

Shooting Games and Prizes : The Origins of Gambling

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| 1. The Scene at Fairs | 3. Street Performance and Amusement Facilities |
| 2. The Trade of the <i>Yashi</i> (salesman) and the <i>Tekiya</i> (street trader) | 4. Gambling and Controls |

1. THE SCENE AT FAIRS

The grand festival of Nezu Shrine (Bunkyō-ku, Tokyo) was held in 1991 on the 19 and 20 September.

There have recently been few examples of the grand-scale fairs which used to accompany shrine festivals in olden days. This is due in large part to the effects of the laws and ordinances of the Road Traffic Act, which were systematically implemented in 1960. The relevant parts of this act are, for reference, as follows:

ARTICLE 77 (ROAD USE AUTHORIZATION)

Those to whom the following categories apply must obtain permission for practices mentioned in the category concerned from the chief of police under whose jurisdiction the area relating to the relevant practices falls . . .

3. Those who wish to use the road to set up semi-permanent, non-mobile stands or other such vending places.

This meanwhile is linked to a social phenomenon—the way that local people are reluctant to allow these practices since they make an identification between *tekiya* (stall operators and street traders) and the *yakuza* (the Japanese Mafia).

As a consequence, the only places which convey the atmosphere of the fairs of former times are those which are held inside the grounds of places that have a sufficiently large space to offer and which are based on arrangements made simply between the *tekiya* street-trade organisations and either individual shrines or the associations supporting them.

When we speak of the atmosphere of the fairs of former times, one aspect to which we refer is the absence of widespread provision of food for sale. While this was only natural for a period which had not yet seen the development of cars and

refrigeration equipment, we must conclude that historically speaking popular dishes, such as *yakisoba*, *okonomiyaki*, *takoyaki*, *ikayaki* and so on, are new enterprises at fairs. Inroads made by the *yakuza* are also apparent in this sphere of activity.

Another feature of the fairs of the past was the number of shows included in them and also the prevalence of shooting games and prizes. The emphasis on entertainment, in other words, was strong. These attractions have suffered a marked decline in recent years.

Although shows have disappeared from the fair at Nezu Shrine, shooting games and prizes do, however, still survive in some quantity.

There were, by the way, 103 street stalls lined up at the fair at the grand festival in 1991. Of these 38 were stalls that featured shooting games or prizes. They break down as follows:

- Fishing for Treasure (7 stalls)
- Scooping Goldfish (6 stalls)
- Target Practice (4 stalls)
- Dice Games, Smartball, Scooping Bouncy Balls, Scooping Yo-yo's (3 stalls each)
- Quoits, Adding Numbers (like Bingo) (2 stalls each)
- Paper/scissors/stone (*jan-ken*) game, ball-throwing game, dart game, *Katanuki* (a shape-tearing game), Fishing for Turtles, Lining Up Dolls (1 stall each)

Of the remaining 65 stalls over 40 were selling food. The sweet stalls (of which there were 5) and cayenne pepper (1) are survivors from days gone by, but the rest were all selling the foods mentioned above. The remaining stalls, of which there were under 20, were selling small things such as purses, thread, ribbons, accessories and toys.

If one bears all this in mind, the significance of the shooting games and prize stalls becomes even more pronounced. Their main targets and customers are, of course, children. In the old days they were quite separate from the *sugoroku* and other dice-throwing games whose promise of excitement used to attract the adults (see below).

In both, however, one is given the pleasure of playing the game right there, on the spot, while they also involve the material gains of the prize that one can win. In this sense we can therefore say of them that they are recreational forms which incorporate the spirit of gambling. They are consequently the sort of attraction of which parents do not really approve.

2. THE TRADE OF THE *YASHI* (SALESMAN) AND THE *TEKIYA* (STREET TRADER)

The *tekiya* street-trade organizations were what came to run these fairs. The *tekiya* set up their movable vending stands and amusement equipment and created a bustling scene. When we speak of the *tekiya* we refer to both the *yashi* salesmen and to their trade associations.

The majority of street traders are small-scale itinerant workers. Their travels involve negotiations with locals as well as friction with fellow traders. Street traders came to require controls to regulate these situations, and consequently *tekiya* street trader unions evolved around the country. This happened in the middle of the Edo era.

