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# **Culture of Desire**

*The history and development of sexual services in Japan*

**Ritgerð til BA-prófs í japönsku máli og menningu**

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## **Abstract**

A detailed overview of the history and development of sexual services in Japan. This thesis will recount sexual services in Japan from 759 AD and culminate in the modern sex trade. It will also describe how sexual services were accepted as a societal norm and how the historic demand for brothels progressed into a billion-dollar industry. The thesis will analyse how the Japanese military and government enabled brothels and expedited forced recruitment of women during the Occupation of Japan by the United States. As Japan experienced an economic growth 1955-1973, a link between corporate entertainment and working-class women formed, resulting in a demand for more sex workers. Lastly, an explanation will be provided of common sexual services available in Japan's modern sex industry.

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## Introduction

Many are fascinated with Japan's complex and diverse culture. There are elements of novelty to Japanese culture that non-Japanese people in general find mysterious and captivating. The modern sex industry (*j. fuzoku*) in Japan is no exception. With all kinds of different sexual services ranging from themed bath houses to peeping clubs, its sex culture is perceived as one of the most unique in the world (Sinclair, 2006).

Prostitution in Japan is not equal to prostitution the way one would perceive it by Icelandic standards, in which buying sex for financial gain is prohibited (“A new law makes purchase of sex illegal in Iceland,” 2009). This means that while prostitution is the business or practice of engaging in sexual intercourse in exchange for payment or some other benefit, the modern sex industry in Japan actually offers other services that do not necessarily include sexual intercourse. According to Joan Sinclair (2006), the notable author of the book *Pink Box: Inside Japan's Sex Clubs*, she explains that the modern Japanese sex industry ironically offers absolutely everything imaginable except for coitus (Pink Box Japan). Therefore, the people who are working in the sex industry have managed to bypass the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956 in that regard. The law clearly states that only coitus is illegal in Japan, and that does not include anal sex, oral sex, mammary intercourse or any other type of non-coital acts. This allowed some sexual services like soaplands<sup>1</sup> and fashion health<sup>2</sup>, which usually entail a massage until the customer has received an orgasm, to continue under the “sexual entertainment” regulations (Hongo, 2008).

These types of sexual services are a major income for the sex industry in modern Japan, an industry which makes approximately \$24 billions annually, making it the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest sex industry in the world, after China and Spain (Esomba, 2013). Both men and women alike have offered their sexual services long before the rise of the modern sex industry, with records as far back as the late 600s (*Man'yōshū* vol. 18:4106). It is irrefutable that there are services offered by men. However, this essay will be focusing

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<sup>1</sup> “Soapland” is a slang term for a Japanese massage parlor with cell baths and means a house consisting of rooms with beds and Japanese style bathrooms. These rooms are filled with soap and bubbles and Japanese female commercial sex workers engage in oral and vaginal sex (Koch, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Fashion health parlors, or health for short, offer oral sex and variations of other services such as anal sex. The parlors also offer health delivery, in which customers can choose the woman they would like, to come to their house or to a love hotel (Koch, 2014).

on services offered by women as there is a very limited number of academic sources on male services before the Edo period (1603-1868), that are available in the English language.

According to Tabuchi, employment opportunities for young women are few and far in-between, particularly those who do not have a college education. They are stuck in low-paying, dead-end jobs or temporary positions. The recession has only made their position worse. A growing number of young Japanese women are interested in working as a hostess. They can make from \$100,000 up to \$300,000 a year (2009). Furthermore, the jobs within the sex industry require little to no skill. Most of the women working in the sex industry seek the jobs to either fund their exploits or to save up money for their next step in their lives, such as their education or starting their own businesses (Ramseyer, 1991: 90).

Up until the Anti-Prostitution Law in 1956, brothel districts had been licensed since 1589 and prostitutes were relatively safe because they were somewhat under the protection of the government (Leupp, 2003:45). In former centuries, sexual fluidity was in fact considered completely 'normal' and a part of a man's daily life, the sexual services the brothels offer are a large part of that (Downer, 2001). This begs the question, how were these services presented, how did they function as a part of accepted societal norms and how have they developed?

It is interesting how Japan's sex industry is full of various types of legal brothels because this is completely different to Iceland where there are none who are legal (Árni Helgason, 2009). Although Iceland is considered quite liberal and often known for being the best place for a woman to live due to low amount of gender discrimination in comparison to other countries (Morrison, 2012), it is not liberal in regard to sale of any type of sexual services.

## 1. History of Sexual Services in Japan

To gain a better understanding of the modern sex industry in Japan, how it has been sustained and why it seems socially acceptable in Japan more so than in Iceland, it is imperative to look into Japan's history of women trading their bodies for financial gain.

The oldest known reference available of prostitution in Japan is written in the *Ma'nyōshu* ("A Collection of Myriad Leaves" or "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"), the oldest existing collection of Japanese poetry. It is believed to date back to at least circa 759 AD (during the Nara period (710-794)), as it is the last date mentioned in the writings. The compilation which includes about 4,500 poems, contains information about Japanese society and themes of love and longing are frequently mentioned (Hitomaru, 1990:192).

Otomo no Yakamochi's long poem in the *Man'yōshu* contains the first known reference of female entertainers in Japan, the *saburuko* (vol. 18:4106). *Saburuko* (e. serving girls) came from families who had been displaced because of factional struggles during the late 600s. They are described as being wanderers and many resorted to prostitution to survive. Other girls, who perhaps had some educational background or possessed a skill, could become successful and entertain at aristocratic gatherings. Other terms mentioned in the *Man'yōshu* were *yuko jofu* (e. itinerant women) and *ukareme* (frivolous women, floating women). Furthermore there is an entry in the *History of T'ang (T'ang shu)*<sup>3</sup> which was compiled in 941, in which the writer deduces that there were eleven Japanese dancing girls who were forcefully taken from Japan and sold. They were eventually presented to the T'ang court as an indication of gratitude or respect during the Hōki period (Oct. 770-Jan. 781) (Seigle, 1993:3-4).

