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## Transnational Labor Migration in Japan : The Case of Korean Nightclub Hostesses in Osaka

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## Transnational Labor Migration in Japan: The Case of Korean Nightclub Hostesses in Osaka

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日本におけるトランスナショナルな労働移民:大阪の韓国クラブの事例から

鄭 幸 子

Although there was no visa category for “hostess” in Japan, this was one of the most common occupations for immigrant women until the United States intervened in the mid-2000s. How they dealt with this contradictory situation and what the personal, social and economic costs were the research questions that guide the studies outlined in this paper. By the 2000s in Osaka, thirty-three Korean clubs operated in the district called Minami, where, typically, South Korean-born women served Japanese-born men. I conducted participant observation as a paid hostess at one of them between 2000 and 2001, discussing the questions above with one entertainer, two hostesses and one associate *mama* (senior-status hostess with management responsibilities) as main informants. Drawing on the ethnographic data gathered during fieldwork and the study of hundreds of pages of club management documentation from the summer of 1997 to the fall of 2000, this paper shows how the contradiction between the demand for immigrant hostesses and the lack of an appropriate visa category converts them into legally vulnerable persons, leaving them prey to economic exploitation and psychological suffering.

日本にはホステスビザが存在しないにも関わらず、2000年代半ばに米国国務省から干渉されるまでは、移住労働女性にとってホステスという仕事が最も広く行われる職業の一つであった。移住女性たちがこうした矛盾の中、どのような社会的、心理的な負担を負わなければいけなかったかというのが本論で展開

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**Key Words** : Korean clubs, transnational migrant hostesses, hospitality workers, visa policy, Japan

**キーワード** : 韓国クラブ, 国境を越えて移動するホステス, おもてなし労働者, ビザ政策, 日本

する問いである。2000年代には、大阪のミナミと呼ばれるエリアだけで、33軒の韓国クラブが存在し、韓国生まれの女性が日本生まれの男性をもてなすというのが最も一般的な形態であった。筆者は2000年から2001年にかけて、その中の一つの韓国クラブでホステスとして働きながら参与観察を行った。本論では、1997年夏から2000年秋までの数百ページに及ぶ経営者サイドの資料と、筆者の参与観察に基づくデータを照らし合わせながら、ホステス需要に応える形で移住してきた女性たちが、ホステスビザが存在しないために法的弱者となり、経済的に搾取されたり精神的に苦しんだりする日常を、エンターテナー一人、ホステス二人、チーママー一人に焦点を当てて論じる。

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## 1 Introduction: Transnational Migrant Hostesses<sup>1)</sup>

In June 2004, the U.S. Department of State published the “Trafficking in Persons Report” and designated Japan as a monitored country, expressly indicating Japan’s “entertainer visa” (*kōgyō biza*) as a hotbed for human trafficking. Until that time, the majority of approximately 130,000 immigrant entertainers were working as hostesses in 10,000 bars, nightclubs and pubs across Japan, while about 1,000 production agencies and their promoters were connecting transnational migrant entertainers with clubs, bars and pubs (Sakanaka 2005). Various ethnic clubs and bars in Japan serve customers seeking “exotic” experiences where immigrant women work as companion “hostesses.” These establishments include Korean clubs<sup>2)</sup>, Filipino bars, Thai snack pubs, Chinese lounges and international clubs—where predominantly white women serve as hostesses<sup>3)</sup>. Some other clubs are multi-ethnic and multi-racial<sup>4)</sup>.

In light of Japan’s lack of immigration policy<sup>5)</sup>, the Japanese government did not refute the high-handed yet problematic arguments of the U.S. Department of State that the hostess club industry<sup>6)</sup> was the equivalent of “the product of human trafficking” (Parreñas 2011). By way of example, the name of the Japanese bureau that controls the national border crossing (*Nyūkoku Kanri-kyoku*) is officially trans-

lated as the Immigration Bureau of Japan, while its literal translation would be more like the Bureau Controlling Entry to the Country, a designation that clearly states its primary mission of controlling people's entry without any reference to the notion of "immigration" (*imin*)<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the Bureau was often abbreviated to the Entry Control (*Nyūkan*) among Koreans in Japan. After the publication of the report by the U.S. Department of State, and instead of addressing these contradictions, the Japanese government simply tightened the eligibility criteria for an "entertainer visa." As a result, the number of visas for entertainers fell from nearly 135,000 in 2004 to fewer than 100,000 in 2005, and the number kept declining drastically until it reached 28,612 in 2010.