This period, the middle of the Edo era, coincides with the sudden rise of the pleasure-seeking culture of the merchant class and was a time when recreational activities were flourishing among the people. Typical of such pursuits were blossom-viewing and fireworks, for example. There were many festivals and religious fêtes also. Fairs were linked in with this, providing an important factor in people gathering for pleasure purposes. Where there is a crowd, there are street stalls; where there are street stalls, there is a crowd. The scale of the fairs, therefore, gradually began to grow. In some cases the sites used by the larger fairs became regular fixtures, as with the "temple booths" (*nakamise*) in Asakusa, and, despite their temporary structure, lasted for a considerable length of time. Merchandise, of course, also diversified in cases such as these. It was in these places that the *tekiya* unions evolved. Even though the merchandise that the *yashi* salesmen handled did diversify over time, the peddling of medicines was their main concern.

The word *yashi* is nowadays usually written with the characters for "incense set seller" but in earlier times the characters for "medicine seller," "arrow seller," or "field man" were the ones that were used.

This is what we are told in *Morisada Mankō* (*Essays by Morisada*) for example:

Yashi is a name for a tradesman; most medicine sellers were *yashi*, but not all. They sell a variety of things and there are many tradesmen on the roads. Teeth-pullers also belong to this category. . . .

The characters "arrow seller" for *yashi* are assumed—the proper characters are "field man." As the characters imply, poor wandering *samurai* began selling medicines to help stave off their hunger and thirst. Nowadays, divided under thirteen different categories, they basically sell pharmaceutical and household goods. Although there are thirteen different categories, there is a vast array of wares: dentifrice for teeth, lipstick for lips, face powder for the face, moxa for sudden sickness while travelling. They also sell flints and steels. Generally speaking everyone selling pharmaceuticals and household goods at the roadside is a *yashi*. They wander around from place to place starting as apprentices for older, more experienced men before starting on their own. This is why they refer to each other in "parent" and "child" (*oyabun-kobun*) hierarchical

terms.

The agricultural deity Shinnō was worshipped as the symbol of the *yashi* and *tekiya* line. Shinnō first featured in Chinese mythology and was originally worshipped as a farming deity. In Japan the deity became the progenitor of medicinal herbs. Thus in the drinking feasts and other ceremonies of *yashi* and *tekiya* society an image of Shinnō (a scroll) was hung in the centre of the wall. Similarly, when a family's professional name was passed on to a new heir, the old family head handed over a long sword, a scroll and an image of Shinnō (in scroll form) to the new head.

This scroll, incidentally, was called the *Scroll of the Secrets of the Thirteen Medicines* (*Jūsan Kōgu Tora-no-maki*). If we consider the image of Shinnō as the symbol of the *tekiya* and the long sword as the *tekiya*'s soul, *The Scroll of the Secrets of the Thirteen Medicines* represented the *tekiya*'s genealogy or family tree. It corresponds exactly to the *History of Tsuikyō Shinnō* (*Tsuikyō Shinnō-den*) of woodworker society and formed the authoritative foundation for so-called itinerant workers.

In the *Scroll of the Thirteen Medicines* we find the "Catalogue of Comings and Goings of Medicine Traders" which records the legend- and rumor-based history of the *yashi*. It records the emergence of a series of distinguished historical figures such as En no Gyōja, Hachiman Tarō Yoshiie and Toyotomi Hideyoshi and how the *yashi* worked for these personalities as guides and medicine salesmen. A typical passage reads as follows:

1592. When the *shōgun* Hideyoshi attacked Korea, as he crossed the sea from Nagoya in Hizen he received guidance from medicine dealers.

1629. *Yashi* were summoned to visit Councillor of State Matsudaira, Lord of Izu. The eight *yashi* and five tradesmen were granted permission by the *shōgun*. For the stalls they were allowed to hang a three-foot curtain as a sign; this read:

Cook, Puppeteer, Ironmonger, Expositor, Pharmacist, Impersonator, Writer, Roadside Doctor.

These were the eight *yashi*.

Sundries Seller, Medicine Seller, Tobacco Seller, Entertainer, Tea Stall Proprietor. These five tradesmen were *yashi* too.

