

Avril Haye *

Prostitution in Japan : Social Management Or Regulation?



Introduction.

"...the term social management best describes how Japanese bureaucrats and private groups themselves envisioned their task throughout the twentieth century." (Garon, 1997: 6) These tasks rather than being seen in the light of controlling the populace and their activities were an attempt to regulate and manage. Prostitution and the sex industry can be seen as examples of this desire to regulate rather than to control or prohibit (Garon 1997).

The officially sanctioned sex industry in Japan has and continues to be one of the most lucrative and successful trades in the country. This essay will examine how past and present Japanese governments have used prostitution; whether as a social management policy, or a form of regulation to reinforce various ideological beliefs and to support institutions.

Historical Perspective.

Prostitution has often been described as the 'world's oldest profession' and in Japan it has been officially sanctioned for a considerable amount of time. Laws were passed which on the surface appeared to limit the trade but that were designed to regulate, rather than abolish it. In the Kamakura (1185-1333) and Muromachi (1378-1578) periods, for example, urban growth led to its official recognition resulting in the creation of a bureau of prostitution and a tax levied on their activities. In addition in 1618 the first walled in 'pleasure quarter' the Yoshiwara was established (Bornoff 1991: 247).

The Yoshiwara was a mix of brothels and teahouses staffed by young girls and women. Some of these women had joined the Yoshiwara voluntarily while others had been sold by desperate parents or coerced into it. Bound by indentured contracts they were unable to leave (Morrison, 1998).

The Meiji government began national regulation of prostitution with the passing of a licensing system under the Prostitutes Regulation Code (Davis 1993: 178). It stipulated that prostitutes had to be 18 years and over, register with the government, have regular health inspections and work and live in restricted areas (Tomita in Davis, 1993: 178).

The growth of Christianity and the influx of liberal ideology from the west led to considerable opposition to licensed prostitution. Nevertheless, the state felt that regulation of a system of prostitution was important for various reasons. First, most prostitutes came from impoverished families, and desired to help them economically (Garon, 1997: 95). Secondly, medical experts and academics claimed that prostitution was important for "the regulation of public morals and public hygiene." Repression of men's sexual desires, they insisted, would lead to rape. Additionally licensed prostitution would limit the spread of venereal disease (Garon 1997:100).

Thirdly extramarital activity by the male was actively encouraged because "...the male body needed to satisfy sexual lust to maintain itself, just as a train would come to a halt if it did not burn coal" (Garon, 1997:101). In addition licensed brothels were useful to the police for controlling the criminal element who regularly spent money there.

* Part-time Lecturer, Chubu University

Brothel keepers often acted as informants to police who in exchange would receive special treatment and were only too happy to help track down runaway prostitutes (Garon, 1997:102).

For all these reasons licensed prostitution was seen as a necessary and integral part of the social structure, in other words a successful model of regulation.

The Karayuki-san.

The existence of women known as Karayuki-san in the mid-1800's further illustrates the authorities' attitude towards organized prostitution. The term referred to poor women and girls, some as young as ten years old, who were sold into prostitution in Asia, Australia and America (Yamazaki, 1995: 51). Although exploited and abused, they played a very important role in Japan's expansion into a number of Asian regions and its economic development at home (Mihapoulos, 1994).

They were also viewed as migrating laborers who through feelings of filial piety and patriotism to Japan, sent money home to help maintain and stimulate the economy (Mihapoulos, 1994).

War Time Sexual Slavery and The End of Licensed Prostitution

The provision of military sexual slaves, euphemistically known as comfort women to Japanese soldiers overseas followed on naturally from the Karayuki system. In the same way that the karayuki played an important role in Japanese economic interests, sexual slavery played a significant part in Japanese military activity in Asia. These women were forced into this system in the same way as their predecessors. The difference was that the majority of women were from other Asian regions particularly Korea and only 10% Japanese. The reason for this was that the military felt it would

be de-motivating if soldiers were to use Japanese women in this way, moreover, Japanese women were needed on the homefront to work in factories and on farms (Colligan-Taylor in Yamazaki,1999: xxv).

