

FABRICS OF MEMORY: INTERLACING LIFE HISTORY, SEWING PRACTICE, AND LEARNING THROUGH ART

Priscila Akimi Hayashi

Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the possible interweavings between life history and the knowledge of a manual craft, with learning through art as its horizon. The investigation stemmed from the time spent with Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, my paternal grandmother, a Japanese immigrant who arrived in Brazil in the 1930s and worked as a seamstress throughout her life. Through meetings in which we sewed and conversed, Lígia shared her memories with me and taught me her craft — sewing — thus activating a process of knowledge transmission that articulated technical, sensorial, and cultural aspects. The study adopted oral history and autoethnography as its primary methodologies, allowing attentive listening to individual memory as a source of knowledge and reflection. Personal documents, records, and biographical objects were gathered as analytical material, composing a narrative that engages with the social history of Japanese immigration in Brazil. The research was based on the assumption that individual memory is a constitutive part of collective memory, and that non-hegemonic narratives — such as that of an elderly, foreign woman belonging to the working class — can disrupt dominant historical discourses and practices consecrated by traditional arts. Thus, sewing, understood as a popular and feminine form of know-how, proved to be a powerful field of creation, affection, and learning. Prompted by the question “how can I learn to teach with my grandmother?”, the study reflects on the transmission of knowledge in non-school-based learning processes and its implications for Art Education, advocating the recognition of sensitive, relational experiences grounded in life trajectories as both poetic and pedagogical instruments.

KEYWORDS

sewing, life history, Japanese immigration, memory

TECIDOS DA MEMÓRIA: ENTRELAÇAMENTOS ENTRE HISTÓRIA DE VIDA, PRÁTICAS DE COSTURA E A APRENDIZAGEM PELA ARTE

RESUMO

A presente pesquisa investigou os possíveis entrelaçamentos entre a história de vida e o saber de um ofício manual, tendo como horizonte a aprendizagem pela arte. A investigação partiu da convivência com Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, minha avó paterna, imigrante japonesa que chegou ao Brasil na década de 1930 e trabalhou como costureira ao longo de toda a vida. Por meio de encontros em que costurávamos e conversávamos, Lígia compartilhou comigo suas memórias e me ensinou seu ofício: a costura; ativando um processo de transmissão de saberes que articulou aspectos técnicos, sensíveis e culturais. O estudo adotou como principais metodologias a história oral e a autoetnografia, permitindo uma escuta atenta à memória individual

como fonte de conhecimento e reflexão. Foram acolhidos documentos pessoais, registros e objetos biográficos como materiais de análise, compondo uma narrativa que dialoga com a história social da imigração japonesa no Brasil. A pesquisa partiu do pressuposto de que a memória individual é parte constituinte da memória coletiva, e que narrativas não hegemônicas, como a de uma mulher velha, estrangeira e pertencente às camadas populares, podem friccionar discursos históricos dominantes e modos de fazer consagrados pelas artes tradicionais. Assim, a costura, compreendida como um saber-fazer popular e feminino, revelou-se um potente campo de criação, afeto e aprendizagem. A partir da pergunta “como posso aprender a ensinar com minha avó?”, o estudo propõe reflexões sobre a transmissão de saberes em processos formativos não escolares e seus desdobramentos para o campo da Arte-Educação, defendendo a valorização de experiências sensíveis, relacionais e ancoradas nas trajetórias de vida como dispositivos poéticos e pedagógicos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

costura, história de vida, imigração japonesa, memória

1. INTRODUCTION

This text arises from a master’s research in Art Education¹ that sought to understand how the relationship between life history and the transmission of knowledge operates within a process of learning a manual craft. To this end, the study focused on an experience of conversations and sewing with Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, who, between 2022 and 2024, entrusted me with her life story and one of her most significant skills: sewing.

Historically, knowledge associated with the feminine, domestic, and popular spheres has been marginalised both by official narratives and by the mechanisms that legitimise knowledge in the field of art. In this sense, sewing — a craft traditionally linked to women and family intimacy — is frequently relegated to a secondary position in relation to artistic practices considered high art. Similarly, the life histories of elderly, foreign women from working-class backgrounds (such as Lígia) tend to be silenced or undervalued within hegemonic historiographical discourses. Against this backdrop, this research is justified by the need to listen to, document, and value non-hegemonic narratives and manual skills as legitimate forms of knowledge, sensibility, and identity within the field of Art Education.

Dona Hatsuko or Dona Lígia², as she is commonly called, is also my paternal grandmother, who emigrated from Japan to Brazil as a child in the mid-1930s. Since my childhood, she has maintained the habit of recounting her memories and the family history. This and other customs associated with the preservation of memory were set as the object of the research, which considered intergenerational transmission as a potential means of sustaining both individual and collective memories, as well as ancestral

¹ The research entitled *Tecidos da Memória: Entrelaçamentos Entre História de Vida, o Fazer da Costura e a Aprendizagem Pela Arte* (Fabrics of Memory: Intertwining Life Stories, Sewing, and Learning Through Art, 2024) was conducted through the Graduate Program in Visual Arts at the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (<https://doi.org/10.11606/D.27.2024.tde-14112024-161635>).