There is another *Scroll of the Secrets of the Thirteen Medicines* based on the *Requirements for Incense Traders* of 1718 in which Ōoka, Lord of Echizen, established the thirteen *yashi*, but it is basically much the same. Worth noting, however, is the fact that nearly everything was directed towards selling medicines. We are given accounts of people involved with sword-play and juggling, for example, or top-spinning and mortar reworking, who were actually selling dentifrice, pills and

other medicinal products, whilst tea, sweets, pears, tangerines, white *sake* and so on were all being sold as medicines. This confirms that the *yashi*'s main concern was indeed peddling medicines.

One can infer this also from the structure of his travels. Travelling was, of course, the *yashi*'s life. In the past travelling meant walking, both in the times portrayed in legends and much more recent times. Baggage therefore was kept to a minimum. Since the *yashi* was a tradesman, however, he needed goods to sell. Because he was itinerant, there were limits on the goods he could take. What was required was something valuable, compact and not too heavy, which would keep and which he could sell basically anywhere. Furthermore, it was essential for him to be able to replenish his stocks wherever he went without expending much capital. It was thus medicinal goods that were the most lucrative merchandise for him. Certainly there is no doubt that in former times men who knew some way of making Chinese medicines did travel around, on foot, relying on their knowledge and skills to make their living.

With time the *yashi*'s main stock-in-trade changed from medicines to incense sets. This switch is thought to have taken place around the middle of the Edo period with the rise in demand for incense in powder and stick form that accompanied the spread of the *butsudan* (Buddhist household altar) and the formalization of Buddhist funeral ceremonies and memorial services. It was at this time, therefore, that the characters for *yashi* also changed from "medicine seller" to "incense set seller."

After this the name *tekiya* also came into being. There are various explanations for this word, but the most likely would seem to be that the word is a reversal of *yateki*, meaning "target practice" and written with the characters for arrow and target—this is an association we saw in *Essays by Morisada* earlier where *yashi* is written with the characters for "arrow" and "seller." It would seem that this society quite often reversed words in this way and then used them cipher-like in their new form.

From the middle of the Edo period on we start to find stalls which, although they were only temporary constructions, were left in the same place for some time, while we have already spoken above of the diversification which took place in merchandising. We should be sure to take note of another development too: of the amusement-oriented equipment which began to appear in these places. These were essentially shooting games and amusements that involved winning prizes and they link directly down to the present day. Target practice for shooting featured among them, as did quoits, *sugoroku* (a dice game), *hagashie* (where one tears a picture out of paper), bird-catching and so on. Whereas nowadays these games are for children, they developed in those days as adult games. Particularly popular among them was target practice.

Of course target practice and the other types of amusement equipment developed mainly in the cities. They reached the provinces slightly later. We can presumably therefore say that the strong trends towards travelling street traders be-

ing called *yashi* in agricultural and fishing villages and *tekiya* in cities are only natural.

3. STREET PERFORMANCE AND AMUSEMENT FACILITIES

Let us consider at this point the *enka* street singer Soeda Azemibō's *A Record of the Undercurrents at Asakusa (Asakusa Teiryūki)*, published in 1930. In his descriptions of fair scenes which feature in it he records a large number of street shows and amusements. Thus:

Street Shows:

Minstrels, popular songs (*enka*), one-act street shows (plays), comic dialogue, *shamisen*-playing, impersonations, globe-running, top-spinning, caricature sketching.

Amusements:

Rocking horses, target practice, gambling.

Of course most of these performances were put on not for money and involved no entrance fees—they were intended to attract people to whom some product might then be sold. Plays, comic dialogue shows and impersonations were also, however, being performed in theaters and variety halls by this time. Indeed, in Asakusa around this period the focal point of the busiest amusement area was Rokku (the theater district) and it was alongside the theaters that street stalls were set up and street shows performed.

The street stalls were varied and included stalls for bananas, hosiery, medicines, drapery, sandals, shoes, toys, gardening, music, books, sundries, second hand clothing, beans, umbrellas and toiletries.

Trade at these stalls was based around persistent sales patter and sales demonstrations, and it is important to note this. The patter was really a highly developed art, as the salesman skilfully manipulated his audience's minds, expounding on his product's efficacy in an amusing and interesting way and adjusting the price for them. The demonstrations meanwhile required practice as the salesman used deft sleight of hand displays to attract customers.

