

The Japanese Presence in São Paulo in the District of Liberdade and in the Rural Fields of the District of Itaquera

Maria Cristina da Silva LEME

University of São Paulo

* Translated to English by Patrícia Gimenez Camargo and Marcelo C. Santana

Since the end of the XIX century, the presence of foreigners has been crucial for the process of economic, social and cultural transformation of the city of São Paulo¹. In many different situations, various migrant groups have established and fixed themselves in the city printing new habits and ways of sociability. Since then, the presence of the foreigners has been perceptible in the urban space and in the architecture of the buildings. For many times, it is in the interstices of this presence that the transformation of the city can be noticed.

The palimpsest, a recurrent image useful to describe cities that quickly transform themselves supplanting the old for the new, is frequently used when it comes to the case of the city of São Paulo. We intend to carefully analyze the spatial transformations that occurred in the city from the initial moment of the subdivisions and divisions into urban lots, until the impact of the construction of large avenues.

We propose to reflect upon the social practices of occupation of the District of Liberdade and in the rural fields of Itaquera after the Japanese migration in São Paulo city. São Paulo is commonly regarded as a city that has spread over all the surrounding physical limits; however this has happened as a unity that articulated the urban and the rural, as much as the inner city and the outskirts. The objective of this reflection is to understand the complex relation between the urbanism and the urbanization processes of the city of São Paulo, with a focus on the foreign presence of the Japanese community in the city.

1. The arrival

In 1893, the population census of São Paulo city undertaken by the newly established São Paulo State

Department of Statistics and Records showed two interesting facts: the population practically doubled, in relation to the census conducted in 1890, raising from 64.934 inhabitants to 130.775. This extraordinary population's growth was due to the impact of immigration, a real novelty in the period. São Paulo's population then counted 59.307 Brazilians and 71.468 foreigners. The Italian community was the most numerous, followed by the Portuguese, the Spaniards and the Germans.

Since the XIX century there have been reports of the presence of Japanese in São Paulo, as occasional visitors, passing through the city. But it is a new economic situation in the beginning of the XX century when there are records of immigrants contracted to work on agricultural activities. The acceptance of the Japanese immigrants by the Brazilian Government, in 1902, is attributed to the decline in the number of Italians arriving due to the decision of the Italian Government to restrict the subsidized migration to Brazil.

Originally destined to work in coffee plantations, a significant portion of this population later migrated to the cities, especially to São Paulo City. The reasons that explain the rural exodus toward São Paulo are varied: from the overproduction of coffee in 1898, which knocked down the coffee price and the salaries, to the working conditions and the difficulty for the Japanese community to acquire rural land.

The number of migrants coming from the countryside to the city was significant. *“Between 1904 and 1918, when the industrialization process in São Paulo accelerated, the amount of immigrants that arrived in the port with subsidized tickets counted around 265.000 from a total number of 695.000. It is known that in a comparison between the non-subsidized and the subsidized immigrants, the first ones tended to work in different activities other than*

1 This reflection has as reference São Paulo Thematic Project: the Foreigner and the construction of the city. (Projeto Temático São Paulo: o estrangeiro e a construção da cidade.) Financial Support: FAPESP.

coffee cultivation. The total difference in the numbers of non-subsidized and the subsidized immigrants, ranging about 430.000, serves as an indication of the number of people that looked for jobs in the urban industrial activities².

The ship Kasato Maru, which brought the first group of immigrants from Japan, arrived in the Port of Santos on 18 June 1908. The list of passengers aboard, a document issued by the Consulate of the United States of Brazil in Yokohama, has been recently incorporated to the Public Archives of the State of Sao Paulo. The list of passengers described the place of origin of the immigrants, the names and contained information about gender, age, occupation and the surnames of the household heads. They were youngsters from 20 to 35 years old and the great majority of men and women, declared themselves to be farmers. There was also a letter from the Consul where he alerted that “it should not be demanded from them more than 2/3 of the work produced by the white emigrant. Naturally, salaries should be paid in the same proportion.”(Silva 1908)

The arrival of the Japanese migrants was received with strangeness and hesitancy. They were the first non-European emigrant to arrive in São Paulo. The workers’ movement newspapers warned against the danger to be avoided, and published criticisms about the habits, the language of this non-integrated migrants.

“The Newspaper, concerning the immigration problem and referring to the Japanese Government decision to intensify the flow of migrants to Brazil, positions itself against the immigration and presents many considerations affirming that the living example of The United States of America shows us the danger of the Japanese immigration, adding that it is inadequate for Brazil, as much as it is for any country of the European civilization.

