

The Alcoholic Beverages of Bars and Restaurants in 17th - 19th Century Tokyo

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journal or publication title	Senri Ethnological Studies
volume	64
page range	63-75
year	2003-11-25
URL	http://doi.org/10.15021/00002730

The Alcoholic Beverages of Bars and Restaurants in 17th – 19th Century Tokyo

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1. DINTRODUCTION: ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS AS URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The popularization of everyday drinking is a result of the commercialization of the production and distribution of alcoholic beverages. A key part of commercial distribution is the development of entertainment districts containing both restaurants and pubs where alcoholic beverages are served. This paper will cover the development of such entertainment districts in Tokyo during the 17th to 19th centuries, detailing their role in popularizing the everyday custom of drinking alcoholic beverages, as well as their function as a major element of urban infrastructure.

Entertainment districts in early Tokyo can be classified into two types: general areas designed for all strata of society, and nightlife areas intended specifically for adult males. General areas include stores, markets, theaters and other attractions that men, women and

A Note on Terminology

- “Entertainment districts” refer to the Japanese term *sakariba* (“flourishing area”) which are busy and lively locales within a town or city which are intended for shopping, leisure or sybaritic pursuits.
- “Restaurants” refer to the Japanese term *ryoriya* (“cuisine establishments”) which are places where food and drink are served, and various forms of cabaret-style entertainment may be provided.
- “Pubs” refer to the Japanese term *izakaya* (“establishment where alcoholic beverages are served), which are places primarily for the consumption of alcoholic beverages, though light food items are also available.
- “Teahouse restaurants” refer to the Japanese term *ryori-jaya* (“cuisine + teahouse”) for teahouses which also served food.

children may visit. On the other hand, nightlife areas include a “pleasure circuit” of pubs, restaurants and brothels collectively providing locales for drinking, gambling and prostitution. It is this latter category that will be focused upon in this paper.

Entertainment quarters for nightlife began to develop in towns and cities as part of the urban infrastructure, but were not found in farming and fishing villages. In Japan, the most notable entertainment quarters of this type developed in the city of Edo, which was populated predominantly by single males.

The population of Edo in the mid-17th century is estimated at 400,000, growing to between 900,000 to one million in the 18th century, and 1.2 million by the dawn of the 19th century, at which time it was the world’s most populous city, according to modern accounts. Population growth was particularly rapid toward the end of the 17th century, when significant numbers of single men moved into the city, sparking the first new urban culture.

These single men ranged from young apprentices to merchants and craftsmen, to samurai who moved to Edo in keeping with the *Sankin Kotai* system requiring regional feudal lords (*Daimyo*) to also maintain residences in Edo. Hiroshi Kito estimates that of the 500,000 people living in Edo in 1721, some 320,000 were male and only 180,000 were female (Kito, 1983), making it an overwhelmingly male-dominated society. Parallels can be drawn to the small towns of the American West in the 19th century, though Edo was on a much greater magnitude.

A natural outgrowth of the predominantly male population was the emergence of nightlife entertainment districts. Although these areas were made up of drinking places and brothels (*yuu-kaku*, or “pleasure quarters”), this paper will focus upon drinking places and their role in spreading the custom of everyday consumption of alcoholic beverages.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBS

While restaurants and pubs are both establishments which provide food and drink, there are several key differences. Generally speaking, pubs serve all customers in the same front room, and provide less expensive beverages. However, unlike even cheaper types of establishments where patrons must stand while drinking, pubs do provide seats, enabling customers to relax and stay longer. Yet they do not have individual rooms for private groups, as restaurants often do.

Engyo Mitamura, an authority on the nightlife culture of the Edo Era, has said “Even in the late 17th century, pubs did not exist yet (in Edo)” (Inagaki, 1959). However, they began to appear in the 18th century, and became common. Engyo Mitamura has also said that “Establishments called *niuri-zakaya* (“sellers of drink and boiled foods”) serving foods such as boiled fish and vegetables along with alcoholic beverages were flourishing in the last decade of the 17th century” (Inagaki, 1959). Thus, it can be said that the serving of alcoholic beverages in these establishments provided the model for pubs which would develop in the following century.