Many of the women mentioned in the *Man'yōshu* resembled beggars more than prostitutes. However, according to Seigle (1993) the women who came from more fortunate backgrounds were willingly engaging in sexual services and were not forced to do so. Thus by the eighth century a precedent for full-time prostitution had been established for women whether they were wealthy or poor (p. 3).

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<sup>3</sup> Historical work about the Chinese imperial Tang dynasty which reigned from 618-907.

## 1.1 Prostitution from the Heian Period (794-1192) to the end of Azuchi-Momoyama Period (1568-1603)

Entering into the Heian period (794-1185) the number of displaced women who engaged in sexual services for payment, increased. The women making a living by selling themselves during the Heian period worked mostly in the cities, and in popular locations such as by well-traveled rivers, ocean fronts, and roads between the capital city Heian-kyo, which today is known as Kyoto, and provincial towns. In Murasaki Shibiku's *Tale of Genji*<sup>4</sup>, she mentions these women of pleasure and how they traveled in small boats, even approaching Genji's attendants at the Yodo River in Naniwa (as cited in Seigle, 1993:3).

Another important source is the *Yūjoki*, which are the records Oe no Masafusa (1040-1111) kept about the women of pleasure. Masafusa was an academic aristocrat and in his records he describes prostitutes he has seen. Regarding the date of his records, it seems likely he wrote it in the late eleventh century. He wrote in Chinese which was traditional for Japanese aristocrats, particularly men, as women commonly wrote in Japanese hiragana at the time. In his records, Masafusa has a very distinct tone, he describes the prostitutes in a way that shows appreciation and more kindness than previously mentioned in Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*. When the prostitutes would approach boats carrying men from their travels, the men would welcome them and in return for sexual favours, would give the prostitutes valuable things, such as silk fabric or rice. In addition, Masafusa wrote about Fujiwara Michinaga (966-1027), the topmost figure of the forceful Fujiwara regents, and stated that Michinaga himself patronized prostitutes.

Other accounts about prostitutes seem to express a favorable opinion. For instance in *Sarashina Nikki*, a diary written in 1020 by the daughter of Sugawara Takasuke<sup>5</sup>, the author writes about three prostitutes she saw during her travel through the dark woods of Mount Ashigara, all of different ages. One of the prostitutes was incredibly attractive and clean, and could easily pass as a servant lady from a noble family. The author mentions her beautiful singing and how she was sad to part with the prostitutes, not knowing where they appeared from or to where they disappear.

An interesting element of prostitution, is that during the Heian period it was likely introduced from China as an entertainment sector under the Japanese government (Seigle,

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<sup>4</sup> The Tale of Genji is generally considered to be the world's first novel.

<sup>5</sup> Her real name is unknown, so she is referred to as Takasuke's daughter.

1993:4). Because prostitution was partially overseen by the government, perceptions of it may have been considerably different than they are today, due to the legal nature of the practice as well as how interwoven it was into society.

To avoid confusion, prostitutes will henceforth be divided into several categories depending on their different statuses, categorizing the women of lower class with poor background as prostitutes, and women of higher class as courtesans. Courtesans differed from prostitutes in the sense that they were not only offering sexual services but they also performed by reciting poems, or even wrote their own for men of higher status. It is evident that both lower class and upper class prostitutes existed between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, and from there on, the categories would only grow in number (Seigle, 1993:3-5).

One category of courtesans were the *Shirabyoshi*, women of talent and often very experienced dancers during the Heian period who reached their peak of popularity from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries (Gallagher, 2003:99). They also sang and dressed themselves in men's clothing while they danced. Their clothes consisted of a draped overshirt, a high cap and a dagger, which are the same clothes male officials would wear during their duty. Underneath all of the clothes they would put on for a performance, they would wear their own clothing as well. Along with their modern style singing, they had either a drum or a tapping fan to perform with, which was often the focal point of the performance. Not much is known about their style of dancing other than it was very erotic and there were descriptions of "counting" and "stepping", which bears resemblance to the counting of steps during modern dance practices when trying to learn or remember new steps (Oyler, 2004:341, 346).

Shizuka Gozen was the most famous *shirabyoshi* (Seigle, 1993:6). She was the mistress of Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159-1189), who is believed to have been the most popular historical figure of his time. Yoshitsune proved to be a military genius and he managed to defeat the Taira samurai clan, one of the most powerful clans that dominated Japanese politics during the Heian period (794-1185)(Yoshitsune, 2016, Encyclopædia Britannica).

These *shirabyoshi* were prominent during power struggles of clans, when once powerful or rich families found themselves in a less fortunate situation, they would sometimes force their daughters to become a *shirabyoshi*. Because of their rich cultural background, i.e. court ladies of the preceding era, and because of their affinity for the arts, they became courtesans of higher standards (Seigle, 1993:6).

When the first *bakufu* was created in the seaside town Kamakura (1185-1333) (which is a namesake of the period 1185-1333 in Japanese history), roads between Kyoto and the Kanto region saw more people than ever. An opportunity surely not to be missed by the prostitutes, the numbers of prostitutes became higher and they sought after men along rivers, ports, and more travelled roads between the provinces. They even sought after them in front of temples and shrines. Many of these men were looking for company and it was not uncommon for men overseeing certain jurisdictions to find the travellers women to sleep with. A sort of business relationship, or an understanding developed between those seeking out women for others, and the prostitutes. Curiously, many of these understandings were between two females. The women in charge of finding the men a companion were often concubines of local rulers. They started keeping tabs of the younger women and offered them to potential customers passing through from Kyoto, reserving men at the top of the crop for themselves, such as highly regarded aristocrats but also catering to their local rulers. The people who delegated customers to prostitutes were called *chōja*, which means head of a post station or incredibly wealthy people. During the Kamakura period, women selling themselves (who were later called *chōja* as well) became more aware of the *chōja* who set them up with customers and became attached to them.