In 1946 the occupation forces issued a memorandum which on the surface at least, put an end to licensed prostitution. This led to the passing of ordinance No. 9 outlawing licensed prostitution. Prior to this, however the Japanese government had set up the Recreation and Amusement Association to provide brothels for the occupation forces. Although they operated for less than a year (27th August 1945 to 27th March 1946), they employed between 55, 000 and 70, 000 women (Mackie : 2003 : 136).

Notwithstanding this the presence of lonely GI's were a source of income for many women, (known as pan-pan girls), who out of desperation in the post-war period turned to prostitution. (Bornoff,1991: 330)

Modern Regulation of Prostitution.

The passing of ordinance number 9 was the beginning of a long process that led to the enactment of the prostitution prevention law in 1956. This law along with the law concerning enterprises affecting public morals regulates the sex industry in Japan today.

According to the prostitution prevention law, neither the act of prostitution nor the buying of a prostitute are criminal acts. But public solicitation or the selling of prostitute services to someone, or requiring another person to engage in prostitution are all illegal activities (Morrison, 1998).

This law is ineffective for two reasons; one is that it focused on punishing the prostitute and not the 'punter' and the other is that far from reducing prostitution it merely changed the form of the trade. Its enactment did result in the closing down of brothels and a decrease in the number of

streetwalkers. However, the number of prostitutes renting private rooms and operating out of public baths (soaplands) increased (Tomita in Davis 1993: 179).

The Enterprises affecting public morals law regulates the businesses within the mizu shobai (water business); establishments that may be 'harmful to public welfare' such as hostess bars, cabarets, dancehalls and pachinko parlours (Tomita in Davis, 1993).

The Prostitution Prevention law and the Enterprises Affecting Public morals law are both ambiguous. By providing such a legal framework, the state found it easier to regulate and support the trade. Also, the ambiguity of the laws demonstrates the state's belief that, as long as no danger is posed to society it has no right to determine the sexual behaviour of individuals (Tomita in Davis, 1993: 177).

Position of Women in Japanese Society.

The definition of a woman's role in Japan is rooted in neo-confucianism. This ideology brought over from China in the 7th century cited the three obediences namely 'as a daughter obey the father, as a wife obey the husband and as a mother obey the son.' A woman's role was in the home to give birth and complete household tasks. Love between partners was unnecessary and seen to be inconsistent with the Confucian code of filial piety (Matsui in Fujimura-Fanselow & Kameda 1995: 315). Women had no rights and were not allowed to own anything including their bodies, illustrated by the saying 'a womb is a borrowed thing'. (Burton, 2003)

Against this Confucian backdrop men were expected and actively encouraged to engage in extra-marital sex and women to turn a blind-eye to their husband's infidelities. Jankowiak, Nell and Buckmaster (2002) hold that in societies with a strong patriarchal ethos where women are

marginalized infidelity is supported by institutions created by men to control women. Arranged marriage, obsession with virginity and chaperonage are such examples. Control systems like these, are to some extent still evident in many cultures today.

Motherhood and wifely duties thus defined the role of women. There was also one more category of women whose role was to provide sexual pleasure to the male. Yayori Matsui describes this division as "...those with wombs and those with sexual organs" (Matsui in Fujimura-Fanselow & Kameda 1995: 315).

Nowadays women may express their sexuality more freely but a double standard exists where men are expected to engage freely in sex but women are not or at least must appear not to do so. This is an example of a 'honne' (real intention) and 'tatemae' (front or surface) situation. The 'honne' being that women have premarital sex and the tatemae that they are seen as virgins until marriage (Morrison, 1998).

Once married, the gender roles proliferated by this double standard become even more clearly demarcated. The Meiji state's goal for women of *ryousai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) is still seen to be the pinnacle of a woman's achievement and highlights the gender division of labour (Allison, 1998:199).

Types of Prostitution and its Role in Japanese Society.