There were three basic types of these *niuri-zakaya*: 1) hawkers carrying a charcoal burner, a pan and tableware on a pole from which they sold food, 2) stalls by the side of the road, and 3) those operating in permanent storefronts. These three types of operations represent the development of this style of business, and all three catered to single men.



Figure 1. A *niuri-zakaya* depicted in an early drawing.

Niuri-zakaya typically served simple dishes such as boiled beans, vegetables boiled hard with soy sauce, hotchpotch, as well as tofu topped with *miso* (fermented soybean paste) and rice cooked with vegetables. Although the precise time of their appearance is not known, *niuri-zakaya* are clearly depicted in drawings of street scenes of the middle of the Edo Era. Those operating in storefronts were little fancier than those in street stalls, with lettering painted on their paper-screened doors advertising the food items being sold. Customers would sit on stools and drink while enjoying these light foods as snacks.

Customers drank from wide, shallow cups called *choku* and cylinder-shaped cups called *chorori*. In the *Morisada Manko* (1853), a book on customs of the Edo Era, *choko* are described. “In recent years, these wide-rimmed cups are rarely lacquered, and most are porcelain... Porcelain cups are called *choko* in Edo, Kyoto and Osaka, and the rim is almost as thin as paper. They are just six centimeters in diameter, and only about three centimeters deep.”

Porcelain ware produced in Arita in the province of Bizen in the 17th century was later distributed to port cities during the middle of the Edo Era. Among this were the *choko* porcelain cups. When used for the dipping sauce served with *soba* (buckwheat noodles), these cups were referred to as *soba choko*, while smaller versions for drinking saké were known as *o-choko* (“small *choko*”). Another type of ceramic cup called a *gui-nomi* (“swig drinking”) was also used. Both *choko* and *gui-nomi* cups used exclusively for drinking in *niuri-zakaya* are a result of the popularization of drinking alcoholic beverages. Until then, only the flat cups used in formal drinking situations were used. Etiquette required that drinking from these relatively

shallow lacquerware or earthenware cups be completed in exactly three sips. However, in the unbridled drinking revelry which began to develop, people would drink from any available vessel. This practice remained in place in farming and fishing villages until the 19th century.

The other type of cup, the cylindrical *chirori* was made of either ceramic or copper. *Saké* inside the cup could be heated by placing the cup in hot water or over burning charcoal. This practice was commonplace in Edo of the time, which remains till today.

Around the same time that *niuri-zakaya* appeared, establishments sporting short curtains (*noren*) made of braided rope over their doorways also came into being. The name of the shop would be indicated on these curtains. However, apart from these curtain signs and the paper-door signs of the *niuri-zakaya*, there seemed to be little difference between these two types of establishments. In fact, the primary function of all such establishments was to serve drink and light food, so we can refer to them as pubs.

Along with the popularization of these simple pubs, certain drinking customs of the Edo residents began to develop. Lingered for any length of time was frowned upon. A saying emerged which said “During festivals, drink until all the barrels are empty, but at normal times drink only 2 *go* (about 360ml). Drinking at these pubs was strictly for enlivening the spirit. A Senryu style comic verse in the *Yanagidaru* sums up this attitude:

“Eight *mon*, and *miso* in one hand to liven the drink.”

In the middle of the Edo Era, eight *mon* was the price of one drink (180ml) of *saké*, while *miso* (fermented soybean paste) was the only snack. Naturally, lingering was not possible.

The appearance of these pubs was instrumental in popularizing the custom of drinking as a leisure activity in Edo. Light foods seasoned with either soy sauce or *miso* proved to be good accompaniments to a drink or two, and this style can be assumed to be the normal way of drinking in Edo of the time.

3. LARGE-SCALE DISTRIBUTION OF SAKÉ BROUGHT INTO EDO

What kinds of alcoholic beverages were consumed in Edo’s entertainment districts? According to Sakaguchi (1964), some 70 to 90 percent was *saké* (an alcoholic beverage brewed from rice) from the Nada region near present-day Kobe in Western Japan. Since it was brought from a location near the then-capital of Kyoto to the distant Edo, it was called *kudari-zaké*, meaning that it had “come down” from the capital.