Kyoto became the center of prostitution during the Muromachi period (1336-1573). After the middle of the period ca. 1500 AD, the magisterial capital was overrun by perpetual fires and civil wars, and women who were affected by these hardships roamed the streets. In particular there were nuns and shrine maidens who became *bikuni* or itinerant nuns, and *aruki moki*, wandering shrine maidens. Both of these maiden groups came to the fore as prostitutes of medieval Japan and swiftly inspired other prostitutes who lacked a definite religious background to take up the same titles, most likely in order to attract wealthy men (Seigle, 1993:7).

100 years later, during the sixteenth century, the warriors fighting for the Ashikaga shoguns<sup>6</sup> treated the better-trained, more elegant courtesans and *shirabyoshi* with more kindness and respect than they did the ordinary prostitutes on the streets. The military government of the twelfth Ashikaga shogun, Yoshihira (in office 1521-1546), created a bureau of prostitution in hopes to boost the funds of the government and save it from bankruptcy which led to the first steps towards licensed prostitution. Consequently,

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<sup>6</sup> A Japanese title for a military ruler.

all prostitutes were taxed the same amount. It was the first governmental ordinance in Japan which recognized prostitution as a legitimate business.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) who is often regarded as Japan's second "great unifier", asserted his dominance and conquered most of the clans fighting for control. In 1584 he chose to build his castle in Osaka, which was surrounded by small communities. These communities had been centers of prostitution since the Heian period due to the convenience of travel. With Hideyoshi's castle as a center, population around the area began to increase and prostitution began to thrive.

It was in 1589, when a retainer of Hideyoshi's set up the first licensed quarter in Kyoto (Seigle, 1993:8). At this point in time, Japan had already been introduced to firearms by the Portuguese and had opened up a foreign trade in Nagasaki (Stephen & Ethel Longstreet, 2009:10).

### **1.2 The Pleasure Quarters of the Edo Period (1603-1868)**

Times were changing and the Tokugawa clan (1603-1867) took over the rule of Japan and set up the new capital of Edo in 1603, or Tokyo as it is known today. Brothels were as dispersed as they had ever been and licensed prostitution quarters were set up under the military regime. The Tokugawa Shogun was worried about the effect the brothels would have on the morals of his military so he decided to move them. The proximity of the pleasure quarters to the heart of the city had a role in his decision as well. Brothels which previously were scattered about, were now being directly controlled by the government, and were ordered to gather into a specific area of Kyoto. The specific area in question was the Shimabara district, a licensed quarter which would continue to operate until 1958 (Martin, J., 2014; Martin, P., 2014:142-143).

In Kyoto, brothels were taken into control by moving them to Shimabara district. However, the capital was moved from Kyoto to Edo in 1603, and more brothels were being established there than before.

According to a study by Becker and Ernest (1899), Mr. Shoji Jinyemon in the year of 1612, came up with the idea of gathering all the brothels in Edo into just one special quarter of the city, which he had discussed a great deal with his fellow colleagues before deciding to present the idea to the government. When presenting his proposition to the government he mentioned that Kyoto had licensed districts but there were in Edo. He

talked about many reasons in which Edo would greatly benefit from a special quarter. A few of the reasons he mentioned were that men were staying day in and day out at a brothel, squandering all their money and neglecting their businesses. Everyone would benefit greatly from a prohibition of a stay at a brothel for longer than twenty-four hours. Another reason was the practice of enticing female children and even kidnapping them, despite it being illegal, to become prostitutes, all for the “good” of the brothel keepers. Meaning they would sell them for a high price but give the children they’d raised to become prostitutes little of the money they’ve earned, keeping most of it for themselves. Jinyemon was summoned by the Court in the following spring of 1613 to discuss the matter further and again in 1617 when the Court had decided to grant him the petition. As Jinyemon’s petition was granted, his first promise was that there would be no prostitutes allowed in Edo or in any neighbouring area except in the licensed district. To keep control over the new pleasure quarter, regulations were set in place. They were as follows:

- (1.) The profession of brothel-keeping shall not be carried on in any place other than the regular prostitute quarter, and in future no request for the attendance of a courtesan at a place outside the limits of the enclosure shall be complied with.
- (2.) No guest shall remain in the brothel for more than twenty-four hours.
- (3.) Prostitutes are forbidden to wear clothes with gold and silver embroidery on them; they are to wear ordinary dyed stuffs.
- (4.) Brothels are not to be built of imposing appearance, and the inhabitants of prostitute quarters shall discharge the same duties (as firemen, etc.,) as ordinary residents in other part of *Yedo* city.
- (5.) Proper enquiries shall be instituted into the person of any visitor to a brothel, no matter whether he be gentleman or commoner, and in case any suspicious individual appears information shall be give to the *Bugyō-sho*(office of the city Governor). (Becker & Ernest, 1899, p. 4-8)

The reason behind prostitutes not being allowed to wear clothes with gold and silver embroidery are likely due to class division. Prostitutes were considered below tradesman and merchants and put in the same category as *hinin* (nonhumans), most of whom were beggars. Courtesans who had a patron were the only exception (Downer, 2001). Jinyemon was then appointed director of the prostitute quarter, and as such, was to oversee and observe these regulations mentioned above which were set by the Governor who possessed administrative, military, and judicial power. Once the pleasure

quarter had been built, it received the name *Yoshiwara*, which means moor of good luck (Becker & Ernest, 1899, p. 8-9).

In administrative terms, brothel quarters appealed to the *bakufu*<sup>7</sup> on three counts: they simplified the collection of brothel fees, made it easier to dictate public morality, and allowed a tighter grasp of security in urban areas (Lublin, 2010:103).

The brothels were organized into several classes in order for customers to choose the type of service they desired with more ease. Prices depended on the type of woman desired, if they were considered very beautiful, skilled or famous, they would be more expensive.

The classes were five. First class was called *Omaakagi*, second class was called *Hammagaki* and third class was *Daicho komise*. The other two lower classes had little room for time or grace (Stephen & Ethel Longstreet, 2009:44-47).