² To align the way the study refers to the research subject, she is referred to as “Hatsuko” when discussing the period of her life in Japan, and as “Lígia” for events following her arrival in Brazil.

culture. In Lígia's case, this is reflected primarily in the memory of Japanese-Brazilian migration and in the craft of sewing as a form of manual know-how and labour. From this context, and considering its elements through the lens of Art Education, the study revolves around the question: "how can I learn to teach with my grandmother?". The aim, in this sense, is to learn and teach through engagement with her and the appreciation of her knowledge.

Building on this question, the research aimed to investigate the possible intertwinings between life history and the knowledge of a manual craft through the transmission of individual memory and practical skills, taking learning through art as its perspective. The study is grounded in the assumption that individual memory constitutes an integral part of collective memory, and that personal narratives — when nurtured in formative contexts — have the power to generate meaning, affect, and subjectivities that contribute to a sensitive and critical understanding of reality. Orality, as a means of recording and transmitting knowledge, is here understood as a counterpoint to official history; and the practice of sewing, as a popular and feminine artisanal skill, is valued as a creative, pedagogical, and relational language.

Considering the habits of sharing personal memories and transmitting skills as legitimate sources of knowledge — which can interact with official history, whether in convergence or divergence — the research sought to document, organise, and reflect on events arising from intergenerational transmission, to understand Lígia's stories and skills as means of constructing knowledge and understanding of the world.

Regarding the learning investigated, the experience of spending time with my grandmother as both interviewee and sewing teacher revealed a universe of knowledge not always present in documented history, since it is activated through orality and interpersonal experience. This mode of access presents itself as an alternative or complement to historical knowledge based exclusively on written documents, as sensorial and subjective aspects can be more fully apprehended through oral narrative.

Thus, the research drew on oral history³ as a means of valuing popular knowledge that is seldom considered by academic tradition. The story narrated through the protagonist's voice provided a way to enter her environments, access archives, and understand cultural, social, and affective aspects that make up my grandmother's world — and that engage with other narratives silenced by dominant epistemologies⁴.

In addition to the interviews, dialogues concerning personal and family memory were also prompted by personal documents she had preserved: photographs, letters, records, and biographical objects. Of particular note is her memory notebook, in which she keeps records of her own history, her family, and other immigrant families.

³ The term "oral history" will always be written in lowercase, in accordance with the recommendation of the sociologist Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz. In her publication *Variações Sobre a Técnica de Gravar no Registro da Informação Viva* (Variations on the Tape Recorder Technique in Recording Living Information, 1991), Queiroz explains that this form of capitalisation is adopted to differentiate this methodology from a specific area of History, also known as Oral History, which does not have a direct relationship with the methodology in question.

⁴ "Oral history" is a qualitative research methodology that uses oral accounts from people who have experienced particular events, engaging with social memory and collective history. It allows access to subjective dimensions and experiences that have been silenced by official history (Queiroz, 1991; Thompson, 2002).

I also adopted autoethnography⁵ as a method, as proposed by Sarah Wall (2006). Throughout the process, I positioned myself as an active participant, given my roles as researcher, student, and granddaughter, seeking to recognise, within my grandmother's life history, traces of a time, a context, and a culture that traverse both the family history and my own. The combination of autoethnography with attentive listening and dialogue from oral history gave the investigation a qualitative character, expanding the human experience in understanding the phenomena observed.

The production and collection of research materials began in the second semester of 2022 and continued until early 2024. In addition to meetings dedicated to listening to Lígia's life story, there were also sewing lessons. The interviews were recorded on video, and the sewing sessions were documented through videos, photographs, and reflective notes.

This text is a selection and edition of part of the material produced during the research. Given the density and variety of content — interviews, personal documents, memory notebooks, photographs, and records of sewing lessons — the article was organised into sections highlighting the intertwinings between memory, orality, artisanal practice, and learning. The selection of excerpts was based on their representativeness in relation to the central research questions and their reflective potential for the field of Art Education. Following this introduction, a section is dedicated to personal documents, or biographical objects, of my grandparents; then, I present excerpts from the interviewee's life history, collected through the interviews; the third part shows some results from the sewing lessons; and, finally, the concluding section brings together general reflections of the research, particularly aimed at the field of Art Education.

2. THE ROOM-ARCHIVE AND TRACES OF MEMORY

One of the first elements that inspired the work was a room in my grandmother's house: a space planned, organised, and maintained by my grandfather, Akira Hayashi (Figure 1). This room was designated for storing objects, books, materials, and documents accumulated over the family's trajectory in Brazil. Following her husband's death, Lígia became the sole custodian of the space. For this reason, the room was understood as a kind of archive, or "room-archive", bringing together objects that were taken here as a starting point for entering the universe of the memories under study.

⁵ "Autoethnography" is a method that connects the researcher's personal experience with the cultural and social contexts under investigation, treating subjective involvement as a legitimate source of reflection, analysis, and knowledge (Wall, 2006).



Figure 1. Photographic record of the room-archive of Ligia Hatsuko and Akira Hayashi, 2020–2021

Credits. Priscila Akimi Hayashi

The objects preserved by my grandparents are relevant to memory reconstruction because they function as material traces of their life paths. In this study, they were understood as biographical objects, following the terms proposed by Bosi (1987/1994). According to Bosi, there is a desire, particularly in old age, for fixation in something immobile, concrete, which engages us with its material, affective, and sensorial presence, even if silent: the objects that fill our homes. Beyond their aesthetic or utilitarian value, these materials carry information, marks, and impressions of their owners, human traces that situate the individual in the world and constitute identity.