The Newspaper also states that the Japanese immigration is a danger that must be timely avoided, arguing that the settlement problem in Brazil can still be solved with a solution that comes from Europe and its Mediterranean people, and the admirable settlers from its northern and central countries

with their arms that Brazil needs for the efficient use of our wealth and for our economic growth³.”

2. Isolation- the first housings

The first records of the housings for the Japanese families were found In the District of Liberdade, a neighborhood located in the south of the Sé district, in an area previously occupied by the estate owned by Mrs Ana Maria Almeida Lorena Machado, where the Conde de Sarzedas street, Tabatinguera street and Conde de Pinhal street were built. The district was built in the highest area located between two rivers the Anhangabaú and the Tamanduatei River.

The geography of the city defines different types of occupation of the urban space and exposes situations of social vulnerability created inside the contextual frame of the urban precariousness. The precariousness manifests itself in many different ways: in the occupation of boggy areas without drainage, including the flood prone areas of rivers and brooks, such as those surrounding the areas next to the Tamanduatei River.

The relationship between the urban precariousness and the social vulnerability is showed in the first report presented to the City Council of São Paulo in 1893 by the intendant Cezário Ramalho da Silva who worked for the Comissão de Exame, Inspeção das habitações operárias e cortiços de Santa Ephigenia (Commission for the Exam and Inspection of worker’s houses and slums of Santa Ifigênia Neighborhood)⁴, who surveyed the worker’s’ housings and slum tenements located in the Santa Ephigenia region.

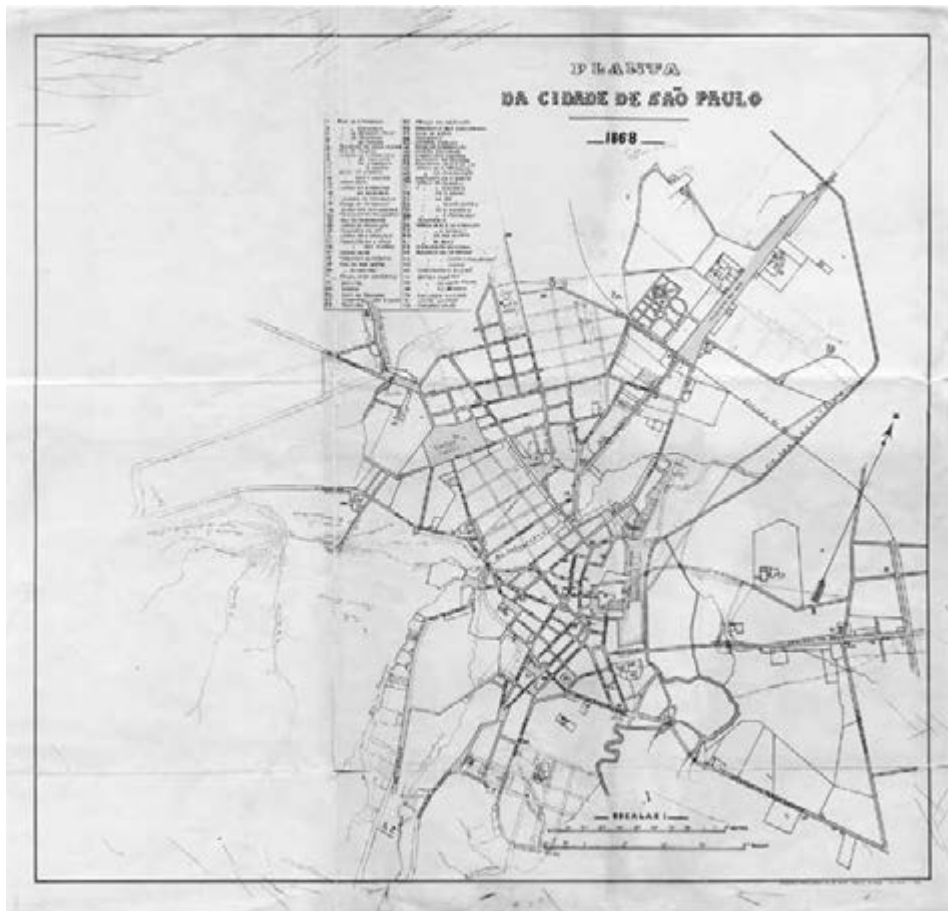
Observe that this relationship had already been appointed by the Commission in the description of the area affected by the epidemic in 1893:

“the last epidemic, that has been overcome by last June only , emphasizes that the epidemic emerged, prospered and developed where the environmental, topographical and populational conditions were

2 Kowarick, Lucio “Trabalho e vadiagem: as origens do trabalho livre no Brasil” São Paulo, Ed Paz e Terra, 1994, p.92.

3 The Combat of the 24th of September, 1920.

4 Comissão de Exame, Inspeção das habitações operárias e cortiços de Santa Ephigenia



1868 São Paulo Plan

Source: Plans collection published by the Comissão do IV Centenário de São Paulo (IV São Paulo Centenary Commission) in 1954.

especially favorable. The area affected by the Yellow Fever epidemic comprehended an old palustrine bay, which nowadays disappeared under the landfill and the buildings. (...) In this area the steep declivity of the land towards the interior of the blocks is noticeable. Each of these blocks is a bay surrounded by the streets' landfills, where usually the paving is elevated higher than the backyards of the houses built in these blocks". (Comissão de Exame, Inspeção das habitações operárias e cortiços de Santa Ephigenia, 1893)

In 1912, there are records of many families living in the basements of houses located alongside the Conde de Sarzedas street, one of the oldest streets in the district. The tracing of this old street inside Lady Ana's lands, occupied the Tabatinguera lowland, limited with the dirty alley that nowadays conform the area of the Glória alleyway, in conjunction with the Tamanduateí River, and the lands owned by the Santa

Casa da Misericórdia (Holly House) where the Asilo de Mendicidade (Poor House)⁵ building was located.

The Conde de Sarzedas street was a craggy slope running down towards Tamanduateí River, where in the lower area existed a creek and a mangrove. One of the reasons why the first Japanese families chose this street to live was that in almost all of the houses there, basements were built where the conditions were better - the rentals of underground bedrooms were cheaper and groups of people were allowed to live in these bedrooms.

Originally the construction of basements in the new buildings was an exigence of the City of São Paulo's Building Code. The Act 849 of 1916 obliged the construction of basements in new buildings as a

5 Guimarães, Laís de Barros Monteiro "Liberdade" Serie Historia dos Bairros de São Paulo DPH Divisão de Arquivo Histórico, 1979, p76.

sanitary measure to avoid ground humidity.

The housing conditions in the basements of these constructions were very precarious. They were tiny cells lacking any type of openings for illumination and ventilation. But even if it is prohibited the use of these basements as housing they were and they still are, in most of time, the available condition of residence for the new groups of migrants that arrives to São Paulo city.

For the Japanese immigrants that region was advantageous as a central and commercial area, with better opportunities in terms of business and jobs. During that early period it started to appear commercial activities such as lodgings and stores established to attend the needs of the arriving Japanese community.

3. The transformation of the District of Liberdade: insertion and permanence of the Japanese community

In 1932, when the population of São Paulo reached almost one million of inhabitants, the Japanese community living in the São Paulo State was according to the Japanese Consulate, 132.689 inhabitants, and two thousand lived in the city. Signs of the permanence of this community were present in the District of Liberdade, with stores specialized in the commerce of Japanese cuisine and clothing. The first school created to attend the Japanese community was inaugurated in the Conde de Sarzedas Street. Signs of prosperity were evident with the expansion of the financial sector taking on some of the financial activities that were held before by the Colonization companies coming from Japan⁶. In 1932, there are records of bank agencies that financed agricultural activities.

⁶ As examples, the Tozan Bank House (later, in 1954, known as Tozan Bank), through the Tozan House, that acted in Brazil since 1927 with activities linked to the agriculture sector. It served as a financial source for agricultural activities and was the pioneer in accepting deposit accounts from the Japanese community. The Bratac Bank House later appeared in 1937, as one of the branches of the innumerable activities of the Sociedade Colonizadora do Brasil Ltda. (Brazil Colonizing Society Ltd) also known as Bratac). In 1940, it was succeeded by the South America Bank. Also, the Yokohama Specie Bank (succeeded by Tóquio Bank) installed in Rio de Janeiro since 1919, as an establishment specialized in currency exchange. From the mid-1930s, it started to function as a refinancing institution to the bank houses previously described.

“In the 23th of July 1953, Yoshikazu Tanaka inaugurated in Galvão Bueno Street a 5 storey building, with an event hall, a restaurant, a hotel and a great projection hall to shelter 1.500 spectators, named Cine Niterói. Different movies produced in Japan were weekly exhibited to entertain the Japanese community in São Paulo. Galvão Bueno Street became the center of the Japanese neighborhood, expanding around the Cine Niterói”⁷.