Nada had gained prominence as a *saké* producing region from around the 18th century, as breweries previously located in Itami and Ikeda moved there to be close to seaports. As more production was shipped from Nada, such *kudari-zaké* became more commonplace in Edo. Vessels carrying commodities from Western Japan to Edo were known as *higaki kaisen* (commodity circuit freighters), and this led to the development of ships designed specifically for the transport of *saké*. These were known as *taru kaisen* (barrel circuit freighters).

A passage in the *Morisada Manko* details the eventual decline of *kudari-zaké* and the rise in breweries in the greater Edo region.

“Yearly consumption of *kudari-zaké* was between 800,000 and 900,000 barrels until around 1840, when there was a crackdown on illegal brothels. Their abolishment led to a drop in economic activity in Edo, and consumption dropped to between 340,000 and 400,000 barrels. This was in addition to the *saké* produced in the greater Edo region, called *jimawarizaké*, which amounted to about 100,000 barrels.”

In Edo, annual consumption of *saké* peaked at nearly one million barrels in the early 19th century, during the second period of urban development. At the time, the population is estimated to have been around one million, representing one barrel for every man, woman and child.

Each barrel contained 72 liters, amounting to just under 200ml per day per person. This is somewhat more than present day consumption in Japan, which averages less than 180ml for all types of alcoholic beverages, including those of Western origin. While consumption in 19th century Edo may be considered high by modern standards, it is not necessarily so when taking into account the overwhelmingly high population of single males. It is doubtful that there were many heavy drinkers in Edo of the time. Another consideration is the alcoholic content of the various beverages being considered, but no discussion of this will be offered here.

After this peak, however, consumption of *saké* dropped dramatically, by about 400,000 barrels, as a result of the Tempo Reforms enacted between 1841 and 1843.

Nevertheless, among the Japanese, the custom of everyday drinking, and the popularization of drinking in general, is certain to have taken root during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Even at half the amount of estimated consumption, drinking would have still been significant. This was because throughout Japan at the time, *saké* was brewed for consumption only on special auspicious days. Many historical accounts indicate that traditional festivals and celebrations begin with a *saké* drinking ritual. Except for the regions of Fushimi and Nada, *saké* brewing was not very widespread, with production invariably only in limited quantities. As Kunio Yanagida points out in *History of the Meiji and Taisho Periods* (1931), “Solitary drinking developed in the Meiji and Taisho periods” and that “Towns led to the proliferation of drinking.”

During Japan at the time, drinking on ordinary days was considered ill mannered. However, the rise of Edo created an exceptional situation in which drinking, gambling and prostitution became forms of everyday merrymaking common throughout the city. This led to the creation of several entertainment districts throughout the city. This reflected the mainstream cultural belief that drinking should be done in a proper place, so both restaurants and pubs developed as urban infrastructure for the practice of drinking outside the home. However, as Kunio Yanagida notes, drinking at home before the evening meal was a custom which developed many years later.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF TEAHOUSE RESTAURANTS

Developing alongside pubs in Edo were restaurants which evolved as offshoots of teahouses. These were known as *ryori-jaya* (“teahouse restaurants”) and arose in between the 18th and 19th centuries as the primary component of entertainment districts.

According to descriptions by Engyo Mitamura, “There were many varieties of teahouses,

with the *dejaya* and *kakejaya* (two types of outdoor stalls) being temporary structures which were put up in the morning and taken down in the evening” (Inagaki, 1959). However, teahouse restaurants and another type known as meeting place teahouses (*yoriai-jaya*) were permanent structures, with the latter having small rooms with straw-mat floors. The major difference between these two types is the availability of food. “Meeting place teahouses did not have kitchens, so food could only be served if arranged for in advance. However, teahouse restaurants could always serve food to customers at any time” (Inagaki, 1959). What these two types had in common, though, was that eating was accompanied by drinking.