The appreciation of these objects aligns with the life trajectories of the subjects involved: elderly immigrants who faced various adversities in a foreign land, including scarcity of resources. “It’s better to keep these boxes there, because one day someone might need them” (verbal information) was a recurring phrase from my grandmother during tidying. “This is advice that the elderly constantly repeat: they have not yet assimilated the experience of disposability, which seems a cruel waste to them. That is why grandmother’s cupboard is full of boxes, scraps, and little jars (...)” (Bosi, 2003, p. 30).

From the history of my grandparents and the contexts they experienced, it also makes sense to understand the room as an archive in the terms of Artières (1998), for whom archiving is linked to the desire for material confirmation of the events and facts that constitute a given existence. This tangible confirmation appears particularly important for immigrant communities, who, deprived of their belongings and part of their native culture, faced the challenge of surviving and adapting to an unfamiliar land. Kossoy (2010) addresses this aspect when discussing the Japanese identity constructed by immigrants in Brazil. Regarding the relationship between identity and archiving, Artières (1998) states:

but this demand to archive oneself does not serve merely an occasional function. The individual must maintain personal archives in order to see their identity recognised. We must control our lives. Nothing can be left to

chance; we must keep archives to remember and draw lessons from the past, to prepare for the future, but above all to exist in daily life. (p. 7)

My grandparents' room, therefore, constitutes an archive because it contains the material indices of their work, tastes, passions, and strategies for navigating the world: to make sense of their experiences, become aware of themselves, their origins, and daily practices (Artières, 1998). For this reason, the space was also a key element in mediating the dialogue between me and the interviewee.

One of these traces — or documents — is Lígia's memory notebook, in which she maintains the habit of recording her family history and personal memories (Figure 2 and Figure 3). These records were fundamental in guiding and shaping our conversations throughout the research.

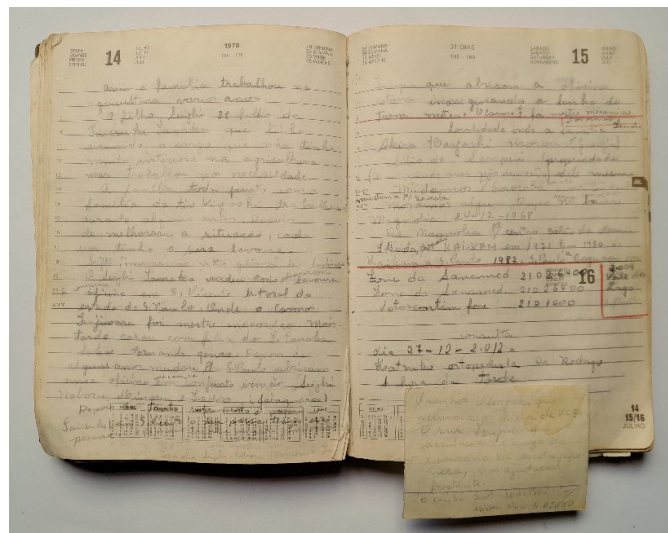


Figure 2. Photographic record of a page from Lígia's memory notebook — Item belonging to the personal collection of Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi. Date unknown

Credits. Priscila Akimi Hayashi

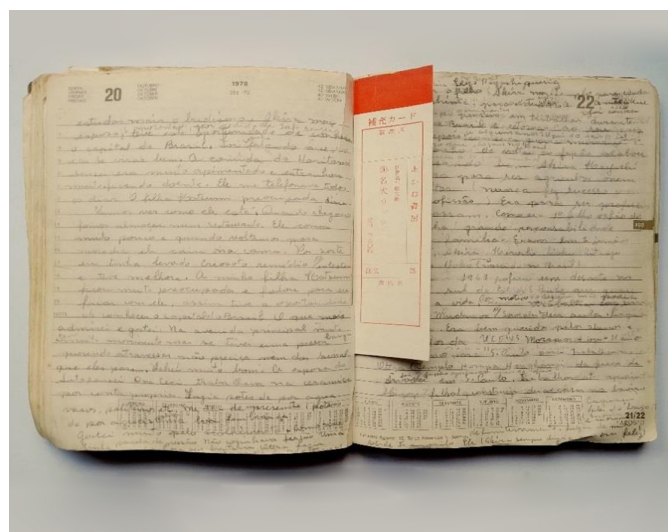


Figure 3. Photographic record of a page from Lígia's memory notebook — Item belonging to the personal collection of Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi. Date unknown

Credits. Priscila Akimi Hayashi

The pages were photographed from Lígia's memory notebook. During the investigation, this notebook was read and analysed as a complementary source of data alongside Lígia's oral narratives. The practice of keeping autobiographical records appears to be linked to the phenomenon of Japanese immigration and the will to document experiences lived as a foreigner in another country. Even at an individual level, my grandmother demonstrates, albeit intuitively, the importance of recording her story so as not to forget or distance herself from her origins.

