qualification (EMBRATUR/IATA)		X	X
Issuing tickets		X	X
Loans to trip	X	X	
Labor brokering	X	X	

Source: Recruiter data

Table 11 Sources of travel expenses to Japan

	Loans from recruiting agencies		Personal Savings		Loans from Family		Others		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Lower secondary	414	69.0								

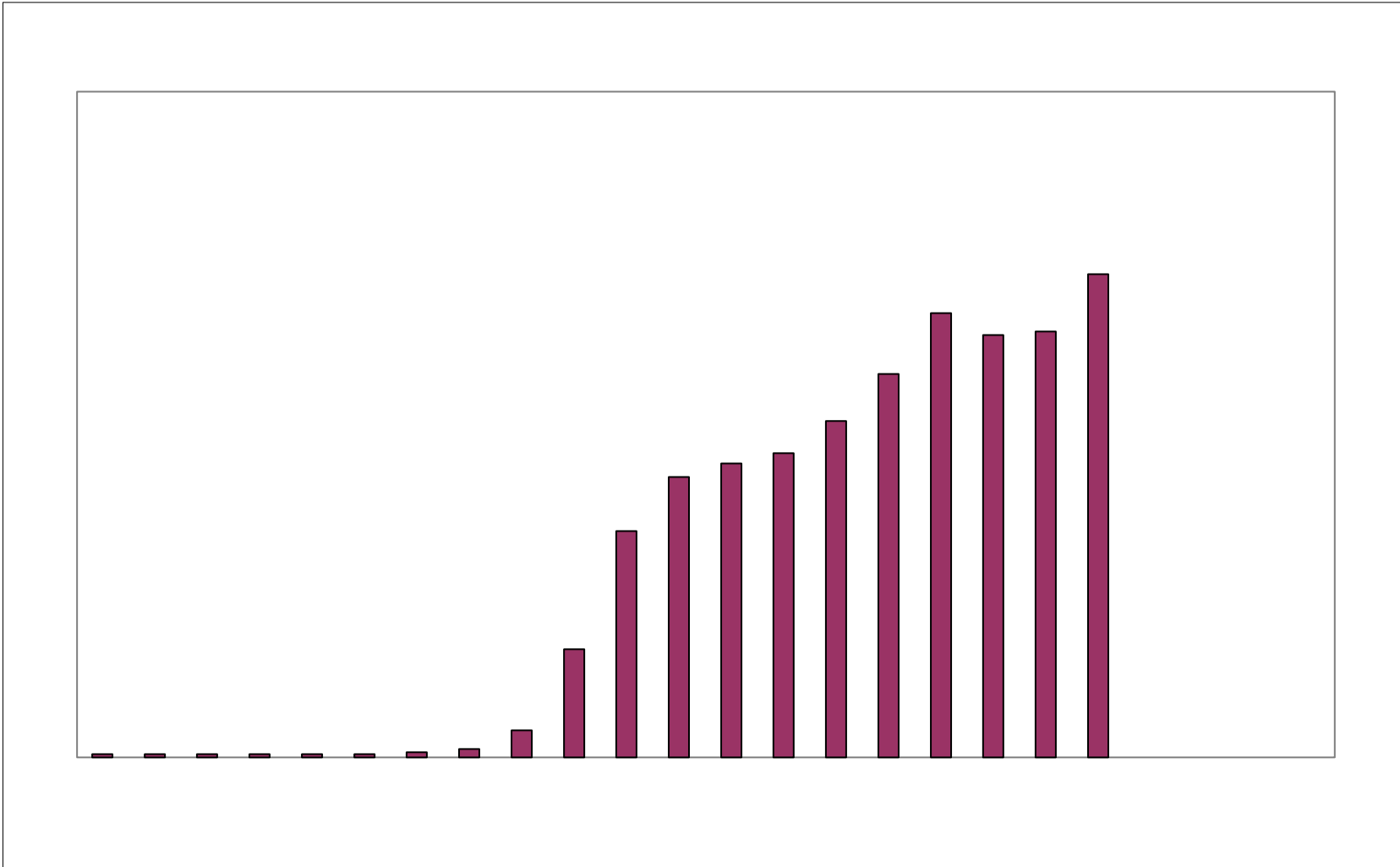
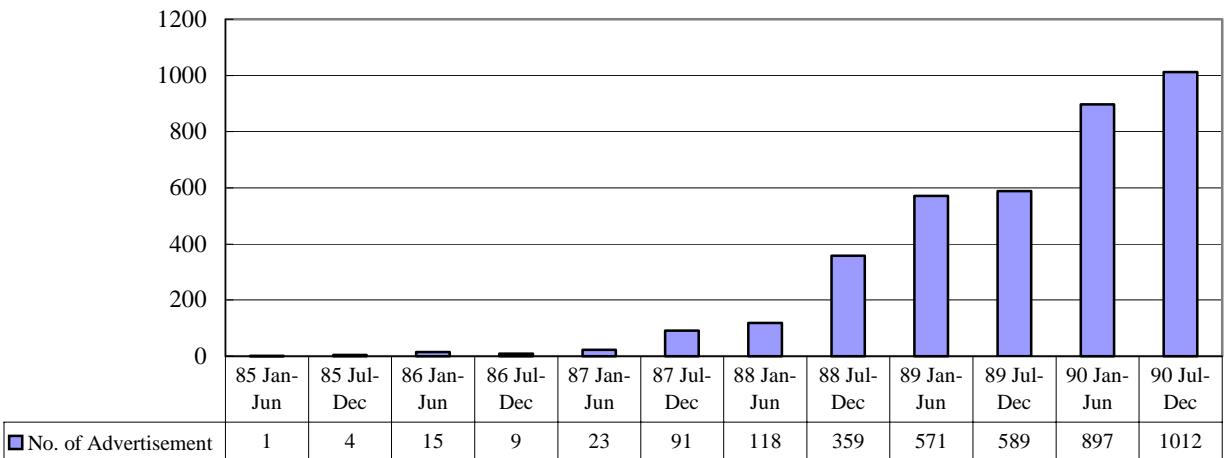