Another type of teahouse, dating back from earlier times, was located along roads, and served tea to those passing by. These were known by several names, such as *mizu-jaya* (“water teahouse”), *shogi-jaya* (“folding stool teahouse”) and *koshikake-jaya* (“chair teahouse”). Such establishments sprung up in places with lots of pedestrian traffic, such as on the grounds of temples and shrines, or near their gates, as well as in open spaces. Historical references differ as to their origin, some citing the early 18th century, and others citing the late 18th century. Common features included reed screens, chairs and the serving of the *sencha* grade of green tea.

Teahouse restaurants served food and drinks in rooms with straw-mat floors. Sometimes called *kappo-ten* (“cooking establishments”), these are described in the *Morisada Manko*: “At the time, the word *ryori* (“cuisine”) encompassed giving consideration to every aspect of food preparation. In modern Japan, *ryori* means simply the creation of a certain dish.” Accompanying this description is a list of 24 new teahouse restaurants, including Kawacho in North Yanagibashi, Tagawaya in Asakusa near the Daionji Temple, and Yaozen in Sanya.

In the same document, there is a very fascinating and revealing observation: “Today, both the samurai class and townspeople of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka have luxurious lifestyles,

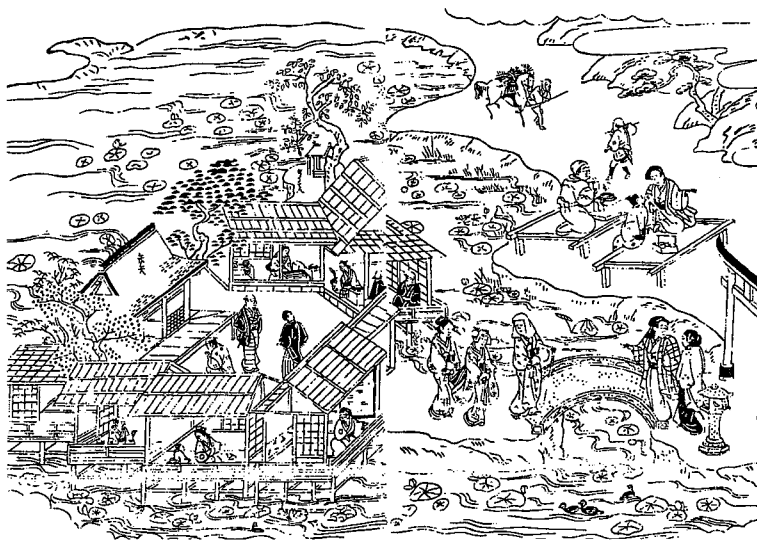


Figure 2. A *ryori-jaya* depicted in an early drawing

particularly with respect to food. Despite their differences in dress, they are equal in terms of social status and affluence.” From this we can assume that eating out at a teahouse restaurant was a common activity among residents, though most of the customers of these establishments were the direct retainers of the Shogunate (*hatamoto*) living in Edo, feudal lords (*daimyo*) visiting Edo, and merchants under official patronage of the royal family. It is likely that what went on among these people during their nightly visits to such establishments would be considered similar to the type of business collusion known as *dango* in modern Japan.

Regardless of the size and status of the teahouse restaurants, the food served was largely similar. According to one account: “After an appetizer of *miso* broth, various specialties were served, followed by *sashimi* and either a clear broth or a stewed dish. Soup and two side dishes were served, along with green tea and high-grade sweets before and after the meal. Afterwards, the customer would adjourn to a beautifully appointed bath house while the remaining food was packed in boxes to take home. This was apparently part of the normally provided service.

The style of cuisine served became known as *Edo-mae*, which meant it was made primarily from seafood from what is now known as Tokyo Bay. The *Azuma Warawa*, a book of prints depicting scenes of children in Edo at the start of the 19th century, shows dried seaweed (*nori*) from Asakusa, eel from Edo, octopus and small fish from Shimba, bonito from Kamakura, horse mackerel from Haneda, sweetfish from the Tama River, loaches from Senju, carp from the Ara River, whitebait from Tsukuda, small fishes and shrimp from Shiba, sea cucumber from Kanazawa, and tiny fresh-water clams from Narihira.