The prostitutes would be on display in the front of the brothels, behind metal rods, to showcase that they were available for purchase. The brothels had different structures depending on how expensive their services were. The most expensive ones were large lattice houses, but the cheapest ones had horizontal rods rather than vertical ones. This was so that no man, no matter what state he was in after drinking, could not mistake the cost and class of the women he was seeking.

Before the men were able to purchase sexual services, they had to go through a teahouse. There were other teahouses which were only really meant for serving tea but there were in fact, 'introducing' teahouses as well. Introducing teahouses were a way for the Japanese to save face and cater to the male drive in ease, behind the curtains. This meant that all clients had to go to a teahouse if they wished to see a prostitute. Maids of the teahouses would greet the men with a bow and a dip, they would then proceed to make them feel comfortable and keep them entertained throughout their entire stay. The maids would then offer the clients menus with pictures of women, or ask them what they wanted. The clients were able to choose between the different women on the menu, and after they had chosen they were taken to the brothel to meet the women they had chosen (Stephen & Ethel Longstreet, 2009:44-47).

Brothels thrived in the Edo period and the *Yoshiwara* remained to be the most famous pleasure quarter, despite more and more quarters being raised all over Japan. The prostitutes were not alone in these quarters. The *geisha* were very prominent figures

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<sup>7</sup> Military government of Japan.

during the Edo period. The lines between a *geisha* and a prostitute have not always been clear, as the *geisha* to a certain extent, could offer herself to her client, often in exchange for favours and gifts, however, she may also choose not to do so.

### **1.3 The Meiji Period (1868-1912)**

During almost the entirety of the Edo period (1603-1868) Japan had been closed to foreigners from circa 1633 to 1853. The Japanese were also forbidden to leave the country, or they would risk not being able to return again, or even the penalty of death. It was Ieyasu, the founder and first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate who eventually carried out the closed country edict of 1635. Christianity, which had resided in Japan since the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1549, was banned and mass murders of Christians were carried out. The Tokugawa shogunate was worried about residing foreigners gaining more influence and power. The shogunate enacted a policy of “sakoku”, isolation of Japan from foreign influences. It wasn't until almost 220 years later when Commodore Matthew Perry was sent on behalf of America to force open ports in Japan, which the Japanese eventually did in 1853. After ending the isolation, Japan went through major political, economic and social change which led to modernization and Westernization (Schirokauer, Lurie, & Gay, 2013).

The Meiji government acquired the administrative roles of the Yoshiwara pleasure district and made a number of key changes, including mandatory testing of all prostitutes working in brothels for venereal disease, in an attempt to modernize. According to Elizabeth Dorn Lublin (2010), by 1881 the Japanese were requiring periodic examinations of all brothel prostitutes, when previously they had only tested the prostitutes who serviced foreigners (p. 104).

Japan had a system of legalized prostitution and now that the country had a new position within a world community, the government was struggling with different issues, one of which was wanting to keep up with other foreign nations, especially the Western ones. Victorians were shocked and questioned whether a country with legalized prostitution could in fact be civilized, and Japan feeling the pressure from both domestic and international critics, eventually gave way. The discussion of freeing prostitutes from their indentured contracts had been present since the Edo period (1603-1868) but it wasn't until the Meiji period (1868-1912) when those discussions began to have effect. In 1872 the Meiji government enacted a Prostitution Emancipation Act which liberated both prostitutes and *geisha* from their contracts and labored subjection, and had a momentous

effect on a national scale. The Prostitution Emancipation Act sparked worldwide discussions, the general view of prostitutes had not included words like “liberation” or “freedom”, however the possibility that they could be unconstrained became more probable. Conversely, even though many women were indeed freed by the Prostitution Emancipation Act, a number of women were devoid of employment and earnings, which simply led to prostitution resuming and going further underground (Dalby, 1983:63).

Women who chose to work as prostitutes after the Prostitution Emancipation Act were now criticized for choosing to continue to work as such, whereas before they did not have much choice for they were bound by an indentured contract, and were pitied or otherwise respected for their devoutness. Therefore, without the contracts and being able to choose their own path in life, the prostitutes came to be viewed negatively (Hane, 1982:207-208). The stigmatization of the prostitutes followed them into every time period since, and typically the prostitutes of the Meiji Period were later considered more discreet and gracious than the next generation, which were the prostitutes who served soldiers during the World Wars and in the Allied occupation of Japan thereafter. Long forgotten were the views of romanticised courtesans of Yoshiwara.

## 2. The US Occupation of Japan

In 1923 the great earthquake severely damaged the Yoshiwara district. The district was rebuilt but never returned to its former state (Ringdal, 2004:321). According to Katharine Moon, prostitute numbers began to rise considerably, mostly due to American soldier presence in World War II (Moon, 2009).

The number of lower grade prostitutes increased. Some began to do their own cheaper take on a *geisha* or a courtesan by recreating the specific makeup or clothing *geishas* wore and advertising themselves as authentic *geishas*. The prostitutes knew American soldiers were drawn to the mysteriousness of the *geisha* and used it to their advantage. Between the wars, prostitutes began using western style makeup and started wearing high heels. Many other changes were to follow as Japan began adopting their own take on all things Western. Increased tourism as well as industrial conversion all had impact on the moral climate of Japan.

Contemporary buildings replaced the teahouses, and in place of the lanterns came advertisements which included words such as girls, beer, dance and jazz.

Up until the end of the Second World War, prostitution was mainly controlled by the brothels but with Western influence, and Japan imported the call girl concept (Stephen & Ethel Longstreet, 2009:216-217). A call girl, or sometimes referred to as an escort, is someone who does not work at a brothel, does not publicly display her profession and is available through appointment only, usually by telephone (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

Progressive Japanese men were accepting of the new standards and premarital sex. Inexperienced sex partners were in favour to the professional prostitute. Thus, the whole circumstances the Yoshiwara was built on, became tired. The manners, the fixed routine and tradition in which men and the Yoshiwara courtesans took part in made way for a much laxer environment. Most Japanese women were able to break away from the stigmatization that they would be disgraced or dishonoured as brothel prostitutes, and they were now sexually available to the men of their choice no matter what class they belonged to. The status of women was rising, and people were paying less mind to the codes of Shinto, Buddhism and missionary Christianity (Stephen & Ethel Longstreet, 2009:217-218). However, during the Second World War Japan adopted forced recruitment to brothels, going the opposite way as other Western countries during that time (Ringdal, 2004:326).