As this is the life history of an immigrant, someone who has left their homeland to live elsewhere, the personal archive can be understood as an expression of the will to permanence and to the reaffirmation of identity and existence as a people, an ethnicity, and a culture. As Artières (1998) notes, "to archive one's own life is to place oneself before a mirror; it is to set the intimate image of oneself against the social image, and in this sense, the archiving of the self is a practice of self-construction and resistance" (p. 3).

The notion of resistance is also discussed by Bosi (1987/1994), who understands the preservation of memory as a movement that resists the alienation of time and the erasure of the experiences, knowledge, and identities of those who lived history in their own bodies.

3. SPEECH: HATSUKO'S UNIVERSE

Following the revisiting of material traces, the second phase of the research focused on the narratives shared by my grandmother through dialogues and interviews about her life history (Figure 4). Hatsuko was born in 1930 in the province of Okayama, Japan. Her family (Tanaka) migrated to Brazil in 1935 and began working on cotton plantations in the interior of São Paulo, in the city of Rancharia. Over time, the family experienced further relocations: Itararé, São Miguel Arcanjo, São Vicente, and São Paulo. After marrying in 1953, and already baptised as Lígia, she also lived in Piedade and Sorocaba, accompanying her husband Akira Hayashi's family.



Figure 4. Photographic record of Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi at her residence, in Sorocaba-SP, 2022

Credits. Priscila Akimi Hayashi

Her childhood and immigration memories were recounted over seven meetings, held between September 2022 and August 2023, all at her home in Sorocaba. The visits aimed to share aspects of her immigrant trajectory, reconstructed from previously structured interviews. These encounters resulted in five video-recorded interviews, which were subsequently transcribed.

The questions were designed in chronological order to facilitate the construction of the narrative. Key questions included:

- Could you begin by telling me about your journey from Japan to Brazil? Please share your earliest memories from when you still lived in your country of origin.
- When and why did your family decide to come here?
- How many members of your family came?
- What was the arrival in Brazil like?
- What was your relationship with the employers who hired your family?
- When did you start attending school? Was it a Brazilian school?
- When did you begin sewing? Who taught you? When did you start working as a seamstress?

This section is organised around three principal axes: (1) Hatsuko's individual memories, particularly those from her time in Japan; (2) the social memory of the Japanese migration to Brazil in the twentieth century; and (3) the process of assimilation and integration of Japanese families into Brazilian culture.

3.1. INDIVIDUAL MEMORY: THE PERSIMMON TREE

This section presents Hatsuko's earliest memories in Japan, before the migration in 1935. The persimmon tree evokes the house where she lived and her grandmother, Kotoyo Tanaka, who would pick the fruit and leave it for her to eat — affective elements with which her narrative begins. This was one of our first recorded conversations, initiated with the question: could you start by telling me about your journey from Japan to Brazil? Please share your earliest memories from when you still lived in your country of origin⁶.

Well... I was still small, not yet five years old, so I don't remember very well when I lived in Japan. But I was told that the house was in a somewhat high place, and below it there was a water tank, see? A little pond. And I was told I used to play near the pond, and sometimes I'd fall in. From above, they saw me fall into the water, and they came, they would come, to pull me out of the water, see? And everything was fine. Then I was told they asked me: "what did you see in the water?" They said that I received, I replied

⁶ The excerpts presented below were taken from the interview transcriptions.

that there was a very big fish⁷. (Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, personal interview, September 7, 2022)

The house... The house was simple, see? I don't remember well how it was. I just remember it was on a somewhat high place, and beside it there was a persimmon tree, but it was one of those astringent persimmons. My grandmother would pick the persimmons, take the astringent ones to sell. Then she'd put the persimmons in a little cart, see? And she'd put me beside it like that, to sell the persimmons. And I would eat the persimmons, getting all messy, see? [Laughs] And that was my grandmother's life, see? (Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, personal interview, September 7, 2022)

In these and other accounts, the relationship with her grandmother Kotoyo appears to have played a significant role in Hatsuko's upbringing, whether through affection, gentle care, or simply by being the primary caregiver. Being a woman, she compensated for the mother's absence⁸ in the domestic sphere. Being elderly, she deviated from the austerity of adults. Hatsuko always recalls: "my grandmother was very kind to me, you know? Oh my... I think because I was the first granddaughter, see?" (Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, informal communication, date unknown). This aspect is echoed in Hatsuko's own behaviour as my grandmother, as she also appears as a nurturing figure in much of my own childhood memory. Such familial influences were likely inherited through the direct experience my grandmother had of living with and being cared for by her own grandmother during childhood. This intergenerational influence resonates with what Thompson (2002) calls directly observable models: habits, affections, and knowledge that traverse generations through lived experience.

Transgenerational family influences provide a fascinating example of how traditions can be a mixture, on the one hand, of directly observable models — such as a grandmother offering her granddaughter an example of independent motherhood — and, on the other, of symbolic myths that, nonetheless, can exert powerful influence on identity formation. (Thompson, 2002, p. 19)

Regarding Japanese family culture, the notions raised by Thompson (2002) allow reflection on the female role in child-rearing and education, as well as in the maintenance and transmission of cultural heritage to generations born in the new country. Sakurai (1993) reflects on the experience of immigration from a female perspective, often associated with domestic life, adaptation to a new culture, and preservation of maternal culture.