In this paper, I investigate the sales and incomes of South Korean immigrant hostesses in a country where a "hostess visa" does not exist, with the goal of illuminating the structural problems of the current Japanese visa policy. I focus on Club Rose<sup>8</sup>, one of the thirty-three Korean clubs that hired about 1,000 Korean immigrants in Minami (Osaka), where I undertook fieldwork between 2000 and 2001. I conducted multiple short-term research visits in the 1990s, one long-term labor participant observation as a paid hostess from 2000 to 2001, and multiple follow-up field visits in Japan and South Korea until 2013. Although this paper focuses on the period before the aforementioned intervention of the U.S. Department of State, it shows that the hostesses were already legally vulnerable and susceptible to becoming objects of economic exploitation and psychological suffering, a situation that, ironically, worsened after the issuing of the U.S. report, as was consistently noted by Parreñas (2011).

These thirty-three Korean clubs constituted the corporative platform of the Osaka Minami Korean Eating and Drinking Establishments Cooperative (*Osaka Minami Kankoku Inshokuten Kyōdō Kumiai*), comprising the club directors. This cooperative organization held a periodic management committee meeting (*tenchō kaigi*) attended by directors (*tenchō*), but also by full *mamas*<sup>9</sup> (*ōmama*), owners (*ōnā*), and/or executive directors (*senmu*). Club Rose was one of the member establishments. The club served primarily Japanese-born male customers and the workers and customers identified it as a Korean club<sup>10</sup>. The majority of the hostesses were Korean immigrant women, between their twenties and their forties, and only a couple of Japanese men worked there. In fact, forty-six Korean women were working at Club Rose during my field research. Except for one cook and one dishwasher, the remaining forty-four women offered hospitality companionship services by drinking and talking with the customers, whose age range was wider than the workers'. They were between their twenties and their seventies and the majority were Japanese men. The typical picture at a Club Rose table was of young Korean immigrant hostesses serving older Japanese men.

Comprehensive anthropological investigation of immigrant entertainers and hostesses is still very limited<sup>11</sup>. A notable exception is Parreñas (2011) who con-

ducted participant observation among Filipino entertainers in Tokyo and precisely underscores the problems of the *Trafficking in Persons Report*. In this scholarly context, my research aims to contribute to the study of this topic through the detailed analysis of the hostesses' incomes and labor relationships, analyzing how their working conditions are differently affected by their migration pattern and visa statuses.

## 2 Korean Hostesses in Japan

While as of 2014 Japan has not established diplomatic relations with North Korea, it normalized its diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1965. By 1973, the number of Japanese tourists that visited South Korea for sex tourism reached 430,000 (Hinago 1986: 144). As a result, anti sex-tourism movements arose frequently both in Japan and South Korea, and Japan began to accept nightclub Korean hostesses, although there was not a “hostess visa” category. This contradiction remains a major cause of concern.

At the beginning of this arrangement, some argued that Korean hostesses had received favorable treatment, and after the abrogation of foreign travel restrictions in South Korea in January 1989, there was an increase in the number of Koreans in search of higher-paying jobs who came to Japan to work as hostesses. According to the report by the 1995 Korea Broadcasting System, 1,200 Korean nightclubs, lounges, bars and snack pubs existed in the Tokyo area, and 900 in the Osaka area. However, after the economic bubble burst in the early 1990s and Japan entered into a cycle of recession, the immigrant hostesses saw how more and more additional work requirements were added to their job, engaging them in extra-visa activities (*shikakugai katsudo*). As their legal situation remained precarious and their temporary visas limited, the clubs began requiring more hostesses to meet their sales quotas<sup>12)</sup>. While these requirements were commonly imposed on Japanese hostesses in Japanese clubs as well, immigrant hostesses without proper visas had to cope with an extra psychological challenge due to their unstable legal situation and the scenario of economic crisis.