In 1930, was published the first propositions for a Plan of Avenues for São Paulo city. It was elaborated by Francisco Prestes Maia (1896-1965) and was the document serving as reference for the actions of two São Paulo Mayors: Fabio Prado (1887-1963) and Prestes Maia himself, during the period between 1934 and 1945.

The road system proposed in the plan was composed of three peripheral avenues articulated by a system of radial avenues. The radial-peripheral system allowed the limited extension of the city and ensured, at the same time, a more efficient spatial integration of the different districts. The predominance of the use of vehicles and buses in detriment of other means of transportation is evident in the Plan. The period of the mandate of the two Mayors Fabio Prado (1934 -1938) and Francisco Prestes Maia (1938 - 1945), between 1934 and 1945, was the period when the infrastructure construction works drastically changed the urban structure of the city.

The list of projected, initiated and realized interventions is extremely extensive. However, more than the quantity, the importance of this period is due to the transformation of the city of São Paulo. From a fragmented city where the connection among districts themselves and the city center was done by narrow streets circumventing valleys, it became an integrated city with a set of wide avenues articulated by bridges and viaducts. In this process the capacity and the speed of the communication among different districts and the center of the city became the necessary condition to the development of industry and commerce, allowing the leap of the economic development that occurred in the following decade.

In the Liberdade District, took place the construction

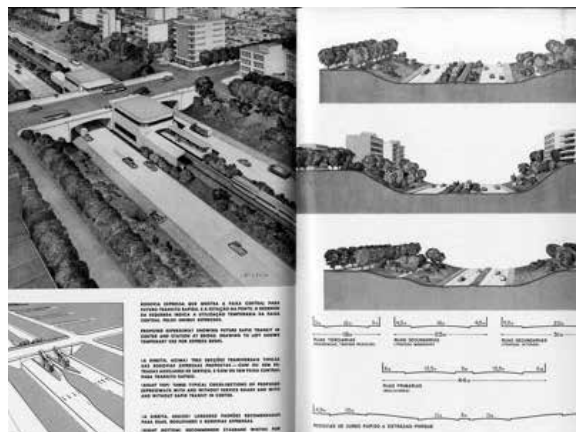
⁷ www.culturajaponesa.com.br

of avenues and the enlargement and renovation of streets. To conduct these interventions, expropriations happened throwing down old one-story and two-story houses that were substituted by high rise buildings.

Conducted by Helou⁸, the systematic compilation of the laws that supported the opening, leveling and rectification of roads reveals important interventions proposed in the Plan, such as in the case of the avenues Liberdade, Vergueiro, Brigadeiro Luis Antonio and Conselheiro Furtado. Others interventions that were not proposed in the Plan by Prestes Maia, but that were important for the opening of new articulations and for the development of the neighborhood were the Prefeito Passos Avenue, the Teixeira Mendes Street and the Paraíso Street.

By the end of the 1960s, new and important changes occurred in São Paulo city. A new pattern of express - ways were proposed, breaking through the urban configuration, cutting across blocks and dislocating well established activities. The new road system combined the use of viaducts that connected the express- ways built under a lower ground level from the existing road system. This would permit from then on the rapid displacement in-between the opposite edges of the city by overcoming long distances. In the Anhangabaú Valley, as part of 1930's Plan of Avenues it was already included the construction of the Itoiroró Avenue, that was later named as Avenue Vinte e Três de Maio. This avenue and the avenue Nove de Julho and the Tiradentes Avenue, the Vinte e Três de Maio Avenue formed a Y system that articulated the city from North to South West. Although this avenue was proposed in the first Plan of avenues of 1930, its final construction was concluded in the end of the 1960s.

The Radial Leste road, that cuts across the Liberdade neighborhood, is part of this new system. During the 1970s, the Liberdade subway station in the first São Paulo's subway line which was another factor of transformation of the accessibility to the neighborhood in a period when it lost the role as the main housing location for the Japanese community. Many of them maintained their commercial



Plan for the Express Avenues
Source: IBEC (1950)

establishment in the neighbourhood but did not live in the region anymore, instead the neighborhood began to be also occupied by Chinese and Koreans.