⁷ The chosen transcription style aimed to preserve aspects of the oral narrative, recognising and respecting the specificities, singularities, and unique data inherent in this mode of interaction. Whenever possible, grammatical forms and features characteristic of spoken language are retained, in order to integrate the interviewee's oral expression into the text. Her bilingual ability is also a significant aspect of the investigation.

⁸ At the time described by Hatsuko, her mother, like the other adults of working age, worked in the rice fields that supported the family in Japan. Thus, she (Hatsuko) and her younger brother were left in the care of their paternal grandmother.

Almost never is the woman the main protagonist, but it is through her that events are filtered, and judgments and evaluations about the weight of events are passed. (...) Her role is to raise individuals for integration into society within standards that guide family members toward honest work and the maintenance of the family's honour and name. (...) The quiet, always busy, sometimes overlooked woman is the axis that unites the man and the children. The mother participates in the work on the farm alongside the husband and children, takes care of domestic chores, and bears full responsibility for raising the children. (Sakurai, 1993, pp. 27–28)

The persimmon tree was part of the land where Hatsuko was born, and it marked the early, significant moments of her relationship with her grandmother. However, resource scarcity led the family to emigrate, a phenomenon with historical dimensions in East–West relations. In this sense, Hatsuko's memory of coming to Brazil begins to intertwine with the collective memory of her family group.

3.2. COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE COTTON FIELDS

Emigration is part of the social memory of a large portion of the Japanese population residing in Brazil, who, like Hatsuko's family, emigrated from Japan. From the perspective of this investigation, the relationship between personal memory and collective memory was guided by the ideas put forward by Halbwachs (1950/1990):

as the child grows, and especially as he becomes an adult, he participates in a more distinctive and reflective way in the life and thoughts of the groups to which he belongs. How could he help changing this idea of the past? How could his newly acquired conceptions — conceptions of facts, reflections and ideas — help reacting on this remembrance? As I have said many times, a remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered. Of course, if we presume memory to be a resumption of direct contact with certain past impressions, then a remembrance would, by definition, be distinguished from these ideas of varying precision whereby our reflections, assisted by others' stories, admissions, and evidence, make a determination of what our past must have been. (p. 71)

Halbwachs does not view these two instances of memory as dichotomous, that is, as one being exclusively personal, separate, or even antagonistic to a collective dimension, but rather as two aspects that intertwine through the individual and their connection to certain social groups. In Hatsuko's case, even her individual memories, from childhood, of the place she lived, and of her relationship with her grandmother, were sufficient to connect her to a particular social group — namely, her family — which, in turn, made decisions within a broader context. Her formation through the experiences

of other subjects, that is, the family collective, is evident when she explains, for example, the reasons her family chose to emigrate.

In Japan at that time, there was quite a crisis, you know? Because rice is grown in water, see? In, like... A place with lots of water, a humid place, and each person's plot was very small, see? So, there wasn't enough to sell, only enough for the household. And then, because it was difficult to survive there in Japan, they held a family meeting, and the decision was: we'll go to Brazil, see? (...) The governments ran that propaganda, you know? Because at that time, coffee plantations were booming, you know? There were lots of coffee plantations, and many people who came from Japan went to work on the coffee farm. Now, the Tanaka family, my parents, were lucky because there was a fellow countryman? In the city of Santos waiting for the ship to arrive with the immigrants. Once they arrived in... Santos, they went to... What's it called? [Pause] It's, there's a place that hosts immigrants⁹ until it's time to go to one side or the other, the Mogiana side, the Sorocabana side... You see? And there had gone a compatriot, called Yamauti. They wanted a family with lots of workers, right? So, the family... those who stayed at home were my grandmother, my brother, and me. The rest could work in the fields, right? There were nine of us. My grandfather had just turned sixty, and he still had plenty of energy to work, you know? And luckily¹⁰, a Japanese man went to look for a family with lots of workers, so the Tanaka family was chosen to go work on the cotton plantation¹¹. (Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, personal interview, September 7, 2022)

During this period, Japanese immigration to Brazil, which had begun in 1908, continued at a significant pace due to the economic demands and interests of both countries. The crisis to which my grandmother refers struck Japan at the beginning of the century, especially in the 1920s, when low productivity, the loss of foreign markets after

⁹ She refers to a hostel for Japanese immigrants, but does not recall its name or exact location where her family was accommodated immediately upon disembarking. I found no documents indicating the precise location. It is only known that it was in the city of Santos, São Paulo.

¹⁰ The notion of "luck," according to Lígia's own interpretation, is associated with the fact that the Tanaka family was welcomed by a compatriot. Given the cultural contrasts that Japanese immigrants faced upon arriving in a Western country — where the language, culture, and even phenotypical characteristics were markedly different — their connection with other Japanese people was welcomed with relief, serving as a way to feel less disoriented and more familiar with Brazilian territory. This identification among Japanese immigrants, according to Okamoto (2008), was also responsible for the formation of groups and communities, which saw such unions as a means of strengthening and preserving their culture of origin. Moreover, for my grandmother, luck was also associated with her family's immediate integration into the labour market upon arrival. Despite the precarious conditions and exploitation of work on coffee and cotton plantations, newly arrived Japanese immigrants viewed labour as a source of hope for prosperity and a way to support a return to their homeland.