Since the category of “hostess visa” does not exist in Japan, the immigrant hostesses had and still have to apply for an “entertainer visa,” being thus subjected to economic exploitation by the Japanese-Korean production agencies responsible for hiring them via auditions. From the clubs' point of view, the recruitment of entertainers entails additional complications since it requires substantial capital, careful planning, complicated paperwork, good reputations, spatial allocations for performance<sup>13)</sup>, and living space outside the club. The majority of the newer clubs, therefore, cannot afford to hire entertainers.

In the case of Club Rose, these hostesses comprised 20 to 25 percent of the female hospitality workers<sup>14)</sup>, although their training and skills as entertainers

varied widely. One of them graduated from the prestigious National University of Traditional Performing Arts in South Korea and aspired to continue her education and training at the Graduate School of the University of Hawai'i in Manoa. When she came to Japan as an entertainer for the first time, she did not like her job and left in the middle of the contract, but she later returned to Japan as an entertainer. At the other end of the spectrum were women like Naoko, whose training as a stage performer was minimal and who preferred serving and sitting with customers instead of performing on stage.

Although the work content and the club conditions were far from what is evoked by the legal concept of "human trafficking,"<sup>15)</sup> once the invisible production agencies were brought into the picture, economic exploitation became salient even though their working hours and salaries were reasonable. The average monthly take-home pay of entertainers was about 240,000 JPY (2,400 USD). On the other hand, if one worked as a regular, daily-waged hostess, not as a show member, the club offered between 18,000 JPY (180 USD) and 25,000 JPY (250 USD) a day, based on the forecast of their sales performance, clientele and potential. If a regular hostess worked for 25 days—as many entertainers actually did—her monthly salary could be somewhere between 450,000 JPY (4,500 USD) and 625,000 JPY (6,250 USD). However, "entertainer visa" holders received less than half the salary offered to the regular hostesses, since the club had already paid 440,000 JPY (4,400 USD) for each entertainer to the production agencies. The approximate daily wage was 17,000 JPY (170 USD), but the agencies took away half and paid only the remaining amount. The only cash directly handed to an entertainer from the club was, on average, approximately 20,000 JPY (200 USD), as a bonus for a good performance. We can thus conclude that the Japanese visa policy that conventionalizes the acquisition of an "entertainer visa" via the production agencies enables this system of economic and labor exploitation, a tangled web where the agencies hovering in the shadows are far more exploitative than the much more visible clubs.

In addition, when entertainers were not on stage, they had to engage in hospitality services such as chatting, serving alcohol and playing games with the customers. Although these services are prohibited for an "entertainer visa" holder because they are considered "activities other than those permitted under the status of residence previously granted," in effect, they are tolerated if not, indeed, expected. In this sense, it is worth noting that when the Entry Control Bureau raided a Korean club, these activities did not become an issue. This practice meant both clubs and entertainers were willing to pay hefty fees to the production agencies in order to obtain a visa.

In general terms, the primary targets for deportation by the Entry Control Bureau included the following: 1) those who were engaged in hostess work with short-term stay visas such as tourist, business or student<sup>16)</sup>; and 2) those who were attempting to obtain or who had already obtained a spouse visa from a "paper

marriage” with a Japanese national or permanent resident. The spouse visa has no restriction on employment and may be obtained by paying several million yen to brokers, a fraction of which is for the “contracted husband.” While an immigrant hostess with a spouse visa can avoid economic exploitation by production agencies, she has to pay thousands of dollars to the marriage broker. Since the majority of show members are in their twenties, it is hard for a woman in her thirties or above to obtain an “entertainer visa.” Consequently, she has to take the way of the spouse visa despite its costs and risks, or become a circular migrant hostess with a tourist visa, shuttling back and forth between South Korea and Japan. The lack of a “hostess visa” category in Japanese legislation therefore condemns the immigrant hostesses to being subjected to economic exploitation and crime even though there is a real demand for their services among clubs in Japan.