## 2.1 Military Prostitution

Moon states that military prostitution has been so commonplace that people seldom think about why it was created, and how it is connected to warfare. This topic has only recently become popular in the past 30 years, it's a difficult subject to broach because of how personal and subjective people's accounts are (Moon, 2009).

In World War II, when the Japanese troops moved in on Shanghai, there were mass rapes of Chinese civilians. The army lost control of a part of its troops and although the military had access to an astounding number of brothels, this did not prevent the rapes of innocent people (Ringdal, 2004:328). In 1930s Japan, a common view was that the men who were in the Japanese army were among the nation's most vigorous young men, considered to be at the peak of their sexual energy and in need for a way to release it, there were very few chances of social or emotional diversion due to the nature of their job. They lived in a very controlled environment and sex was a favorite topic, often the only release of stress. Furthermore, it was believed that the discipline as well as the line of command were strengthened if the soldiers could have a sexual release and after two thousand years, this had become a seemingly logical fact, as well as soldiers needing brothels especially when the army switches from passive to active warfare. This emphasizes the requirement for preoccupation among the fighters, regardless of how minimal leisure time they have. Even if it is an intimate encounter lasting a day or 15 minutes, it infers that the warrior is an individual, a one of a kind person free from the dread of projectiles and bombs, discharged from lines of summon and the military chain of command. The apprehension of never again having the capacity to experience such closeness measures each experience intensely no matter whether the sex is paid for or not (Ringdal, 2004:321-322).

In 1930s and 1940s Japan, the dominant view was that a man's capability as a warrior was directly linked with their sexual organ and several other sex-related superstitions existed within the army. Unsurprisingly Japan adopted a policy of forced recruitment to brothels, going the opposite direction as the West which experienced a fall in recruitment to the sex industry.

Men who joined the Japanese army and had no previous sexual experience before were considered a threat to the army and the emperor himself, if they were found out by their army unit, they were forced to pay a visit to a brothel and would be watched through small holes in the wall. Resistance was futile. In Western countries, individuality is highly

valued but in Japan this is considered to be a negative quality. One was supposed to focus on the team and show uniformity, not having a sexual experience in the army was considered deviant behavior and that might explain why it was important not only to the army where uniformity was especially notable, but also to the state.

As mentioned in chapter 1.4 the Japanese state was involved with prostitution and had been since 1880s, for over 400 years. This is notable because the state has been involved for longer than any other country (Ringdal, 2004:326-327).

Business visionaries started finding market within other Asian countries as well as the United States and began exporting *karayuki-san*<sup>8</sup>. This was a focal part in Japan's economic growth beginning in the 1900s and lasting into the twenties, *karayuki-san* also helped introduce Japanese goods into Asian markets (Shimizu, 2007:41). During those same years, the Japanese military began its conquest. They annexed Okinawa and the Ryukyu islands in 1885, followed by Formosa (now Taiwan) and eventually Korea in 1910, which the Japanese renamed Chosen. They also claimed the Sakhalin island and Micronesia.

Japan was very politically ambitious, and its army grew rapidly. Twenty years later, in the very beginning of the 1930s, Japan annexed Manchuria and renamed it Manchukuo. The Japanese army had already set its sight on China by this point (Ringdal, 2004:327). There was a political discord between the two leading political parties in China, which Japan saw as a great opportunity to take advantage of ("Internal Strife in China," 2017).

As the army grew, so did the brothels and they began experiencing recruitment issues. More jobs for women were created outside agriculture due to economic growth, and this removed pressure for the families to uproot their daughters. The demand for prostitutes gradually started to surpass the supply. The average age of Japanese prostitutes began to increase toward middle age around 1920, they also began to contract sexually transmitted diseases over and over. Amid these years the Japanese executed a few changes, starting with sponsorship of the red-light district in Seoul, then by supplementing Japan's brothels with younger prostitutes from Korea. They did the "recruitment" by sending brokers to poor farmer families in the countryside of Korea. Once the Korean prostitutes

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<sup>8</sup> Karayuki-san were Japanese woman working as prostitutes outside of Japan. They worked mainly in Southeast Asia but also China, Siberia, Manchuria, the South Pacific, Australian colonies, and the United States (Mihalopoulos, 1994).

were in Japan, they received a Japanese name and were supposed to dress and behave like their Japanese counterparts (Ringdal, 2004:327-328). The Korean women along with other women from Japanese territories during their colonial expansions before and during the Second World War were called comfort women (a euphemism for a prostitute) and were forced to work (Schellstede, 2007:7). The exact number of comfort women is unknown, but the number is believed to be anywhere between 100,000 to 200,000 (Kim-Gibson, 1999:40). The pressure was relieved off of some of the Korean women when Manchuria was annexed, as there was a new supply of Russian, Chinese and Jewish women to Japan's sex industry.

A couple of years later, Japan's army moved in on China during the battle of Shanghai in 1932. The military authorities lost partial control of their troops and although there was a myriad of brothels, it did not prevent a mass rape of civilians (Ringdal, 2004:328). The Japanese army marched from Shanghai towards Nanking and in 1937, they invaded Nanking and committed heinous war crimes by mass raping and murdering civilians. Today this incident is referred to as the Rape of Nanking or the Nanking Massacre. The reports of the incident reached Emperor Hirohito and he along with Military Chiefs, Counselors and Ministers, made several reforms to reduce the negative image of Japan which was going around in international press. Among those reforms was the creation and systematic extensions of comfort stations by the Japanese military. The comfort stations had been around since 1932 but after the Rape of Nanking, the comfort stations became institutions of sexual slavery and women and girls were kidnapped and sent to brothels (Argibay, 2003:376).