¹¹ Newton Akinori Hayashi, Lígia's eldest son (who contributed as an intermediary in my conversations with her), suggests that the "luck" recognised by his mother is further associated with the Tanaka family being assigned to a cotton plantation. According to him, his parents considered cotton plantations preferable to coffee plantations — where his father, Akira Hayashi, worked — since the labour on coffee plantations was even more arduous.

the First World War, unemployment, and low wages afflicted families across diverse regions, sectors, and social levels.

Brazil, on the other hand, was undergoing a transformation of its internal production and had only recently emerged from a long period of slavery at the start of the century. The workforce that was developing and expanding domestically was largely immigrant, brought in from other countries and directed to work on coffee plantations and in the expansion of pastoral and arable lands, particularly in the state of São Paulo. In this context, pro-immigration propaganda in Japan was indeed intense and promising, as my grandmother recalls, leading Japanese families to consider temporary migration as a possible solution for overcoming the crisis and ensuring a prosperous return to their homeland.

Knowledge of this context and of the circumstances that led to the Tanaka family's emigration was most likely not directly assimilated by Hatsuko in the way her bond with her grandmother had been. At the time, she was not yet five years old, as she recalls, and was still a child, unaware of the adults' decisions. Her understanding of the facts and events was constructed through the accounts of others who passed their narratives on to her, making her an active participant in the group's memory. Today, she is the only living witness of the migratory process her family experienced, the sole custodian of this history, which carries wider historical reverberations.

Hatsuko's memories of immigration are expressed at the individual level, since she experienced her homeland directly, through the persimmon tree or through the adults' decision to migrate (Figure 5). Nevertheless, significant parts of her story are constituted through the collective memory of the family, which is anchored in the broader historical and social context of Japanese immigration to Brazil.



Figure 5. Photographic record of the Tanaka family members who departed for Brazil in January 1935. Women, from left to right: Toshino (aunt), Kotoyo (grandmother), and Sumi (mother). Men, from left to right: Kiyoshi (uncle), Jisuke (grandfather), Taisuke (father), and Shosaburo (uncle). Children: Toyoichi (brother, left) and Hatsuko. The spelling of names follows the passenger list available on the website of the Historical Museum of Japanese Immigration in Brazil — Photograph from the personal collection of Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi

Credits. Author unknown, Okayama, 1934

3.3. FOUNDATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE: UNCLE KIYOSHI, DONA PALMIRA

Once settled and employed adequately in Brazil, the last part of the chapter is dedicated to exploring and analysing Japanese life in a foreign land, as well as the strategies and resources of acceptance and adaptation to the new culture. It also highlights Lígia's childhood memories in the city of Rancharia, São Paulo, such as: the Brazilian school, her family's experience as farm labourers, and her initiation into sewing through a Brazilian woman, Dona Palmira. Language, education, sociability, and the dynamics of work relations are the guiding threads of this section.

Regarding her schooling in Brazil, she attended school for the first time at around ten years old, at Fazenda Santa Elisa, where her family had settled to clear virgin forest and cultivate cotton. Until then, she says she did not know how to read or write, nor was she familiar with the Portuguese language. She attributes this to the isolation of Japanese families, who generally gathered in colonies in a given region, and also to the fact that she had spent her early childhood at home with her younger brother, under the care of her grandmother.

On the education of the generations born and raised in Brazil, Demartini (2012) emphasises the strong concern of Japanese immigrants regarding this aspect. According to the author, the Japanese who arrived in Brazil to contribute as labour had a relatively high level of schooling, even in comparison with the educational levels of other labour-exporting countries.

Another factor that may have influenced the education of Japanese immigrants was that they had a high level of schooling, which surpassed that of many other countries. A survey of immigrants disembarking at the Port of Santos between 1908 and 1932 showed that 89.9% of Japanese aged over twelve were literate (compared with 71.36% of Italians, 51.7% of Portuguese, 46.3% of Spaniards, and 91.1% of Germans) (Various Authors, 1992, p. 143). (...) Most parents wanted their children to learn the Japanese language and customs, with the prospect of returning to Japan in mind, but all aspired to a better schooling for their children. (Demartini, 2012, p. 25)

The Japanese understood education as one of the main foundations for social mobility, even more than the accumulation of wealth or socioeconomic status, as Sakurai (1993) explains. Education was a fundamental tool for achieving the primary goal of succeeding in life. Raising children abroad with the aim of a prosperous return also meant ensuring that heirs were literate and instructed adequately in basic disciplines such as arithmetic, languages, sciences, history, and geography. For first-generation immigrants, the ideal was that their children be educated on equal footing with the Japanese school curriculum, as highlighted by Demartini (2012).

The idea of raising children according to Brazilian norms and knowledge was one of the first paradoxes faced by the first generation of immigrants: despite their wish to bring up their children exclusively according to Japanese standards, they gradually

realised that, as the plan to return became increasingly distant and unattainable, it would be preferable to accept Brazilian schooling rather than provide none at all. This acceptance marks the beginning of the assimilation process, in which Japanese colonists began to adapt to the idea of a long-term stay in the foreign country.

