

Dekasegi

More than one hundred years ago, my great-grandfather boarded a ship. He was bound for the city of Paramonga in Peru. He was not the only Japanese person to do so – because there was need for labor on the *haciendas* in Peru, the Peruvian government had made an agreement with Japan in 1899 and began to accept immigrants from Japan to work mostly in sugarcane fields on the *haciendas*. Ten years later, my great-grandfather, at the young age of 18 years and with many other young men, boarded the *Honkong-maru*, and left Japan forever. Emigration later expanded to Brazil and other countries in South America, which still have large Japanese-descended populations today. Many of them are still farming, too.

Almost one hundred years later, the Japanese government changed its immigration policy. It introduced a special visa known as the *teijūsha*, or long-term resident. This visa would allow second- and third-generation descendants of Japanese in Brazil, Peru, and other countries in South America to live and work in Japan. Because Japan's economy was very strong, many Brazilians and Peruvians came to Japan as *dekasegi* – to make money from jobs that many Japanese people didn't want to do. The jobs they worked were often called 3K jobs, meaning that they were dirty, dangerous, and demanding.

Although many of the *dekasegi* planned to work in Japan for a few years, and then return to their home countries, a majority of them eventually decided to settle in Japan with their families. In fact, now more than thirty years since the *dekasegi* began arriving, there are more than 200,000 Brazilians and almost 50,000 Peruvians living in Japan.

Despite often having Japanese heritage, many of the *dekasegi* and their families have, of course, completely assimilated into the countries in South America where they live – and of course, they often speak Spanish or Portuguese, so many arrive in Japan without knowing any Japanese. This can cause difficulty for their children, as a lot of them enter public schools without any Japanese ability, and some face bullying and other challenges in adapting to their new culture.

In fact, my own parents were *dekasagi*. My mother and father left Peru in 1991 to work in Japan. Unlike my great-grandfather more than 100 years ago, they didn't go by ship – they flew. For five more years, I stayed in Peru with my siblings. My mother would come home to visit every six months, but my father only came back to Peru once during that time. Like many others, my parents eventually decided to stay in Japan, and so after those five years, in 1996, I joined them.

When I arrived in Japan, I began to attend junior high school. Of course, it was very difficult for me at first, because I had to learn *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji* from scratch. Even though my great-grandfather was Japanese, my family exclusively spoke Spanish – well, my grandmother in Peru spoke Quechua, but that's a different story. I was fortunate to receive support, including Japanese classes at school and a Japanese language community center run by volunteers. Three months after my arrival, I enrolled in a night high school where teachers and classmates extended a helping hand, making my stay in Japan far more enjoyable.

Unfortunately, many children of migrants have had to endure bullying in public schools, often due to physical differences, such as their external appearance, hair, skin color, or their inability to speak Japanese fluently. As the number of migrants from various nationalities continues to grow, with more than three million foreigners now residing in Japan, many children born to migrants now consider Japan as their only home.

In today's world, there is an ongoing dialogue about accepting differences, and I firmly believe that we should acknowledge Japan's changing landscape and appreciate the richness that diversity brings.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. In what year did the narrator's great-grandfather emigrate to Peru?

Answer: 1909.

Hints/Clues: “the Peruvian government had made an agreement with Japan in **1899**, and began to accept immigrants from Japan to work growing crops and raising animals on the *haciendas*. [...] **Ten years later**, my great-grandfather, [...] boarded the *Honkong-maru*, and left Japan.”

2. What does the Spanish word *haciendas* mean?

Answer: Farm (or similar).

Hints/Clues: “work growing crops and raising animals on the *haciendas*” – growing crops and raising animals suggests farmwork. Also, later in the paragraph, “Many of them [descendants of Japanese immigrants] are still farming, too.”

3. In Japanese, what are the 3 ‘Ks’ ?

Answer: 辛い、汚い、危険 (*kitsui, kitanai, kiken*).

Hints/Clues: In English, the jobs are described as ‘dirty, dangerous, and demanding,’ better referred to perhaps as *3D*. However, a cursory google search of 3K 仕事 in Japanese will reveal the Japanese terms.

4. About how old is the narrator?

Answer: Early 40s (42-43).

Hints/Clues: “in 1996, I joined them” – meaning she joined her parents in Japan in 1996. She also joined junior high school, and enrolled in senior (night) high school “three months later.” This suggests she was around 15 years old when she arrived. $(2024-1996)+15=43$.

5. Why do you think the narrator’s family didn’t speak Japanese?

Answer: Answers will likely vary, but because he great-grandfather and subsequent generations assimilated into Peruvian culture and language.

Hints/Clues: No specific clues given, students should be encouraged to think in terms of time/generational scales.

6. Where in Peru do you think the narrator’s grandmother came from?

Answer: Near the Andes region (likely near Paramonga city).

Hints/Clues: Her grandmother spoke Quechuan language, which is centralized around the Andes (students should be encouraged to look this up in attempting their answers). Also, her great-grandfather emigrated to Paramonga city, so given that the narrator’s grandmother is likely his daughter (or otherwise closely related), it is not unreasonable to think she came from a nearby area.