It need hardly be said that basic business considerations—how to get a product in cheaply and sell it dearly—were what lay behind the development of this way of doing business. In this respect there was no difference from large shops. Where there was a difference from large shops was in the fact that the stalls dealt with many poor quality products. They sold a considerable quantity of remnants and items that were not very practically useful. If we take the rice bowls and plates, for example, which were to be found amongst the *yashi*'s wares in the Meiji era, most were being dealt in in ten-or twenty—piece lots.

Of course, in circumstances such as these, if the salesman simply lined his

goods up quietly, he would not attract any purchasers. He therefore added some extra value to his sales with patter and demonstrations. If the patter was delivered fluently and was interesting and amusing, then customers would be tempted to buy some bowls, aware that they might be being tricked into buying broken ones yet content to do so because they could treat their outlay as payment for the comic display that they had just heard.

For the salesmen the patter and performances were the lifeblood of their trade. Devotedly polishing their oratorical displays, proficiency in the art of speech was what they were concerned with. To be certain, the desire to earn some money, however little, was lurking behind this, but they must also have felt some delight in doing their business. While there was a mischievousness in the way they challenged customers with little puzzles, the customers seem to have been happy to be taken in by them.

Up until World War II, at any rate, street traders and street performers were competing amongst themselves with their oratorical skills, raising their voices loud. Amongst them were target practice stalls and other amusement facilities, attracting large numbers of people. There is a lively description in *A Record of the Undercurrents at Asakusa* mentioned earlier, which reads as follows.

The target practice girls are young and beautiful. Most of them have their hair in Momoware or Shimada styles.

The "Blowgun" and "Bowling" games have disappeared off to far-flung country festivals, so target practice is the only game left that is slightly old-style Asakusa.

When there's nobody playing at the target practice stall, the "pretend punters"—conmen who are in with the stall operators—come up to have a shot, and they are excellent. Bang, bang—down the targets go and they collect a huge pile of cigarettes. Their skill, meanwhile, collects a huge pile of spectators and as soon as someone steps forward for a go, they vanish as quick as a flash. Then they start playing at another empty stall.

The customers aim at tape with bats hanging down from it.

"Wow—excellent! You must have shot quite a bit."

"No, no—today's my first go."

"No way—your first go at Asakusa maybe, but you've done it before elsewhere. ."

The girls are honey-sweet: "Oh dear, sir—not up to your usual good form today.
...."

Going back to the Edo period again, we find that raffles accompanied the

festivals at shrines and temples and that they were extremely popular. A number of sources tell of how they always attracted large crowds and how they turned the shrine or temple grounds into a scene of wild excitement.

Fairs were indeed unusually uproarious places. Their hearts pounding, people thronged together. Fairs were thus entertainment in themselves.

However, it became hard for society to sanction the street performances and amusements which caused people all this excitement. As has been explained above, the Road Traffic Act, which came into force in 1960, was the direct cause for most of these facilities disappearing, although in fact waves of legal regulations had been issued since Meiji times. Thus we find, for Tokyo alone:

- 1876 Notification of a ban on raffles in Tokyo.
- 1877 Establishment of Regulations Controlling Archery Stalls.
- 1880 Notification by Tokyo Police Headquarters of controls for all archery operators in the fifteen wards and six districts of the Metropolitan District, banning the entrance of inebriates and banning gambling and similar behavior.
- 1882 Reform of Regulations Controlling Brothels, Pleasure District Restaurants and Prostitution.
- 1884 Establishment of Regulations for Action on Gambling
- 1890 Establishment of Regulations Controlling Amusement Areas; Establishment of Regulations Controlling Variety Halls; Ban on Vulgar Performance.
- 1900 Establishment of Regulations Controlling Roads, issued by Metropolitan Police Headquarters.
- 1901 City of Tokyo Ban on street shows.
- 1921 Establishment of Regulations Controlling Entertainment Areas and the Entertainment Industry, issued by Metropolitan Police Headquarters.

Since, however, these regulations were mainly established by police authorities, they did not have as much authority as they would have had if they had been established as law. Thus if the *tekiya* organizations notified the relevant police station in advance, in most instances the old conventions applied. However, with the 1960 Road Traffic Act, they were afforded virtually no flexibility. What we can also see in this process is the precedence taken by motor vehicles in road traffic matters, something which characterises the age and which is related to the increase in motor vehicle traffic.

4. GAMBLING AND CONTROLS

The amusements that are typified by target practice games combine the fun of playing with the material rewards of winning a prize. Whilst these games focus on children, we can call them elementary gambling games since the essence of gambling is certainly present. We may look on them as a watershed between the number games that appear spontaneously in the world of children and the gambling pursuits

of adults.