Confucianism and Japanese mythology have never portrayed sex as a purely moral issue as in other religions and this may account for the open attitude in Japan today towards sex. Sex is seen as a natural act and this is perhaps part of the reason why prostitution takes so many forms.

To name but a few, there are streetwalkers who often work and operate within the mizu shobai areas and private room bath attendants working

at private bath houses more commonly known as 'soaplands'. Attendants usually rent rooms and provide "massage" and other sexual acts.

There are also call-girls provided through 'lover-banks' and fantasy establishments where men can go to act out certain fantasies and image clubs such as no-pan kissa (no panty coffeeshops) where waitresses will serve drinks and snacks whilst wearing short skirts and no underwear. (Morrison.1998)

Establishments like the above nicknamed 'sasei sangyo' the ejaculation industry are clearly places that provide men with sexual relief and further reinforce the view that men need and are expected to be promiscuous. The women who serve in these places are 'those' kinds of women the opposite to the 'good wife, wise mother'. Yet one of the roles that prostitutes play in Japan is often a maternal one (Henshall, 1995: 32)

Henshall asserts that Japanese women not only play mother to their children but also to their partners to a much greater degree than their western counterparts. In this "pseudo-maternal" role they are expected to uncomplainingly support their partners in everything and anything they do. He puts this down to the existence of 'amae' which means to depend or presume upon someone and according to Doi Takeo is "...basically a need to be loved and protected and to presume and depend on others as a small child depends upon its mother" (Doi in Henshall, 1999: 33).

Prostitutes have often taken on this pseudo-maternal role, not that this is particular to Japan but the difference, according to Henshall is that in other countries connecting mothering with sex is thought to be deviant, but is not necessarily thought to be so in Japan.

To illustrate this he uses Nosaka Akiyuki's work 'The Pornographers' (1963), in which the main character talks about his visit to a massage parlour.

"The woman isn't allowed to feel anything. In

short, it's as if you're treated by your own mother ...when you climax, the woman must pretend to be shocked and then wipe you clean. At that moment she really is your mother." (Nosaka in Henshall, 1999 : 35)

Hostess Bars

Hostesses are a unique form of prostitution, in that they do not offer sexual acts. However, it is not uncommon for hostesses to prostitute themselves at nearby love hotels for favoured customers. Hostess clubs are places where men can go to enjoy the undivided attention of a beautiful woman, be complimented, flirted with and made to feel he is the most handsome interesting man, that she has ever met; resulting in a boost to the ego and reinforcement of his masculinity (Allison,1994: 8).

Many companies keep corporate accounts at various hostess clubs, where managers may entertain clients or take subordinates as a perk or reward for hard work. Allison (1994) asserts that this is a deliberate act on the part of the corporation, to ensure a merging of worker identity with the company that "...is being actively and ideologically produced to benefit very modern structures of business and economics" (Allison 1994:198).

When a manager arranges to take his subordinates drinking after work it serves to extend the working day and incorporates a social element to the meaning of work. Spending most of his time in this arena, where his social, romantic and sexual desires can be fulfilled, the sariman (businessman) becomes alienated from home and family and looks to the company to define him. Closer identification with the company and further alienation from anything outside culminates in a sarariman who puts more effort and time into his job, thus supporting national business and economic interests. Allison, 1994:199)

Teen Prostitution

In many countries, poverty, desperation and coercion drive teenagers to prostitution; by contrast some young girls in Japan, willingly sell sexual favours to men in order to buy designer goods. Girls as young as 12 have reportedly become involved in this form of prostitution, euphemistically known as 'enjo kosai' compensated dating (Fitzpatrick 1999).

Men may approach girls on the street or pay a fee to join a telephone club and arrange dates. Portrayed as sex objects by the media high school girls are an attraction for men who have a 'Lolita complex' or 'Lolicon', a penchant for having sex with young girls (Witter 1997).

