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Title: The Japanese Sex Industry: The Role of Hostess Clubs

Introduction

The role of the sex industry in Japan will be presented throughout this paper. In specific how hostess clubs are necessary spaces for the precarious individuals living in modern Japan. Modern Japan consists of socially isolated individuals who use services like hostess clubs to survive. This paper will further explain how different types of sex work provides different benefits.

The upbringing of the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956 is a focal point for the rise of popularity for hostess clubs. Hostess clubs were legalized through the adult entertainment law (*Fuuzoku torishimari hou*) of 1954. The women who do work in the sex industry are usually looked down upon because of the nature of their work. Some women are ashamed of acknowledging the nature of their jobs. Although this work is not the safest it is where women who are struggling to find a job turn to. The industry carries a stigma, but no one knows what these women working as hosts provide for socially withdrawn individuals. Men and women who work in the industry have the opportunity to succeed because of their unusually high pay. No regular job will pay a person the same amount of money made as a hostess. The sex industry has an immense impact on contemporary Japanese society. Hostess clubs play an important role as a space for social interaction, particularly among working-class men.

Literature Review

The topic of hostess clubs and the sex industry has been well-researched in recent years. Among a recent review of articles, the authors Fukuda Shiho and Caroline Norma communicate their specific findings in regards to host and hostess clubs in Japan. In Fukuda Shiho's "Hostess Girls" he sheds light on hostess work in the sex industry. Fukuda Shiho states,

In Japan, a hostess is a young woman who entertains men at bars or clubs. Customers pay large sums of money to these women for the pleasure of their company, for flirting, but not sex. There are at least 70,000 such establishments in Japan... once frowned upon along with sex work, the job of a hostess has been gaining popularity among young women. (1)

Modern young women desire to work in the industry because of how fast they can earn income and other women work in the industry because they have no other option. The intention behind working as a hostess in Japan varies, but it has gotten a lot of attention and it has grown immensely. The large sums of money are what attracts young women to want to work there.

On the other hand, Caroline Norma describes the darker side of the sex industry and how it is used for corporate entertainment. Norma's article "Prostitution and the 1960s' Origins of Corporate Entertaining in Japan" describes the initial origins of prostitution and how Japanese men think they need the industry to do business. Sex workers in the industry were never treated fairly and continue to be treated unfairly. In this article, she states, "At the same time that men are restrained from buying women for prostitution, they must nonetheless continue to find hostesses "sexually interesting" (Norma 511). Women working in the industry have to look out for themselves and never feel too comfortable because rich men who have the money can try to manipulate them. Women in hostess bars are susceptible to sexual assault due to the kind of work they perform.

Methodology

In order to investigate the role of hostess clubs in Japan, I will be exploring scholarly articles, a documentary, and recent newspaper reportage.

Research Findings/Policy Recommendations/Conclusions

Origins of Prostitution and the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956

Prostitution has been part of Japanese society since before there was a record to keep track of it. Prostitution is when women sexually engage with men for payment. Japan had been exposed to prostitution since the Edo period between 1603 and 1868 (Hix 1). Author Lisa Hix displays images of beautiful women who were advertised for prostitution, to capture the eyes of their audience primarily being rich Japanese men. In this era, women did not have a choice regarding their occupation because they were sold by their parents at the age of seven or eight. Something to note about these paintings is that they were beautifully made, but in all of them these women are holding a peony flower which was a symbol of female sexuality.

Furthermore, before the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956, there was a boom in prostitution that caused the law. After World War II women suffered severe layoffs and exclusion from the economy. Women that were depressed and came from low-income families turned to the adult entertainment industry which led to the “prostitution boom” (Yuki and Findlay-Kaneko 5). Women were forced out of work faced with lots of problems and not enough rights so they decided to turn to prostitution. According to Yuki and Findlay-Kaneko, “Fukuoka Prefecture became the largest supplier of prostitutes” (6). Soon after this boom, the cabinet decided to pass the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956 that became fully effective in April of 1958. This law prohibited prostitution, yet the sex industry found a loophole to bypass the restrictions. Hostess clubs are living proof that although the law is in place there are still other needs that can be

fulfilled. Norma states, “In an elaborate argument, she suggests that hostess bars preclude prostitution precisely because they must cater to men's requirements in corporate entertaining” (511). Hostess clubs are aiming to provide needs where they sexually excite customers but at the same time serving as places where business can be done and no sexual intercourse is present.