### 3 Korean Clubs: A Circular Migration System

The lack of a “hostess visa” category not only makes the immigrant hostesses the target of economic exploitation, it also contributes as a key factor to the closing down of many clubs. Those clubs become part of a circular activity of opening, closing, renovating and re-opening because of the unstable labor supply of immigrant hostesses due to the restrictions of the temporary visa scheme<sup>17)</sup>. Among the Minami’s thirty three Korean clubs that featured in my research, the newest was only two months old, and the oldest was fifteen years old. Five clubs were one year old and another five were one-and-a-half years old. Four clubs were two years old and two were two-and-a-half years old, while another two were three years old. The average operating period of the thirty-three Korean clubs in Minami was 2.8 years. There were fewer older clubs and only nine clubs (27 percent) were older than the average (2.8 years old). In other words, the majority stayed open for less than three years.

In light of this, I categorized the thirty three clubs into three groups based on their operating periods. The first group had operated for less than one year—eight clubs (24.2 percent) belonged to this group. Among them, one club was only two months old and another one was three months old. Five clubs were six months old, and one club was ten months old. The second group was for those clubs over one year old but less than the Minami club average of 2.8 years. Sixteen clubs (48.5 percent), approximately half of Minami’s Korean clubs, belonged to this group. The last group lasted longer than the average 2.8 years, but only included nine clubs (27.3 percent). Twenty clubs (60.6 percent) clustered between the period of six months to two years old, and two thirds of the clubs were two years old or newer. As a matter of fact, the operating periods of Korean clubs were shorter than the Japanese clubs I studied later in Nagoya (Chung 2004). This finding, along with my following discussion, suggests that the lack of a “hostess visa” category affects the longevity of Korean club operations, which implies that some Korean hostesses and



clubs have to cope with this problem by appropriating “entertainer” visas.

Among the first clubs group (less than one year old), only one hired entertainers, and two of them (three months old and six months old) were preparing to recruit entertainers from South Korea. That is to say, only 12.5 percent of the under-a-year-old clubs hired entertainers. A quarter of this first group’s clubs were in the process of recruiting and the remaining 67.5 percent did not have entertainers, nor were they in the process of hiring them. Among the second group (over one year but less than 2.8 years old), 69 percent hired entertainers. And among the last group (2.8 years old and older), 78 percent hired entertainers. As the operating periods increased, the clubs tended to hire entertainers in order to secure a relatively stable labor stream and make their accrued economic, social and spatial capital profitable.

Overall, nineteen Korean clubs (57.6 percent) hired entertainers and about 160 entertainers had obtained an “entertainer visa” and worked as members of stage shows in Minami. If we divide 160 entertainers by nineteen Korean clubs, the average is 8.4 entertainers per club and, in fact, each club did hire between seven and nine entertainers and employed around thirty people as a whole<sup>18)</sup>. Nevertheless, 160 entertainers only fulfilled 70 percent of the demand for entertainers in Minami<sup>19)</sup>. Therefore, despite the legal issues already mentioned, it is also necessary to highlight that the “entertainer visa” holders enjoyed a relatively stable labor situation (i.e. little risk of deportation by the Entry Control Bureau), becoming a valuable work force in spite of their relative lack of fluency in Japanese and their relatively short contract periods (three to six months).

#### 4 Hospitality Workers: Entertainers and Hostesses

Korean nightclub workers do more than just give entertainment or pleasure. While a hostess is expected to meet a customer’s needs and an entertainer is supposed to give pleasure, it is difficult to establish a clear boundary between both activities and we should consider them as equivalent. In order to deal with this conceptual issue, I want to introduce the emerging notion of “hospitality,”<sup>20)</sup> and define the entertainers, hostesses and *mamas* working in Minami’s Korean clubs industry as hospitality workers.

Specifically, in the case of Club Rose, entertainers were referred to as the “show troupe” (*shōdan*) or “show members” (*shō membā*), and they were marked as a distinct group by stage performance and clothes, such as Korean costumes and long dresses. Nine Korean-born women were entertainers and formed the show troupe headed by a leader (*danchō*). They lived together in a three-bedroom furnished apartment, conveniently located at walking distance from the club. The club paid the rent and utilities and, occasionally, even provided meals for them.