Teen prostitution levels started to climb in the mid-1970's, prompting some prefectures to pass laws to curb its growth. Gifu prefecture for example, was the first prefecture to pass a law regulating telephone clubs (Morrison, 1995). Whereas Tokyo only passed a law prohibiting adults from having sex with minors in 1999 (Fitzpatrick, 1999).

The motivation of high school prostitutes, like others is money, yet most girls come from comfortable middle-class families and express no guilt or remorse regarding their actions (Witter, 1997).

The ease with which these girls go from school to home and into karaoke bar and love hotel has effectively blurred the lines between the Mizu shobai woman and the average Japanese woman. Previously those in the sex industry lived to some extent outside the bounds of everyday society. Working and socializing within the 'mizu shobai', and were to some extent, stigmatized by society. Teen prostitutes on the other hand, live with their families, go to school and lead perfectly 'ordinary' lives. Prostitution for them is, viewed more as a part-time job than as a way of life (Morrison, 1995). Despite efforts to prevent enjo kosai there is a danger that this coexistence may become the norm.

Exploitation of South East Asian Women.

Echoing war time abuse of Asian women, sex tourism, (groups of corporate workers who go to Asian countries on sex tours often financed by their companies and arranged as reward for hard work), and the trafficking of women to Japan from countries in Asia have grown in recent years. Yoko Suzuki asserts that these are just the modern day equivalent of sexual slavery during the war and the karayuki system (Colligan-Taylor in Yamazaki 1999). There are of course obvious differences, the nationality of the women for one. During war time sexual slaves came mainly from Korea whereas modern day sex slaves are drafted mainly from the Phillipines or Thailand.

Human rights groups estimate that between 75,000 and 200,000 women are trafficked to Japan every year due to poverty and deceit. Termed by the media as 'Japayuki' they are told that they will work as waitresses or companions in bars, but in fact are forced into prostitution by 'brokers', often Yakuza gang members (Johnston, 2004). This system reinforces the idea that women are the sexual property of men.

This has led to a number of incidences involving Japayuki and their 'sponsors'. In 1989 four Filipinas who had been held captive in a room and repeatedly beaten and raped reported the manager of their club to the authorities. The case went to court and the men received very light sentences. The women however continued to protest and when it came to light that bribery of the police was involved, the Nagoya court charged them with more serious offences (Bornoff, 1994: 512).

The majority of women however, do not speak out and feel they have no rights. In addition, there are no laws in Japan prohibiting human trafficking, hence the continuation of this abuse (Johnston, 2004).

Opposition to the Sex Industry

There has always been a strong and consistent women's lobby against prostitution in Japan. In 1886 for example, the Women's Christian Temperance Union was established and became the first Japanese group to take issue with licensed prostitution (Garon, 1997: 98). In more recent years women's groups like the Asian Women's Conference and the Asian Women's Association have organized protests against sex tours to countries in Asia, and the trafficking of Asian women to Japan (Matsui in Fujimura-Faunselow and Kameda, 1995: 317).

As well as protesting and providing help and support to victims of the sex industry, the women's movement has set about changing peoples attitudes towards prostitution. In Japanese the word 'baishun' means prostitution, it uses two Chinese characters to denote 'selling spring'. By changing the first Chinese character the word came to mean 'Buying spring' yet the pronunciation remains the same. By this simple act the focus is shifted from women selling their bodies to condemning the men who buy (Okura Yayoi in Ampo, 1996:112).

Japanese women's consciousness raising efforts have also challenged the widely held view that prostitution is primarily about interactions between individuals, therefore intervention by the authorities would infringe on a citizens rights to privacy. Seen in the context of sex tourism and human trafficking, prostitution clearly highlights issues of race, gender, class and economic exploitation of poor countries like the Phillipines, by rich ones like Japan (Mackie, 2003:205).

Conclusion.

The authority's attitude to prostitution is a good example of the principles of 'honne' (real intention) and 'tatemae (surface)'. The tatemae

is that there are no official social management policies to support prostitution and laws are in place to limit its growth. The honne however, is that the state supports prostitution through regulation and implementation of laws that are for the most part vague and ineffective. Just as in the days of licensing, prostitution is an integral part of Japanese society and is accepted for a number of reasons.