The school at Fazenda Santa Elisa, attended by Lígia, was built after the Tanaka family moved there. It was a Brazilian school and, therefore, one of her first meaningful experiences with the country. Uncle Kiyoshi, whose name appears in the title of this subsection, is remembered by my grandmother in these words: “my uncle always liked to teach, to explain things to children, see?” (Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, personal interview, September 7, 2022). He was one of those responsible for her education and that of her younger siblings. She recalls that her uncle was also the family member who mediated interactions with Brazilians, as he studied Portuguese tirelessly to communicate on the family’s behalf. The idea to enrol the children in the school on the farm came from him because, even with hopes of returning to Japan, Kiyoshi recognised the importance and necessity of learning Portuguese as a means of integrating into and surviving in the country where they lived.

Beyond language — one of the most evident aspects of contact with Brazil — other cultural differences also emerged as challenges, such as food or even clothing, both of which deserve special attention in this investigation. In this regard, Sakurai (1993) points to the contact and interactions with Brazilian neighbours and those of other nationalities.

At this initial stage of adaptation to so many differences, the presence of neighbours of other backgrounds is notable. They were the ones who taught the Japanese how to slaughter pigs, bake bread, remove jiggers, and deal with leaf-cutter ants. (...) The sacrifice to cope with all these differences was enormous. Women worked hard to adapt the diet, using the available ingredients to meet Japanese standards. Thus, rice and beans were eaten with pickles made from green papaya with *missô* (salted paste of fermented soybeans), together with meat or salted dried fish. (p. 68)

As for clothing, my grandmother recalls that sewing garments for the family was a common task for her mother and her aunt¹², the main working women in the household. She says that, even back in Japan, her mother had been responsible for making the family’s clothes, which were mostly hand-sewn kimonos. However, when asked if she had learned sewing from her mother, she tells a different story, one that reflects the transmission of knowledge in a context of migration and adaptation to a new culture, as Sakurai (1993) notes. She learned to sew around the age of twelve from a woman named Palmira de Sá, the mother of her best childhood friend, Hermínia, both from a Portuguese family that had long been settled in Brazil.

¹² A slightly different arrangement from the one they had in Japan, where adult women of the household also worked in the fields, in Brazil Lígia’s mother and aunt focused on domestic tasks, taking on the role of homemakers.

(...) At the very beginning, it was Hermínia's mother who taught me. Then, later, we moved to Itararé. (...) Hermínia's mother, oh my, she was so kind, you know? And since my mother and my aunt didn't know how to sew dresses, she would say: "come to my house, I'll teach you everything, see?", so she was the one who taught me the basics. And when she made *pamonha* (steamed corn paste), she would say: "come and help, so you can learn how to make *pamonha*", see? She would make the *pamonha* wrapped in corn husks, you know? And I would go there to help out, with everything, see? Yes, I learned so many things from Hermínia's mother. (Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi, personal interview, September 22, 2022)

The learning experience with Dona Palmira is one more particular case, an individual memory of Lígia's, that also aligns with a broader movement common to other Japanese families: despite the strong ties, attachment, and resistance to forgetting their homeland culture, the immigrants also allowed themselves some opportunities for adaptation and learnings regarding the local culture — in a gradual attempt at assimilation aimed at progressively deeper integration into Brazilian society.

4. HANDS: SEWING AS WORK AND THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE

The third part of the research focused on the experience of learning to sew with Lígia during the investigation period (Figure 6). After presenting and analysing her life history, this section focuses on the transmission of her knowledge as a seamstress.



Figure 6. Photographic record of Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi at her residence, in Sorocaba, São Paulo, 2022

Credits. Priscila Akimi Hayashi

The sewing sessions took place in two distinct phases: a first stage between the second semester of 2022 and February 2023, and a second stage in the second semester of 2023. During the first period, we held 16 sessions, each lasting 1h30min, documented

through photographs, videos, and reflective notes. In the second phase, we conducted another 10 sessions, also focused on sewing practice and similarly documented.

To approach these two stages, the section is organised chronologically according to the main events and the development of the classes. Among the episodes explored in the original work, the highlights are: (1) Cotton fabric: revisiting stored pieces and visiting a fabric store; (2) The pyjamas: the body as a keeper of memory; and (3) Patchwork¹³: revisiting learning experiences. Between the second and third topics, there is also the subtitle “The sewing machine: a biographical object as extension of the body”, with reflections on this central technical element in my learning. In addition to analyses, visual essays based on photographic records of the sessions are also presented (Figure 7 and Figure 8).



Figure 7. Frames extracted from videos recorded with Lúcia during our sewing preparation process, 2022

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Figure 8. Frames extracted from videos recorded with Lúcia during our fabric cutting and preparation process, 2022

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¹³ Patchwork is a traditional sewing craft that consists of joining fabric scraps of different colours, shapes, and patterns to create unique visual compositions, whether geometric or not. Traditionally associated with the domestic and feminine sphere, patchwork carries aesthetic, emotional, and historical dimensions, as well as cultural and affective meanings linked to memory and manual craft.

Beyond teaching the practice itself, our sewing moments were interwoven with conversations and memories prompted by the act of making. My grandmother's narratives naturally emerged from the manual gesture, becoming a constitutive part of the learning process.