Dishes prepared were primarily flavored with soy sauce. At the time, soy sauce production was flourishing in Noda, north of Tokyo on the Ara River, and in Choshi, on the Pacific coast at the mouth of the Toné River. Soy sauce was originally produced in Kishu (Wakayama) and Omi (Shiga), but mass production began in the greater Edo region after production techniques were introduced there.

Noda, Choshi and the surrounding region became the center for soy sauce production because soy beans could be grown in the area. Edo represented a huge market for soy sauce, and barrels used to transport *saké* to Edo could be reused for soy sauce.

Soy sauce was revered, and accordingly nicknamed *murasaki*, meaning “purple,” which was considered the most noble of colors. Its flavor could be savored at restaurants. In this sense, it was considered a seasoning for special occasions.

In restaurants, soy sauce was essential not only for preparing boiled dishes and large pot (*nabemono*) dishes, but also as a condiment for *sashimi*. Moreover, soy sauce was an indispensable ingredient in dipping sauces for buckwheat noodles (*soba*). All of these dishes trace their roots to the *niuri-zakaya* described at the beginning of this article.

Since soy sauce was a prevalent seasoning, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that *saké* was being enjoyed by people who were relishing the flavor of soy sauce. Not surprisingly, this practice continues today in Japan’s drinking establishments.

It is said that the cuisine of Tokyo is a lot saltier than that of Osaka and other cities in Western Japan. Natives of Western Japan who come to Tokyo often complain that the food tastes salty. Actually, the cuisine of Tokyo tastes more strongly of soy sauce, which does contain a great deal of salt. However, if speaking only about saltiness, the cuisine of Western Japan is sufficiently salty. In fact, foods accompanying *saké* in Western Japan were often dried and

salted food, which was even more salty than the cuisine of Tokyo.

The soy sauce of Western Japan is often considered light, while that of Tokyo is thought of as heavy, but this really only has to do with the intensity of flavor as the salt content of both types is about the same. Tokyo soy sauce has a strong fermented flavor, and is rich in amino acids which create the strong “soy sauce” flavor we are familiar with today.

5. TEAHOUSE HOSTESSES AND “PARLOR ENTERTAINMENT”

Teahouse restaurants sprung up throughout the city of Edo as key components of entertainment districts, or as auxiliary establishments to serve them. As they increased in number, their scale of operations became larger as they developed increasingly sophisticated methods of luring customers. At this point, the institution of the teahouse restaurant became firmly established in society as a setting for dining and entertainment.

The *Record of Personal Observations of Society* (1816) carried the following observation:

“Establishments known as *mizu-jaya* (“water teahouses”) which provide quality service can be found all over the city. Customers who merely sit and drink tea are considered unsophisticated, since the correct thing to do is to have a drinking party and be attended by beautiful young women.”

At this point, the appearance of attractive hostesses in both teahouses and teahouse restaurants gave rise to issues concerning public morals. The work *Asukagawa Continued* from the same period contains this description:

“Each establishment has about two apron-clad courtesans with artfully defined eyebrows. While some are older, they are all beautiful. During the daytime, these courtesans sit in the establishments hardly one meter from the entrance, and it is clear they wear no makeup.”

The *New Episodes of Yamashita*, although published later in 1777, has an extremely detailed description, though it is limited to the Yamashita area of Ueno.

“The front of the establishment is three to four meters wide, with lattice doors. Courtesans sit near the entrance, behind a small screen. They use rouge and are extremely beautiful, so much so that it is said that even the brush of the great painter Shunshoryu Kosai is incapable of expressing such beauty. The second floor is separated into four to five rooms, each with a floor space of three or four tatami mats. There are passageways to the houses of many merchants, and what appears to be a wall may actually be a sliding door. There may also be passageways from nearby teahouses or teahouse restaurants.”

This documents that there were small rooms in back of the establishments, or on the second floor, where the courtesans would entertain their customers, so it is safe to assume that prostitution was taking place. The *Horeki Genraishu* notes that: “The girls are between 15 or

16 to 22 or 23, and their services offered for 200 *mon* represent a thriving business.”

Of course, this phenomenon was not limited to the Yamashita area (presently Hirokoji) in Ueno, though the locale was apparently extreme in its lavishness and lasciviousness.