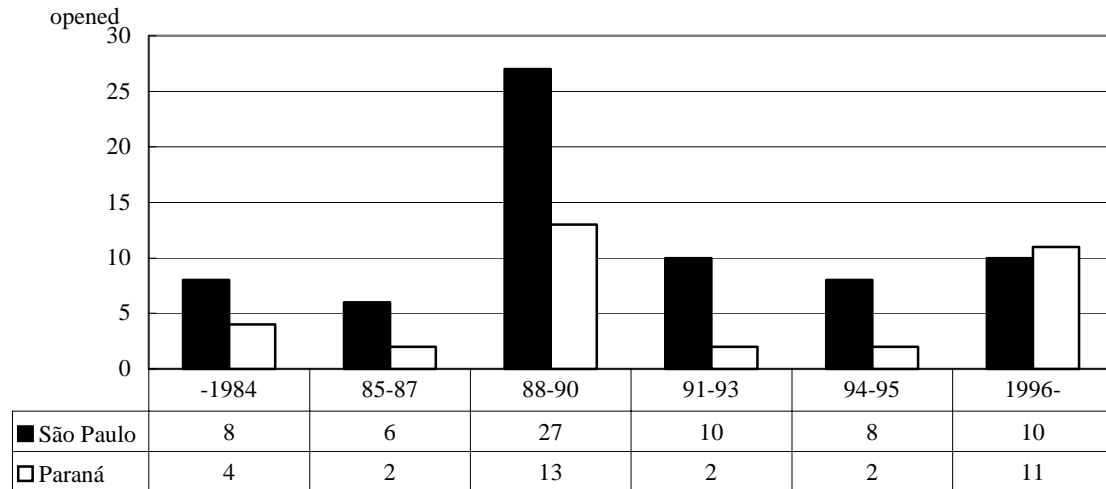
Figure II The Number of Advertisement on Japanese Newspapers in Brazil



Source: Mori (1992, 155)

Note: The number counts advertisement on *São Paulo Shimbun* and *Paulista Shimbun*