Benefits of Hostess Clubs for Precarious Japan

Hostess Clubs provide a multitude of services and benefits to the precarious Japanese individuals. Pardis Mahdavi wrote an article titled “Seduction and the Self: Movements through Precarity, Race, and Sexuality in Japanese Host Clubs” where he describes the immense impact hostess clubs have brought to individuals he interviewed. Mahdavi describes the role in hostess clubs as “‘romancing’, ‘paying attention to’, ‘caring for’ and ‘having fun with’ their clients, placing them solidly within categories of ‘intimate labour’ – or labour that entails the performance of care, love or intimacy as a service” (2). Typically hostess clubs provide all the services mentioned above. These services keep lost individuals afloat. When individuals have the money, they choose to attend these clubs to feel part of society producing a sense of acceptance. For those who are feeling lost, when they step foot in a host/hostess club they feel welcome, and all their worries are left at the doorstep. Although these clubs are part of precarious work in Japanese society, they have always been hospitable places for those living on ‘edge’, and they serve as, “important sites for understanding precarity, as well as possibilities for agency and meaning-making” (Mahdavi 2). These clubs provide something deeper for each person who works at one or goes to one. Pardis Mahdavi mentions in his article one specific interviewee that said that when he walked into the club it was a turning point for him. He was a half Japanese half Filipino man who was having a hard time fitting in and this club brought him relief and belonging. Many of the men who work as hosts said phrases like, “‘Coming out of my shell’,

‘finally feeling accepted’, ‘feeling like a real man’, ‘exploring our sexuality in a safe way’ and ‘finding myself’ (Mahdavi 8). Japanese host and hostess clubs bring countless amounts of benefits to Japanese society. These clubs provide benefits not only for the consumer, but also the provider.

Moreover, the film *The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief* follows the life of a well-known host Issei. Throughout the documentary, women are interviewed and the women who are a part of the interview believe that they are in love with Issei. One woman, in particular, says that she left her boyfriend because she wanted to marry Issei. Multiple women who are interviewed say they do not know where they would be without Issei. The male host Issei and his services are an example of how host/hostess clubs help the economy. Issei benefits from women’s money, and the women benefit from their interactions with him. All of the women dream of marrying Issei, but Issei does not want to make his work life his personal life. Issei’s salary is \$10,000 per month making the host and hostessing jobs extremely attractive.

[The Different Types of Hostesses in Japan](#)

Hostess work in Japan has become extremely popular. Hostess clubs in Japan typically do the same nature of service, but it varies from person to person. Clubs offer different types of services and the most common service is to sit with the gentleman and listen to them, bring them comfort, have a conversation, pour a few drinks, and even karaoke throughout the night. Attending a hostess club can be therapeutic and necessary for those living in precarious situations.

Two examples of hostess work are *iyashi* and the women who produce it as well as Kyaba-Cula hostessing. Japanese sex workers produce *iyashi* during their sessions with men by healing them through maternal care and sexual gratification. Sex workers build connections with

their male white-collar customers who come in to be relieved of the stresses that come with being a working man in Japan. Author Gabrielle Koch explains that using the touch, attentiveness, intuition, indulgence, and maternally inflected erotic care of *iyashi* allows the men to relax and work again by renewing and enabling their productivity (706). Women in the sex industry play a grand role in the way these working men perform at work. Without these women, after the economic recession men would not have been able to get over their “existential alienation, loneliness, and loss of meaning” (Koch 707). During post-bubble Japan, the working men used *iyashi* as a form of therapy that in return helped the economy with paying the sex workers and having better outcomes at work for the men.

Additionally, Kyaba-Cula hostess’s work focuses on communicating with male customers while offering them food and drinks. These women offer little to no physical touch with men inside and outside of the club. Their primary service is primarily communication and short one-on-one conversations. Yumiko Kamise mentions in his article, “Through communication, male customers attempt to “seduce” kyaba-cula hostesses and gain their affection, as well as compete with other males. A dating service is also available for an additional fee, allowing kyaba-cula hostesses to see clients before or after work” (43). This job became extremely attractive after the 1980s when the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956 was receiving severe enforcement. Women tend to opt into this type of job because it pays better than a regular part-time job, and there is not much physical contact like in prostitution. The study Kamise conducted displays that the older woman in their thirties has pay ranging from 700K-1000K.

[Policy Recommendations/Conclusions](#)

After much research, the sex industry in Japan would profit from the legalization of prostitution. Although the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956 was put in place if prostitution became

legal women working in the sex industry would have rights. Women in the sex industry would stop carrying the stigma of being prostitutes if it were more normalized. Hostess clubs and bars are part of Japan's society and are necessary for those isolated individuals. Author Peter Singer displays an example of what happened in Australia regarding their health and safety,

The Sex Workers Outreach Project agreed that decriminalization led to better health for sex workers, and enabled them to be covered by the standard features of the labor market, including insurance, occupational health, and safety programs and rules of fair trading (1).

If Japan decided to move forward with legalizing prostitution there would be plenty more benefits for those working in the industry.

To conclude, the future of the sex industry with COVID-19 is not too promising. Kabukicho, the red-light district of Japan now has 30,000 visitors a day when before the pandemic there were 150,000 visitors. Justin McCurry from The Guardian further explains that when the government lifted the nationwide state of emergency to stimulate the economy, there were about 750 new cases a day. He states, "Workers are horrified by the thought they could be responsible for the closure of their club because they had become infected" (1). These are uncertain times worldwide, but the sex industry in Japan will find its way!

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