Another undated work, *Hanachirusakkin*, provides a detailed insight: “In the brothel district of Yamashita, customers can find services from 200 *mon* practically everywhere.” It also contains a detailed list of some 107 establishments in nine different areas.

In this case, “brothel district” refers to areas of privately operated establishments, apart from the official areas sanctioned by the Shogunate. The women working in teahouses in the open areas of Yamashita designated to prevent the spread of fire were called “Yamashita prostitutes” or “Yamashita hostesses.” Together with the prostitutes of Yoshiwara, they were typical of the women working in the brothel districts of Edo at the time.

Eventually, men of the samurai class joined local townsmen as patrons of these teahouses. This is detailed in a book of essays by Tsuneyoshi Kato (1752-1825). “In 1808, an ordinance was enacted preventing the teahouses of Shomoya Hirokoji from becoming large, stipulating that only females younger than 14 or older than 39 might work there, and banning them from wearing beautiful clothing. For some time it seemed that establishments were conforming to these regulations, but as the years went by, the luxury returned, and many of the women began wearing silk or black satin sashes. Their beauty and elegance were dazzling. These women would remain aloof at payment of 13 *mon* or 16 *do*. Samurai from local clans or monks from the mountains would be talked into merrymaking that lasted well into the night to the accompaniment of *shamisen* music, while a host of other improprieties took place. Since these women were paid only 1 *ryo* and 2 *bu*, or at most 2 *ryo* by the teahouses, there is no way they could afford their beautiful attire unless the samurai and monks were being conned into paying for them.”

Around this time, meeting place teahouses (*deai-jaya*) and shadow houses (*kagama-jaya*) began to appear. The former were establishments which would rent small rooms where men and women could meet, and these correspond to the so-called “love hotels” of modern Japan. The shadow houses were where sodomy prostitutes plied their trade.

The Shogunate repeatedly banned teahouses, citing a threat to public morals. Even before the ordinance of 1808, which was mentioned previously, a number of proclamations and ordinances for regulating the teahouse trade were set forth one after the other.

At first, these ordinances specifically prohibited the samurai class from patronizing such establishments with the reasoning that this undermined the tenets of *bushido*, the code of honor of the samurai class. Thus, it was clear that the culture of hedonism that took deep root in the townspeople was spreading to the samurai class. This is what most concerned the authorities of the Shogunate.

An example of one such ordinance in 1734 stated: “Recently, the samurai of *daimyo* houses, during the absence of the lord, have been visiting teahouses for meetings, and participating in unbecoming behavior. In the future, this shall be banned, and meetings shall take place in the house of the lord.” Ordinances nearly identical to this were set forth several times afterwards.

The Shogunate banned prostitution, as well as the operation of teahouses and teahouse restaurants that employed prostitutes. Naturally, teahouses constructed in areas designated for



Figure 3. A merry-making at a *yu-kaku* depicted in an early drawing

fire control were illegal anyway. However, these types of establishments, once they become popular, are virtually impossible to eradicate by governmental decree. Gradually, female entertainment at teahouse banquets came out into the open. This led to the appearance of *okiya*, businesses that dispatch *geisha* entertainers on an out-call basis.

In response, the following ordinance was set forth in 1821: “There are establishments in the city where females are present, and sent to teahouses and teahouse restaurants to earn money through prostitution. This is unacceptable, and those involved in such businesses shall be subject to arrest and tried by the civil magistrate.” In the same way, city ordinances like this were set forth many times.

It was soon clear that these types of businesses could not be stopped by ordinances from the Shogunate. In 1848, the following ordinance was set forth: “Businesses that dispatch *geisha* with many women in their employ shall not be permitted to operate. However, those with just one *geisha* who must work to support parents and siblings shall be allowed as a measure of social relief.