The patriarchy inherent in Confucianism is still deeply entrenched in the Japanese male psyche and women continue to be seen as the sexual property of men. The notion that men need and have a right to have their sexual desires fulfilled, in a way not open to women, continues to be perpetuated.

The sex industry plays an economic role that has always generated profit for the state. In addition the industry supports the corporate structure upon which Japan is built.

The promise of drinking after work with colleagues encourages men to spend more time in the office and less time at home. Ultimately this means more profit generated for the company and the Japanese economy.

International opinion and opposition from women's groups within Japan means that the authorities cannot be seen to openly sanction prostitution. In fact, Japan has recently been criticized for its lack of laws prohibiting sexual slavery, by a recent U.S State department report. This ranks countries according to their ability to meet U.S set goals of reducing human trafficking and other such violations.

Japan is ranked as one of the countries that does not meet U.S set minimum standards and could face sanctions if it does not make efforts to change (BBC news, 2004).

The governments unofficial sanctioning of prostitution, acknowledges and legitimizes its existence, and ensures the continuation of patriarchy and the subjugation of women in Japanese society.

Bibliography

- Allison, Anne (1994), *Nightwork. Sexuality, Pleasure and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club: The university of Chigago press, Chigago and London.*
- Ampo, (eds) (1996), *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement: M.E. Sharpe Armonk New York.*
- Bernstein, Gail L. (ed) (1991), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945, London: Routledge.*
- BBC News, (2004), *Japan urged to Fight Sexual Slavery_*, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pt/fr/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3809871.stm>
- Buckmaster Anne & Jankowiak William & Nell. M.Diane, (2002), "Managing Infidelity: A Cross-Cultural Perspective" *Ethnology. Volume 41 issue 1.*
- Bornoff, Nicholas, (1992), *Pink Samurai, London: Harper Collins.*
- Burton, Susan K. (2003), *Interviews with Female Study Abroad Students in England_*, available at website.lineone.net/~skburton
- Davis, Nanette J. (ed) (1993), *Prostitution An International Handbook on Trends, Problems and Policies, Greenwood press, Westport C.T*
- Fitzpatrick, Michael (1999), "From Schoolgirl to Sex Object", *Guardian Unlimited, Thursday July 8th 1999*
- Fujimura-Fanselow K.&Kameda A. (eds), (1995), *Japanese Women. New Perspectives on the Past Present and Future, New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York*
- Garon, Sheldon, (1997), *Molding Japanese Minds. The State in Everyday Life, Princeton: Princeton University Press*
- Henshall, Kenneth G. (199), *Dimensions of Japanese Society: Gender Margins and Mainstream, England:Macmillan*
- Johnston, Eric (2004), "Volunteer Offers Consultation to Women Trafficked to Japan" *The Japan Times, April 8th 2004*
- からゆきさんの小部屋、(2001), からゆきさんとは、available at <http://www.karayukisan.jp/no2/cont.html>
- Mackie, Vera (2003), *Feminism in Modern Japan, Cambridge University Press*
- Mihapoulos, Bill (1994) "The Making of Prostitutes in Japan: The Karayuki-san" *Social Justice. Volume 21, issue 2*
- Morrison, Andrew D. (1998), "Teen Prostitution in Japan: Regulation of Telephone Clubs." *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law, March 1998*
- Noguchi, Takeshi (2000), *一売春現象から見えてくるの—* available at <http://www.edogawa-u.ac.jp/apso/happyou1999/noguchi.html>
- Seigle, Cecilia Segawa, (1993), *The Glittering World of The Japanese Courtesan. University of Hawaii press: Honolulu*
- Witter, Willia (1997), "Teen Prostitutes sell Favours After School in Tokyo" *the Washington Times, April 6th 1997*
- Yamazaki, Tomoko, (1999), *Sandakan Brothel No.8 : An episode in the History of Lower-Class Japanese Women: M.E. Sharpe*