At fairs in former times there was plenty of roadside gambling—*sugoroku* and card games, for example, other dice games and chess. While this was never officially condoned, it enjoyed tacit approval for many, many years. *Sugoroku* (a dice game) in particular has a long history and was very popular at fairs in Edo (the old name for Tokyo).

This *sugoroku*, incidentally, was not the picture *sugoroku* which you play by throwing dice and drawing pictures on a piece of paper, but a game played on a wooden board some 37 cm. long, 25 cm. wide and 9 cm. thick. There were two linear measures on the board, divided into 12; you put the two dice in a shaker, threw them and then advanced your men—each player had 15 black or white pieces, round and flat. It was usually played by two people and was an interesting game [MASUKAWA 1980-83], since the way one advanced one's pieces and how this related to the numbers on the dice was quite complicated.

One can picture these gambling activities as very similar to the scenes one can find in the backstreets of Hong Kong and South East Asia, with crowds gathered for chess matches and picture-drawing contests. It is a form of entertainment that mankind as a whole, not only Japanese people, enjoy and when it occurred spontaneously, unregulated by the authorities, it was a peaceful one.

In Japan, however, as a result of the various legal controls of the modern period it has been some time since one has been able to find this sort of scene. Of all the amusement facilities that were set out along roads, gambling was the first to meet with regulatory measures and subsequent extinction.

An 1884 Government Decree, for example, established the following "Regulations Controlling the Crime of Gambling."

Article 1: Anyone found gambling will be subject to punishment for a period of at least one month and of not more than four years and also to a correctional fine of at least five and not more than two hundred yen. This applies equally to anyone providing a venue for such activities, anyone acting as lookout and to anyone else providing any other form of assistance.

Anyone found organising gambling circles, organising gambling venues, carrying offensive weapons or conducting themselves offensively will be subject to punishment for a period of at least one and not more than ten years, and also to a correctional fine of at least fifty and not more than five hundred yen. Even though organisers may not actually gamble, they will still be dealt with as above.

Article 2: Effects and goods found on gambling venues will be taken irrespective of who they may belong to.

Article 3: When gambling is discovered, the contents of the premises will be taken irrespective of who the premises belong to and irrespective of time of day. Police officers should, however, present a certificate for this.

Article 4: The regulations relating to the operation of these regulations have been established in prefectural ordinance by the Police Superintendent, Commissioners and Urban Prefectural Governor (Tokyo excluded) and are put into execution with the approval of the Home Minister.

Many amendments to this followed over the years, but these basically all conformed to the Governmental Decree shown above. Under current law, incidentally, gambling is dealt with under Article 185. This criminalises “anyone engaged in games of chance involving money or in gambling.” Even in our modern society the generally accepted view is that this gambling that began at our roadsides is the root of many evils, and arguments to the contrary are indeed flimsy. Since gangster organizations in particular are frequently involved in this sort of gambling, there can of course be no condoning it with matters being as they are. We should simply not forget, however, the bubbling merriment of the fairs of yesteryear, which also included activities of this kind. Let us reiterate the fact that the oratorical and sleight-of-hand displays typical of street performances, and the shooting games and prizes (with their elements of gambling) were major factors in attracting people to the fairs. Let us also recognise that there was a time that saw some of the originally temporary stalls and huts along the roads develop, almost overnight—*pachinko* parlors and circuses, for example—into established fixtures and commercial ventures.

APPENDIX

The Composition of Fairs

Stalls:

- Jinbai* Also known as *sanzun*. Selling from a stall. Verbal approach employed in part but relatively sober.
- Tankabai* Also known as *korobi*. Hard sell. Spreading out a mat on the road, piling one's merchandise upon it and using patter to sell.
- Ōjime* Using patter, sleight of hand, sword displays etc. to gather people, then selling herbal medicines, medical literature and so on.
- Rokuma* Fortune-telling.

Tents:

- Hajiki* Target practice, knocking down *daruma* dolls, ball-throwing.
- Takamono* Plays, shows, circuses.

*The shooting games of the title mainly fall into the *hajiki* category but there are some not operating as stalls. “Number adding”, “Treasure Hunt” games and so on fall into the street stall *sanzun* category.

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