Once Japan had set up comfort stations and conquered much of China, it joined the Tripartite Pact in 1940 with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, in hopes of preventing the United States attacking as they moved on to conquer Southeast Asia. However, Japan's resources to facilitate war was declining (Nish, 2002:139-141) and they surrendered shortly after the United States nuclear bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Holmes, 2005).

The United States occupied Japan and the government feared that American soldiers in Japan would rape the Japanese women, their wives, sisters and daughters. This is directly tied with the Japanese soldiers raping women in China as previously mentioned. To deal with this threat, they decided to set up brothels for the occupation troops (Kristof, 1995).

## 2.2 Recreation and Amusement Association

The Japanese government feared that the American soldiers would behave the same way as the Japanese troops had. They set up a front organization known as RAA in English, short for Recreation and Amusement Association (*Tokushu Ian Shisetsu Kyōkai* in Japanese), and created brothels for the soldiers (Kristof, 1995).

In fact, only 3 days after Japan's surrender, Prime Minister Higashikuni and Vice Prime Minister Konoé had already planned for ways to "protect" Japanese women from American soldiers. The government gave the Japanese police an order to organize the brothels and enforce them, not only to prevent the rape of women, but also to entertain the Americans so as to become their friends. However, what protection of women meant to the government, was sacrificing other lower status women to the brothels. In patriarchal Japan, the men in power sought after women who were already prostitutes and would-be prostitutes, to work in the brothels of the RAA. The state did not only recruit new women but also advertised in the *Mainichi Shimbun*<sup>9</sup> in 1945 for "special women employees". The advertisement listed that the women would get clothes, shelter, paid travel expenses if they lived in the countryside, high wage and loans. In addition, there was a billboard in Ginza that read: "To the new Japanese women! As part of state emergency institution for postwar task, we need cooperation of the new Japanese women to participate in the important task of comforting stationed troops." However, this was not the only purpose of the RAA. In the commencement speech of the RAA, the purpose of the comfort women was to sustain and cultivate the purity of the race for the next hundred years and beyond. Furthermore, the RAA was supposed to become the basis of postwar social order (Lie, 1997). Many women applied as unemployment and hunger was quite prominent, especially after Japan having been at war for several decades. Other reasons for joining included loyalty to the emperor and the mentality of patriotic self-sacrifice.

The RAA was abolished in 1946 by the order of the General Headquarters of the US Occupation forces (GHQ). GHQ also ordered all "public" prostitution to cease. The official reason for the abolishment was because it was in direct violation of women's human rights and that it was undemocratic, but in actuality, it was because soldiers were contracting venereal diseases at an alarming rate. Around 90% of the RAA women tested positive for infection a few months after the abolition when the prohibition went into

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<sup>9</sup> Main newspaper in Japan.

effect (Dower, 2000:127-130). That would mean around 49,500 out of 55,000 prostitutes who worked there at the time it was disbanded, were infected (Lie, 1997).

### **2.3 The Prostitution Prevention Law of 1956**

Although GHQ had ordered the abolition of licensed prostitution in 1946, it did not take effect until 1956. After the RAA closed in 1946, the women ended up on the streets and this led to a significant increase in streetwalkers. Venereal disease continued to spread, so closing the RAA down in hopes to reduce infections did not prove to be effective at all. That same year public licensed prostitution was back on track via ‘special eating and drinking districts’, or red light districts (Shiga-Fujime & Findlay-Kaneko, 1993). This is because GHQ and the Japanese government maintained the legal basis for the prostitution quarters by allowing the sale of sexual services undertaken of one’s own free will.

Women working in the red light districts periodically received medical examinations to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. The US Military Police and the Japanese government picked up suspected prostitutes from the streets and coerced them to go through medical examinations in hopes to prevent the spread of STDs. As many as 15,000 women were arrested all over Japan.

In 1948, GHQ requested restrictions on prostitution of the Japanese government. The Prostitution Punishment Bill was submitted to the Diet, and it would later frame the premise of the Anti-Prostitution law.

Although the establishment of the 1956 regulations for the prevention of prostitution was disguised as a movement that fought to protect women’s rights, the reality was far from it, and the Prostitution Punishment Bill submitted to the Diet in 1948, failed to pass. This led to local governments in Japan to create their own regulations concerning the control of prostitution despite it not being national law, and in 1955, a year before the Anti-Prostitution Law was passed, 63 local governments had some kind of Anti-Prostitution regulations in place at the behest of the US military. The main goal of the US military was to get rid of street prostitution in hopes to eradicate STDs but when the Korean War broke out, it accompanied an explosion of US soldiers buying sexual services which further escalated the number of local governments establishing regulations. Wherever a US base was located, there were flourishing entertainment districts.

The Anti-Prostitution regulations the localities had in place were not made to eliminate the sale of sex, but to eliminate STDs. By criminalizing the sale of sex, it

provided law enforcement with the authority to arrest women and force them to get checked and treated for STDs. Banning prostitution did not stop the selling or buying of sexual services, but only put women in weaker positions. The US military's goal of "requesting" local governments to establish regulations on prostitution was simply to protect the troops contracting STDs. If the localities failed to comply, they were threatened by declaring areas off-limits to soldiers, which was not feasible as the soldiers brought funds which the localities had an economic need for.

Members of Japanese anti-prostitution groups praised the execution of US military's policy towards sex. The groups had been calling for stricter crackdown on STDs since the prewar period. Women's groups also praised the US military, which might sound strange, but the matter of fact is that these women's groups were not directed at the occupation forces but at the women who "lured" them into prostitution. Women in prostitution were considered a disgrace, their occupation considered to be shameful and tarnishing the honor of Japan.