A typical show program was as follows: three entertainers performed traditional Korean dances with fans and drums on stage and a fourth entertainer



performed a solo modern jazz dance using the whole club as stage. Finally, the youngest entertainer performed the elaborate solo Korean drum dance, and the top sales hostess concluded the program by singing a few songs in English, Korean or Japanese. This program lasted about half an hour and was usually performed only once a night, since the entertainers were expected to sit with customers most of the evening as hospitality workers. The remaining two entertainers hardly performed on stage and stayed with customers. One of them was Naoko, in her twenties. When I asked her why she barely went up on stage, she answered: “I become nervous on stage. That’s why I try to avoid the audience’s gaze when I dance Korean traditional dances, as if I accidentally see the customers’ eyes, my mind goes blank. My show troupe members know it and understand it. That is why I am often excused from the stage performance. I would rather sit next to a customer and watch the show with him.” Ironically, the singer was not legally an entertainer, either. She had a long-term visa instead of a temporary visa as entertainer and did not live in the entertainers’ apartment even though she performed on the stage every night. As I have already mentioned, the boundary between an entertainer and a hostess was porous and, consequently, the general notion of “hospitality workers” seems to best suit the complexity involved. In order to explore this issue further, I will investigate the work conditions and financial situations of an entertainer, two hostesses and one associate *mama* in the following section. In my exposition, I will consider the similarities and differences between them, while paying attention to variables such as language and age.

## 5 Club Rose: Entertainers, Hostesses and Associate *Mamas*

The Club Rose management offered me access to hundreds of pages of confidential management data (from summer 1997 to winter 2000) on its employees for my research. Drawing on this data, I compiled graphs of entertainers, hostesses and associate *mamas* in order to analyze how their working conditions were differently affected by their migration patterns and visa statuses. The lefthand vertical axis on the graphs reflects a worker’s monthly performance based on the following variables: sales, salary, customers’ overdue bills, loan payments, take-home income and bonuses (or fines for the associate *mama*), while the horizontal axis indicates the periods of her employment at the club. Specifically, I will consider the data relating to the entertainer Naoko, the hostesses Mao and Miss Kim, and the associate *Mama* Park.

### 5.1 Entertainers: Depending on a Temporary Agency

Naoko was tall and had her hair dyed light brown. She often wore a long dress that complemented her height. She came to Club Rose from South Korea with an “entertainer visa” in February 2000 and worked at the club for six months, until August 2000, when her “entertainer visa” expired and she had to leave Japan and

reapply for a new visa. In South Korea, she waited for the new visa throughout September and October 2000 and, finally, returned to Japan to work at Club Rose for a second term, from November 2000 to May 2001. This second term was granted to an entertainer only if the club was satisfied with her performance—as was the case with Naoko—tracing a circular shape migration pattern that was widely practiced among entertainers as well as hostesses. That is why, during their absence, immigrant hospitality workers made real efforts to keep in touch with their customers by calling, emailing or meeting them when they visited South Korea, with a view to making this second term secure.