Based on this approach with the interviewee, this section sought to reflect on how learning can occur in practical and craft-based processes. Guided by the question, "how can I learn to teach with my grandmother?", I aimed to construct accounts that captured the details of our interactions and the sewing sessions, which guided and motivated me as a learner.

In this sense, among the main events that marked our classes, the following stand out: the retrieval of traces (stored items) that can serve as references for reflecting on possible paths to follow; the relevance of memory and life history as key builders of meaning and awareness in the practice; careful monitoring of learning stages of techniques, together with guidance for problem-solving. Such guidance also enabled collaborative work — or rather, doing together — which greatly contributed to the construction of knowledge in a relational way; the sensitive assessment of difficulties and potentialities emerging from the process experienced; and the development of solutions and possible unfoldings based on the needs that arose throughout the learning journey.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: ON THE COLLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY — A PATCHWORK OF INSIGHTS

After living through the experience, the final stage of the work led me back to the starting point, that is, to the question that gave rise to the main research problem and outlined its motives and objectives: "how can I learn to teach with my grandmother?"

Between 2022 and 2024, the attentive interactions and shared experiences with Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi allowed me to examine more deeply and analytically the enduring phenomena present in the habits and customs preserved by her and my grandfather, as well as in the role she assumed as a transmitter and teacher to me, her granddaughter, privileged by her presence throughout my upbringing. These experiences shaped my interest in the study of art and contributed to my development as an art educator¹⁴.

Through attentive and analytical listening to the narratives shared by Lígia Hatsuko Hayashi — stories that had been told many times before the context of the research — I was able to recognise important aspects of family history, reflecting the ethnic and cultural origins of my ancestors. It was possible to identify the sources of the teachings transmitted across generations; to understand the relationship with labour that my grandparents and great-grandparents, as immigrants, built in a foreign land and passed on to those born here; and to perceive the persistence of certain habits and elements of

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the final stage of this research coincided with the beginning of my work as an Arts teacher in the municipal education network of São Paulo. This timing allows the experience to be reflected upon not only within the school context but also in broader contexts, such as teacher education at the university level.

Japanese culture that endured through the migratory process or were re-adapted to the new Brazilian reality. These perceptions gave shape and meaning to my identity through ancestry, experienced within family life and grounded in the transmission of knowledge and generational culture.

Throughout my postgraduate experiences, in various activities involving memory reconstruction, I realised that this movement of returning to origins — so present in my grandmother's narratives — also manifests itself significantly in processes of creation and formation, both artistic and pedagogical. This reactivation of memories and images, mobilised by remembrance, often rekindles affections, desires, and dormant interests, functioning as a driving force for investigation and creation. In this sense, I understand memory as a powerful conductor of educational and creative processes — something that, by illuminating lived experiences, transforms the gaze and the paths of both learners and teachers.

These phenomena, in addition to responding to my initial question — by revealing strategies, rhythms, and meanings of a learning constructed through affection and attentive listening — were also connected to the experiences I lived in the field of Art Education, where I entered as a master's student. More than answering a personal concern, the research pointed towards pathways of formation that resonate within the professional field. As a current Arts teacher in São Paulo's municipal school system, I perceive that the learnings experienced in this process reverberate in my practice and sustain pedagogical conceptions guided by principles of attentiveness, relational engagement, and the collaborative construction of knowledge.

Among the main contributions emerging from this research, I highlight: oral transmission as a legitimate means of teaching and learning; the preservation of memory through archiving and documentation; and the proposal of a relational dynamic between teacher and student prompted by the craft activity. This dynamic encompasses everything from structuring a project and selecting materials to carefully guiding practical procedures, sensitively evaluating the learning process, and proposing outcomes coherent with the lived trajectory and the potentials yet to be discovered.

In this sense, I affirm that the experience of learning to teach from a life story indeed contributes to the field of Art Education, by proposing a pedagogy rooted in care, attentive listening, and presence — elements that challenge technical and normative models of teaching. Educational practice, when grounded in memory and experience, acquires critical, sensitive, and transformative depth. It is a form of learning that goes beyond content, encompassing subjectivities, cultures, temporalities, and relationships.

Finally, I interpret my learning and research process developed over the two years of my master's degree as the assembly of a large patchwork that, unlike a piece made of a single, homogeneous, and totalizing fabric, features a diversity of impressions, references, voices, materials, faces, and experiences. A plural, sensitive, and open formation — like a patch waiting for other pieces yet to come (Figure 9 and Figure 10).



Figure 9. Construction of Lúcia Hatsuko Hayashi's biographical piece, 2024

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Figure 10. Construction of Lúcia Hatsuko Hayashi's biographical piece, 2024

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Master's degree in Visual Arts from the Postgraduate Programme in Visual Arts, School of Communication and Arts University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts from the State University of Londrina. Researcher at the Multidisciplinary Group for Teaching and Research in Art Education and Art teacher at the Municipal Department of Education, São Paulo City Hall.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5935-5154>

Email: priscilakimih@gmail.com

Address: Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, Av. Prof. Lúcio Martins Rodrigues, 443, Cidade Universitária, CEP: 05508–020, São Paulo–SP, Brasil

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