In 1952 the Committee for the Promotion of the Establishment of Legislation Banning Prostitution was formed by members of women's groups (the Japan-WCTU, the Japan League of Women Voters, Japanese Association of University Women and the Women's Peace Association). Many other powerful organizations joined and together they fought to submit a bill to the Diet, to enforce police crackdowns and to establish anti-prostitution policies. In 1954, a new committee was arranged by the Japanese government called the Policy Committee on the Prostitution Problem. In that committee were famous feminists such as Kubushiro Ochimi, Muraoka Hanako, Hirabayashi Taiko, and Yamataka Shigeri. They garnered attention from more women's groups and finally in 1956, the government's Prostitution Prevention Law which is still in force to this day, was established (Fujime, 2006:38-42). According to Bayley (1978) the Prostitution Prevention Law entails the following:

The law prohibits three acts: public solicitation, provision of facilities, and management of prostitutes. The law does not prohibit private sex acts for money. A man and a woman may legally negotiate a price for sexual services and go to a hotel to consummate the arrangement. As long as everything is discreetly done, neither party is punishable. It is not commercial sex that the law enjoins but public display and knowing facilitation by third parties. A prostitute and her clients cannot be punished but a landlord who knew her trade could be. The prostitute herself is liable to legal sanctions only if she solicits publicly. In the United States where prostitution is illegal everywhere

except a few counties in Nevada, participation in sex for money is the key prohibition. In many states fornication outside of wedlock, with or without payment, is still a criminal offense. In Japan neither the act of sex nor the commercial nexus is punishable (p.113).

This of course, did not prevent Japan's sex industry to continue to grow and flourish in the following years.

### 3. The Modern Sex Industry in Japan

After the Second World War, the sex industry relocated to Shinjuku, Tokyo. Prostitution had been centered around rivers and ports since the Heian Period because they had a lot of traffic going through them (Seigle, 1993:3). It is interesting because the Japanese euphemism for the nightlife and sex industry is called *mizu shobai*, which translates to water trade (Desser, 1995:214). It could be that the water trade got its name because of its former proximity to water.

Similar to prostitution being centered around heavily-commuted rivers and ports, Shinjuku station is now the busiest railway station in the world and a home to the sex industry (Sinclair, 2006:10). The area closest to Shinjuku station became a commercial and entertainment center and a popular meeting place for salarymen<sup>10</sup> and female workers (Freedman, 2011:117).

Kabukichō in Shinjuku, often referred to as the Sleepless Town, is the most famous red-light district in Japan. It has a variety of establishments but is best known for prostitution, hostess clubs, pornography and sex shows, most of which are run by the *yakuza*<sup>11</sup>. Kabukichō's biggest clientele are the salarymen who work in the area or pass by on their commute (Cybriwsky, 2011:109). It was actually in Kabukichō that Japan's first strip show occurred (catered to American troops). Present-day Kabukichō has more than 5000 commercial sex shops stacked together in multi-story complexes, covered with neon signs and is less than a 2.5 km<sup>2</sup> (Sinclair, 2006:10).

According to a report done by Havocscope (2015) Japan's sex industry brings in \$24 billion annually or 2.3 trillion yen, and accounts for 2-3% of Japan's GDP. The report also includes that a hostess in the high-end entertainment city of Ginza, can make over \$19,500 per month (2 million yen), and a prestigious hostess with customers who pay very generously, can earn up to \$97,000 (10 million yen) a month in bonuses. Many young women are attracted to the sex industry because of the glamour image presented in magazines which also include hundreds of pages of recruitment. There are more examples of this in the media, one of which is a big movie hit called *Platonic Sex* which covers a romanticized story of a girl's recruitment into the sex industry (French, 2001). However, young women are not the only target audience of the sex industry. There are niches for just about any age or body type. There are cases of women who have studied

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<sup>10</sup> A Japanese white-collar businessman.

<sup>11</sup> Also called the Japanese Mafia, and is a transnational organized crime syndicate in Japan.

and go to work in their field but aren't making enough money, so they start working in the sex industry on the side, and sometimes, full-time (Kuchikomi, 2016).

But how exactly did the modern sex industry become so successful? Let's take a look back at the 1960s working class women and corporate entertainment and how that grew into booming business.

### 3.1 Big Business and Working-class Women

Professional women in Japan are a minority, and the water trade offers occupation to millions who cannot find proper work or work that fits them. In 1960s Japan this was the case for many working-class women. Kanematsu Sachiko, a social worker who has worked with women in the sex industry since the enactment of the Prostitution Prevention Law of 1956, reported that more than half of prostitutes come from a poor socio-economic background. She also pointed out that despite the fact that Japan experienced a postwar economic growth which led to families no longer resorting to selling their daughters to brothels, prostitution had increased considerably in Shinjuku and continues to do so today (as cited in Norma, 2011:513). Fukutomi Tarou, a cabaret bar chain owner wrote in 1982 that approximately 90% of the hostesses working in Tokyo, were not actually locals but came from rural areas of Japan (as cited in Norma, 2011:513)

According to *Baishun taisaku shingikai* (e. update on anti-prostitution measures) hostessing (*jokyuu* or *hosutesu* in Japanese) was the most popular occupation among women working in the sex industry in the 1960s. It's a type of entertainment service in which the female worker engages in attentive conversation with a male, pours drinks for him and they party together. Hostesses worked at a variety of venues such as hostess bars, *geisha* restaurants, bathhouses and cabaret clubs. It was legal to provide women and drinks but they had to be presented as „hostesses“ and not prostitutes as stated in the *Fuuzoku toshimari hou* (adult entertainment industry law) of 1954 (as cited in Norma, 2011:513).

Today, big businesses going to host clubs and other similar establishments is accepted as tradition of corporate entertainment. The main purpose of corporate entertainment is to connect together as a group and improve work relations (Allison, 2009:14). Group work is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and considered important to maintain the harmony both inside the workplace and outside (Sugimoto, 2010).

In the biggest companies, there are budgets specifically meant for entertainment expenses. Prof. Allison (2009), the author of *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* and also a former hostess in Tokyo states that:

Big business perceives that corporate entertainment is a mean of making itself stronger and more competitive, and therefore corporate expenditures for recreation increase even in years when the economy is depressed or when the real economic growth is lower than expected. (p.9)

Due to businesses relying so heavily on the sex industry, it started to grow rapidly. Japan's speedy economic growth from 1955 to 1973 resulted in middle class men being able to afford sexual services which created a vulnerability for working class women. As the demand for more sex industry workers increased more women became prostitutes disguised as hostesses (Norma, 2011, p. 513). A staggering amount of different establishments were created to keep up with the sex industry's demand.

