

IDB Migration Seminar

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I. I will discuss the foundational historical process and the current situation regarding the roles that Japanese immigrants, including those originating from Okinawa, played in Latin American society as well as the issues concerning the impact that both sides have made on each other.

(1) Asian immigrants, including those from Japan, arrived later and in a smaller number compared to European immigrants. Nevertheless, being in the new world in Latin America, the Asian immigrants took part in the society and deepened their bonds with the local people and the society in which they lived.

(2) Modern immigrants evolved from contract immigrants, which had replaced slavery since the 1820s, into free immigrants. During the time period between pre-World War II and post-war 1950s, China, India, and Japan were the three largest immigrant-sending countries in Asia.

(3) The Japanese immigrants and their descendents—in other words, first, second, and third generation Japanese descendents—living in the receiving countries in Latin America have created strong ties with both their home country in Asia and their destination in Latin America. They have also contributed to the development of both regions. These facts are apparent in the areas such as politics, economics, society, culture, medicine, and education.

(4) There are already organizations working internationally in which immigrants and their descendents participate. These include the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and, in Okinawa, WUB organizations and prefectural associations of the residing countries.

(5) Of the international exchange programs in Okinawa prefecture, as sister-states/city affiliation, Okinawa prefecture is in a sister-state relation with the state of *Matto Grosso do Sul* in Brazil and *Santa Cruz* in Bolivia and the city of Naha is in a sister-city exchange with the city of *San Vicente*, Brazil. In addition, Okinawa prefecture has hosted "Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival" (*Sekai no Uchinanchu Taikai*) for three times since 1990, establishing a network of 340,000 Okinawa descendents living all around the world.

(6) Examples of the contributions made by the Okinawan descendents residing abroad to their home country/town include remittances during the pre-World War II period and sending off relief materials such as pigs and goats, clothes, and food for their

home town after the end of the war.

(7) Today, more than 300,000 Japanese descendents from Latin American countries such as Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay are coming to Japan as migrant workers hoping for higher pay. A significant number of these people are of Okinawan descent, mostly living in the central Honshu region, particularly in the prefectures of Aichi, Shizuoka, Gunma, Kanagawa, and Mie. Moreover, the number of those Okinawan descendents staying permanently in Japan has been on the rise.

II. I would like to address the following issues as a panelist.

(1) The twentieth century was called "the century of immigrants". In the twenty-first century, in which the globalization of people, goods, and money has been in the midst of progressing, will the issues with respect to immigrants and their descendents be even more profound?

(2) Even though Asia and Latin America are geographically distant, immigrants and their descendents feel spiritually connected to both of the regions. Could the relationship between the two regions be stronger?

(3) The majority of the approximately 2.7 million Japanese immigrants and their descendents residing abroad live in Latin America, including Brazil. By perceiving these people as human assets, would it not be possible to encourage them to boost the exchanges between Japan and Latin America in the areas of politics, economics, society, culture, medicine, and education and thereby mutually contribute to each other for their betterment? Could these people not act as private diplomats?