In 1965, the Associação de Confraternização dos Lojistas do Bairro da Liberdade, (the Brotherhood Association of Store Owners of the Liberdade Neighborhood) was founded, and later was substituted by the Associação Cultural e Assistencial da Liberdade – ACAL. (Cultural and Assistance Association of Liberdade – ACAL). This association, besides representing the interests of the neighborhood before the municipality, had also an important role in the definition of the neighborhood identity. Liberdade became a place for cultural manifestations, thanks to the initiative of the Liberdade Association that congregated the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese communities based or established in that neighborhood.

4. Itaquera Colony – between the rural and the urban occupation

Among the eastern suburban occupation of rural and urban characteristics that were surveyed by the geographer Aroldo de Azevedo in 1945, the Penha District, was the one he studied in detail. For the geographer that district had intriguing features, and he questioned himself if that was a district or a suburb of the Pauliceia (old denomination of the São Paulo City).

⁸ Helou, Tânia Nascimento. A abertura de avenidas e o impacto nos bairros centrais. Research Report FAUUSP 2010.



The satellite cities in the surroundings of the Itaquera fields
Source: Azevedo (1945, p.111)

According to his surveys, a state of isolation was one of the features of that suburban area. The Penha District was distant by ten kilometers from the center of the city, and it used to be the passageway to the state of Minas Gerais. Later, it also became a connecting area to Rio de Janeiro. In the center of that district the Igreja Nossa Senhora da Penha (Our Lady Penha Church) attracted pilgrims all year-round. It became a zone of transition between the dense urban zone of São Paulo city and the rural suburban zone of the Itaquera district. It also became, an alternative place of residence for those working in commerce and industries located in the central districts of São Paulo city.

The studies of Bassanezi and Truzzi⁹ combining the census data to the statistical data from the Serviço de Migração e Colonização da Secretaria de Agricultura de São Paulo (Service of Immigration and Colonization of the Agriculture Secretary of São Paulo) demonstrated how the agricultural work shaped not only the size and the value of the rural properties, but also the geographical mobility and the changes on the demographic profile of the families.

In Itaquera, the old Fazenda Caaguaçu was divided into lots by the Companhia Comercial, Pastoril e Agrícola (Commercial, Pastoral and Agricultural Company) The lands with rural characteristics were occupied by different nationalities, with a predominance of the Japanese community. “First, they were

brought in there by the Brazilian Government but, later since 1922, they came spontaneously and constituted a group of 800 to 1000 people. They lived generally in modest houses, made of bricks or wooden beams, and they raised several and different agricultural cultures.”¹⁰ Their production was sent to the municipal markets and to street markets of the city through agricultural cooperatives. The Itaquera Colony was considered the most important agricultural center of that region.

The linkage between the central area and the East zone districts depended upon a more complex array of infrastructural works than the other districts of the City of São Paulo. It was necessary to implement sanitation works in the valley of the Tamanduatei river, that every year caused floods in the immediate nearby districts, it also required the implementation of transposing structure in the area. The infrastructure works that were proposed in the Plan of Avenues, were accomplished, including the conclusion of the piping system from the Tamanduatei river until the estuary of the Tiete river. It was also necessary to undertake the construction of new bridges: Pequena Bridge, Mercurio bridge and Industrias bridge, to connect the neighborhoods in the East and North zones to the Center of the city.

Small residential hamlets, that were formed nearby the stations placed alongside the railway of Central do Brasil, expanded in connection to the new avenues that reached as far as the eastern suburban areas surveyed by Aroldo de Azevedo.

5. Migrant Neighborhoods – The cycle is renewed

In the city of São Paulo, a constant flow of migrants succeeds one after the other in occupying successively the same neighborhoods. Even if the nationalities of this migrant communities changes, the economic activity that is developed there is maintained. This happened not only with Liberdade but also with others neighborhoods as is the of Bom

⁹ Maria Silvia C. Beozzo Bassanezi e Oswaldo Mário Serra Truzzi, *Plantadores do futuro: os japoneses em São Paulo na primeira metade do século XX*

¹⁰ Azevedo, Aroldo Edgard “Subúrbios orientais de São Paulo” tese de concurso a cadeira de Geografia do Brasil FFLCH USP, 1945.



Japanese community in Itaquera
Source: Azevedo (1945 p.116)

Retiro, Bras and Pari.

The process is different in the suburban areas. New activities related with urban occupation expand and substitute the rural activities, although the necessary urban - rural relation is still maintained.

These processes conform the metropolis of São Paulo, that can only be understood as a complex confluence of the foreign presence with the successive and constant fluxes of migration.

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