### **3.2 Types of Services in Modern Japan**

Entering into 1980s Japan, a "new sex industry" (*nyū fūzoku*) was being formulated and it was centered around roleplaying and stimulation. Red-light districts started materializing all across Tokyo, usually close to major train and subway stations bustling with life, shopping centers and entertainment hubs.

Delivery escort businesses, called *deriheru* (short for delivery health) dominated the market after its legal recognition in 1999 as mobile businesses. Before their recognition, they weren't under police surveillance and unlike other store-based businesses did not have zoning restriction, so they were less expensive to run. *Deriheru* existed before 1999 but by giving them legal recognition, the police could at least keep an eye on them as they had to be officially registered. This became the new approach to the sex industry, acknowledging businesses by incorporating them into existing legal framework to facilitate cooperation with the police (Koch, 2014, p. 5, 83-84).

Although *deriheru* was extremely popular, the sex industry in Japan is known for its diverse, sometimes outlandish concepts. The Japanese sex industry includes but is not limited to: nude theaters, touch pubs, pink salons, peeping rooms, soaplands, fashion health, hotel health, image clubs, happening bars and couples' cafes. Here below, is a list of some of the services and what they include to showcase the diversity of the industry.

- **Delivery health** a massage service in which the customer picks a masseuse to their liking and gets them delivered, usually to the customer's hotel. It typically involves a body wash and massage from a topless woman which ends in fellatio or a hand job (Staff, 2017).
- **Nude theaters** are more or less the Japanese equivalent of a strip club, however, the audience members applaud after performances to show their admiration. Most nude theaters also allow customers to explore the dancer's genitalia by shining a flashlight on the women and/or drinking *sake* off of them. There are private rooms provided for those who seek participation (Sinclair, 2006:46).
- **Touch pubs and Pink salons** are both hostess clubs in which the customer can sexually touch their hostess, but the difference between the two is that pink salons additionally offer oral sex in open booths (Sinclair, 2006:54).
- **Peeping rooms** in which customers can spy on women anonymously through holes or one-way mirrors, some offer more after the peep show (Sinclair, 2006:76).
- **Soaplands** are bathhouse brothels which include a scrub, erotic massage, followed by fellatio in a bathtub. After the bath the customer gets a full body massage on an air mattress, and it concludes with intercourse on a towel-covered bed. Vaginal penetration is not legal but soaplands are known for ignoring this law (Sinclair, 2006:66).
- **Fashion health** in which women wear various types of costumes, the customers can usually choose what type of costume, a range of sexual services are offered but they do not include full intercourse (Sinclair, 2006:86).
- **Hotel health** are oral sex clubs located in apartments and hotels (Sinclair, 2006:102).
- **Image clubs** sexual services provided in detailed fantasy-themed rooms (Sinclair, 2006:132).
- **Happening bars** are bars in which you can engage in sexual encounters with other people, you can wear a bath robe or choose to go nude. Dimly lit play rooms, peepholes and one-way mirrors are also provided.
- **Couples' cafes** are very similar to happening bars but only allow male-and-female pairs. Couples are encouraged to engage with other couples and they can spy or listen to others (Sinclair, 2006:164).

There are many other types of services which do not specialize in prostitution, like offering customers opportunity to talk to women in telephone clubs while watching adult videos. (Sinclair, 2006, p. 7, 174). There's also compensated dating, where a man can pay a girl, often very young ones (minors), to go out on a date with him and pretend that they are a couple (Tormsen, 2016). This is likely due to Japanese people losing interest in conventional relationships as well as having less sexual contact. Furthermore, the number of single Japanese people is at its peak (Haworth, 2013). According to sociologist Masahiro Yamada, softer services which do not offer vaginal or oral sex seem to be gaining popularity, and services offering intimacy and romance are growing in number (as cited in Haworth, 2013).

## Conclusion

The historic demand for brothels in Japan has led to flourishing of various types of sexual services, and legal ambiguity and indifference further enabled the sex industry. Prostitution was closely tied with the government, as evident of licensed brothel quarters in 1589, and later during the World Wars when the general view was that soldiers needed intimate contact to function properly within the army. This view played a large part in the development of forced recruitment to brothels, and the creation of the Recreation and Amusement Association during the Occupation of Japan. While the General Headquarters of the US Occupation forces ordered the abolition of licensed prostitution with the Prostitution Prevention Law of 1956, this only led to sexual services masking themselves as ‘special eating and drinking’ establishments, offering sexual acts behind closed doors. Furthermore, only coitus is illegal, but anal sex, fellatio and handjobs remain legal to this day. This is a large factor in the growth of various types of sexual services available in Japan.

When Japan experienced a swift economic growth from 1955 to 1973, middle-class men were able to afford sexual services, whereas previously, only elite businessmen were able to afford them. This increased the demand for sex workers and many working-class women which were usually of poor socio-economic background sought jobs in the sex industry as a result.

Soaplands, host clubs and delivery health were among establishments that grew rapidly around train stations and shopping malls in the 1980s. Business men relied on corporate entertainment in order to connect together as group by going to host clubs (which frequently facilitated prostitution) and similar establishments in the sex industry.

Different types of sexual services centered around roleplay and stimulation became the focal point of the sex industry in the 1980s. Delivery escort business dominated the market in 1999 as mobile businesses because they were cheap to run and were given legal recognition. This meant that the businesses had to be officially registered, a tactic by the government in order to keep an eye on the businesses. This became the new approach to the sex industry.

While the sex trade offers sexual endeavors, it is versatile and offers services catered towards romance or intimacy as well. Those are the types of services that are growing in the modern sex industry, most likely due to the Japanese people showing less interest in sex. Japan's sex industry undeniably has one of the most intriguing sexual histories, but it will be interesting to see how it develops further.

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