Figure III Established Year of Recruiting Agencies



Source: Recruiter data

Figure IV Reasons to Employ Foreign Workers

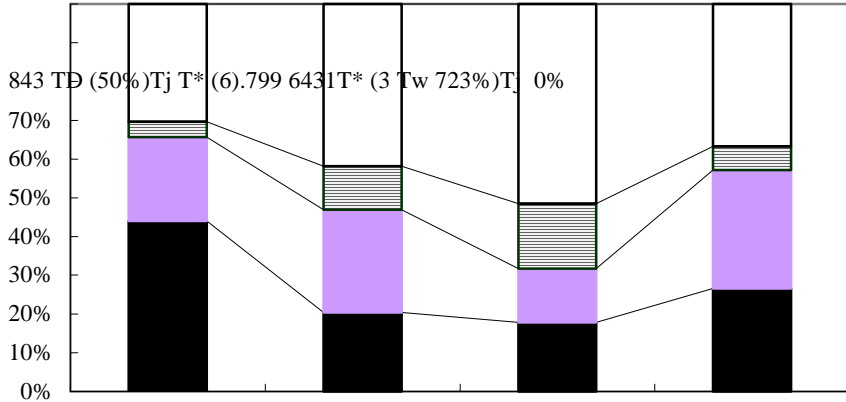
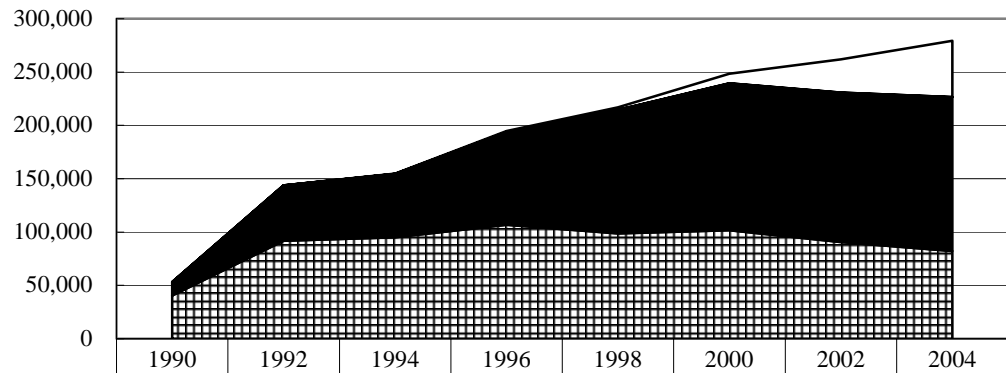


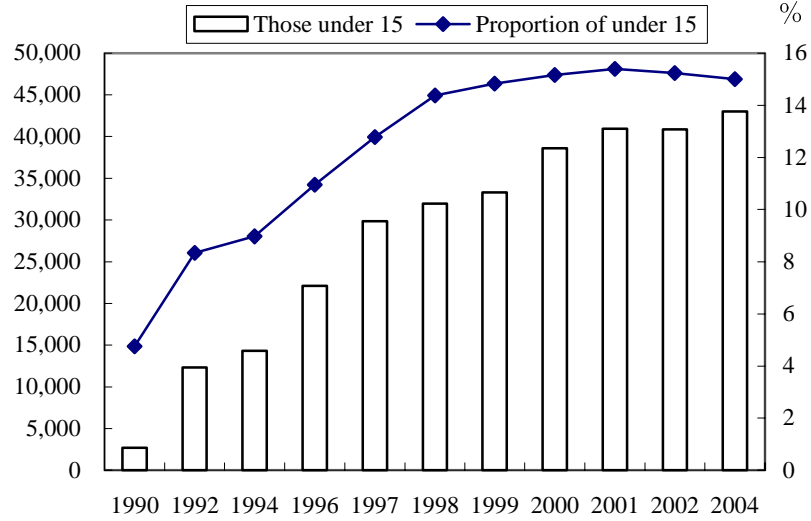
Figure VI Brazilian population by visa category



	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
□ Permanent resident	164	220	373	931	2644	9062	31203	52581
■ Long-term resident	12637	51759	59280	87164	115536	137649	139826	144407
▨ Spouses and children of Japanese	40384	91816	95139	106665	98823	101623	90732	82173

Source: Japan Immigration Association (1991-2005)

Figure VII The Number and Rate of Children under 15



Source: Japan Immigration Association (1991-2003)