In other words, the out-call system became officially sanctioned. As a result of this sanction, according to *Systems in Edo* edited by Ryosuke Ishii (1968), “some 37 or 38 *geisha* entertainers in Fukugawa were adorned in fine clothing to attract customers” and it is said that for a time, the brothel district of Yoshiwara ceased to flourish. Moreover, “Although Yanagibashi also had *geisha*, they were no match for those in Fukugawa in terms of beauty, while the *geisha* of Shimbashi, Yoshicho and Sukiyabashi were considered low-class.” The fact that *geisha* existed out in the open proved that the rule of “one *geisha* for each establishment” was roundly ignored.

From the late 18th century to the early 19th century, entertainment districts called

hanamachi (“flower towns”) replete with teahouses and *okiya* out-call services developed throughout Edo. Fujikichi Kato’s *Japan Hanamachi Chronicle* (1956) identifies some 111 such districts in Edo at the time, including Asakusa, Fukagawa, Nihonbashi, Shitaya and Yanagibashi.

6. CONCLUSION: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THREE PLEASURE INDUSTRIES

After the restoration of the Meiji Emperor in 1868, some 18 entertainment districts flourished in the newly renamed city of Tokyo. These included Akasaka, Kudan, Shintomicho, Yotsuya, and Yushima. (Kato, 1956).

These districts were called *sangyochi* (“three-industry districts”) for the teahouse restaurant, *geisha* out-call and rental room (*machiai-jaya*) industries. (Western Japan, however, only had “two-industry districts.”) Within the infrastructure of the entertainment district, customers would eat at restaurants, call female *geisha* entertainers from the *okiya* out-call services, and once the customer and *geisha* had struck a deal, they would adjourn together to a rental room.

To sum up, the practice of everyday drinking was not merely a matter of choosing a beverage to enjoy, but rather as a sort of prop for “parlor entertainment.” The practice of a customer and *geisha* singing a duet together was highly formalized, with the accompanying drinking activity taking on a rather stylized nature of its own.

Although it is commonly believed that the custom of tipping has not taken root in Japan, it was actually quite a common ritual in the entertainment districts of the period. As each new phase of entertainment began, it was customary for the customer to tip not only the *geisha*, but also to hand over appropriate tips to her attendants. It should be noted that such tipping also became institutionalized in high-class brothels as well.

Entertainment districts known as *hanamachi*, along with full-fledged brothel districts, represented the primary means of nighttime entertainment in Japan from the late 18th century through the mid-20th century. Such infrastructure as pubs which only provided drinks co-existed with other types of establishments. Since entertainment districts as a whole represented not only a major part of urban infrastructure, but also an institution of their own, they are a significant factor in the history and development of Japan’s urban environment.

What these districts provided were food, drink and pleasures of the flesh, and this can be said to be the template for modern-day entertainment districts in Japan’s large cities. Even after the decline of the traditional *hanamachi* entertainment districts, the business of hostess establishments providing drink and carnal pleasures continues apace in the so-called “cabarets” and “salons” of modern Japan.

Interestingly, in these settings, tipping continues to be an institution, but under newer terms such as *gyokudai* (“gift fee”), *badai* (“praise fee”), or *sekiryō* (“table charge”). While the level of sexual services provided varied with the times and the venue, what can be said in general about entertainment districts in Japan is that drinking and various forms of prostitution have gone hand-in-hand as integrated elements. As such, the activity of foreplay between men and women in such situations has become institutionalized.

The singing of duets with *karaoke* accompaniment can be considered a continuation of the old tradition of customers and *geisha* singing duets together as a prelude to more physical activities. In modern Japan, however, a man insisting on singing a duet with a woman he does not know well is not taken as a lascivious gesture. It can be said that the concept of “sexual harassment” does not exist in drinking situations, and that a feature of entertainment district culture is the fusion of drink and carnal pleasure.

What is new in modern Japan, however, is the increase of sex businesses in which drinking is not a component of the activity. Massage parlors, telephone services for arranging blind dates, and out-call prostitutes that make hotel room visits are but a few examples.

As a result, the traditional link between drinking and prostitution is weakening, with drinking increasingly divorced from carnal pleasures. These days, most customers of pubs and restaurants enjoy drinking without the availability of sexual services. This trend can be considered the modernization of Japan’s entertainment district culture. However, as this development is in its infancy, more time is needed to determine if this will become a genuine and long-term change.

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