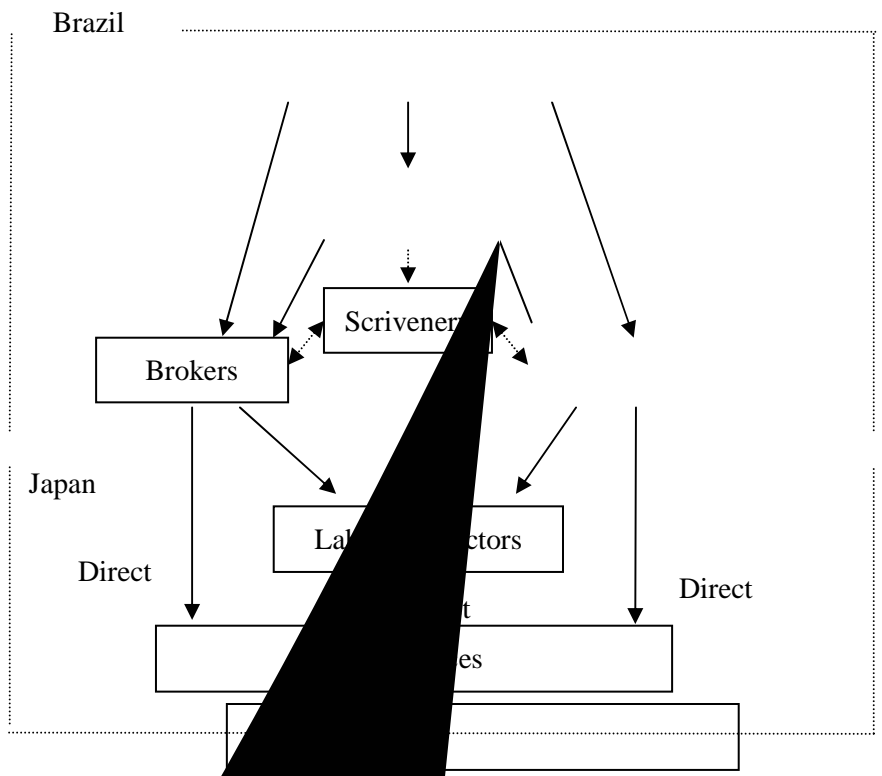
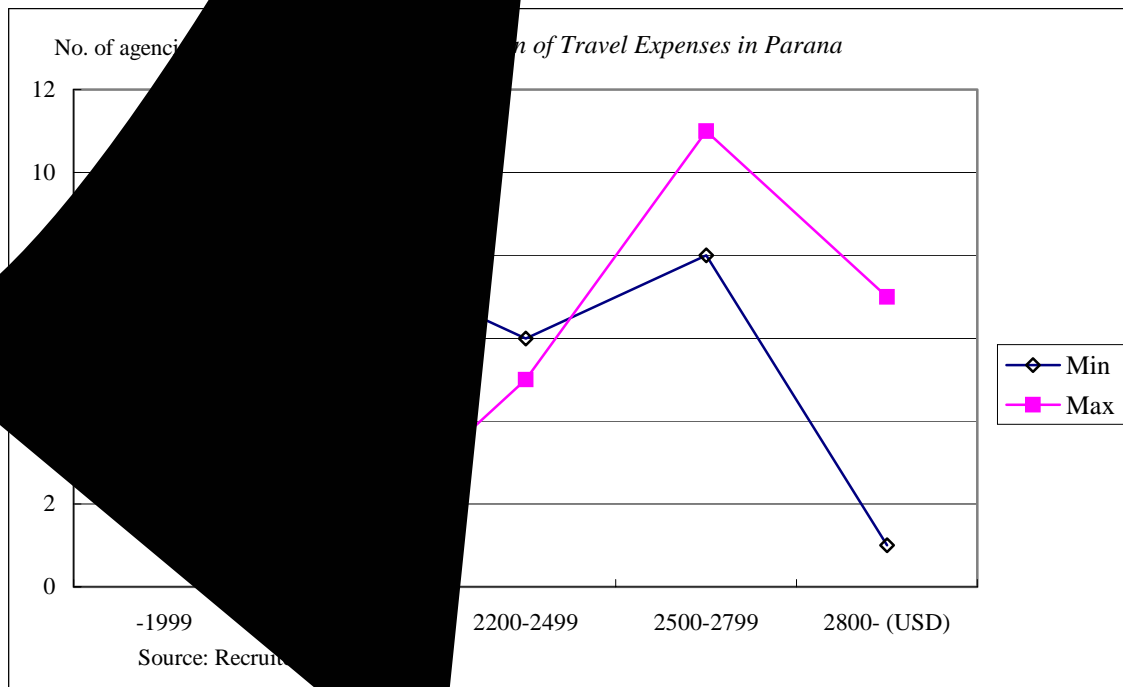


Figure 1. Differences in labor brokering

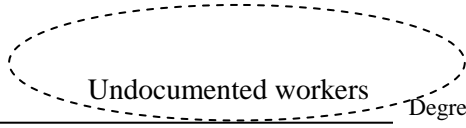


Number of employees

Boundary of primary and secondary labor market



Brazilians since the late '90s



Degree of instability