As Figure 1 shows, Naoko's monthly salary as an entertainer did not fluctuate

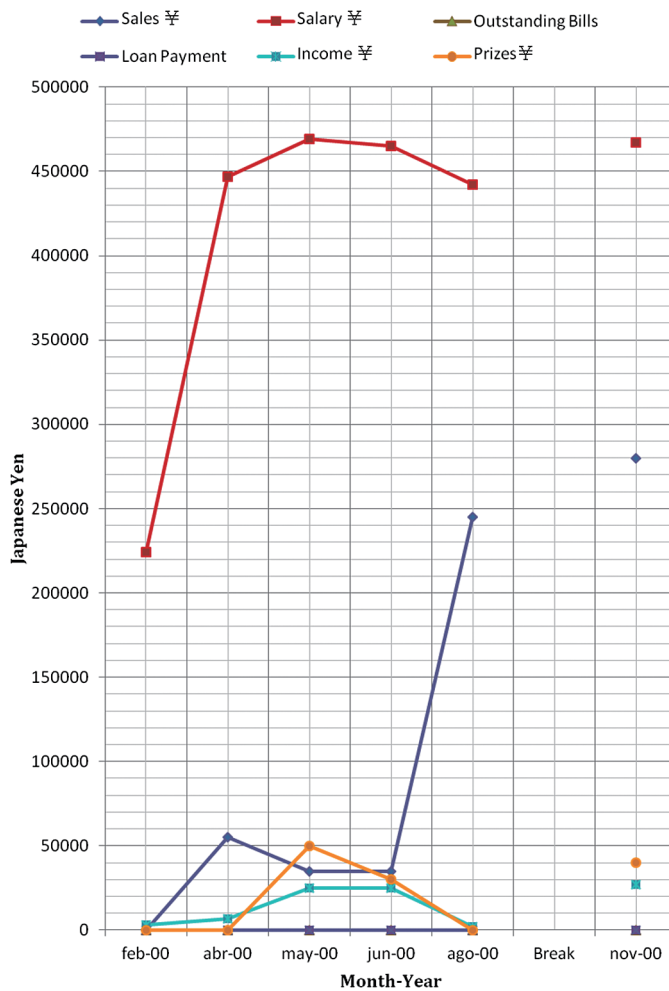


Figure 1 Entertainer Naoko

as much as her monthly sales, except for in February 2000 when she began working at Club Rose only in the latter half of the month. The monetary axis on the lefthand vertical side ranges from zero to 500,000 JPY (USD 5,000), which was typical among entertainers. In the first five months of her first contract term, her monthly sales were minimal, somewhere between zero and 50,000 JPY (USD 500), but her sales jumped to nearly 250,000 JPY (USD 2,500)—more than five times the average monthly sales of the previous five months—in August, the last month of her first contract. Naoko's sales performance improved over the time of her first term and this improvement helped her to secure the second contract with Club Rose. In this second term, it is noteworthy that her sales in the first month (280,000 JPY, USD 2,800)—higher than the highest sales in her first contract—were a resounding success even when taking into consideration the fact that the club increased its activity for the Christmas campaign at the end of the year. The club paid 440,000 JPY (USD 4,400) to her production agencies as a fixed monthly salary, regardless of sickness leave or family emergency absence. Moreover, the production agencies took half of her salary in commission and fees every month and Naoko was given only half of what Club Rose paid for her. This exploitative arrangement is not unique to Korean migrant entertainers, as Parreñas (2011) precisely documents among Filipino hostesses.

Compared with the other hospitality workers, the entertainers had the advantage of not having outstanding bills to meet. At Club Rose, a customer could charge his bills to his account and, by the end of each month, he received a total bill from the manager. The customer might pay out of his own pocket if he had come to the club for his personal pleasure, or the bill might be paid by his company if he had used the club services to entertain his business customers. Yet, if a customer failed to pay on time, the hostess or *mama* in charge of the account (*kōza no tantō*) became responsible for his overdue bills and had to manage her customer to ensure payment. An entertainer, on the other hand, was not responsible for customers' outstanding bills because they were considered customers of the club and the payment was an issue for the club manager. Working as an entertainer therefore carried both an advantage and a disadvantage: lower return and less freedom (e.g. curfew at the club dorm, longer hours spent at the club), but lower risk at the legal, financial and emotional levels.

## 5.2 Hostesses: Between Contractor and Employee

We could say that hostesses had more freedom in exchange for taking on more responsibility. As I just noted, the accounting system made an account hostess (*kōza no hosutesu*) fully responsible not only for entertaining her customer but also for his bills. If the customer did not pay his bills to the club on time, the hostess had to pay it and then manage the debt collection. Some hostesses ended up with more debts the more they worked because they failed to obtain payments from their customers.

This accounting system worked as a risk coverage mechanism for the club, situating the account hostesses somewhere between a contractor and an employee. The club offered the infrastructure (stage, furniture, decoration, snacks and drinks, etc.) as well as the support service of available hostesses, entertainers and male workers<sup>21)</sup> but, ultimately, the hostesses had the real responsibility for payment of the customers' bills. If they could not get enough customers, that is, enough sales, the club let her go because of the impossible task of recovering the money from the fixed daily wage they paid her.

Although Mao and Miss Kim were hired as hostesses in October 2000, their contracts were quite different. For example, Kim received 500,000 JPY (USD 5,000), as an interest-free loan from the club—only half the amount that Mao did. The loan amount was negotiated individually with Director Hong and he decided the amounts based on sales record, potential, desirability, financial needs and risk. Ten percent of the total loan amount would be subtracted from her salary as a monthly installment. If a hostess failed to pay it back, Director Hong became responsible, in another of the clubs risk hedge mechanisms. Therefore, he had to assess various conditions and decide the loan amount for each hostess and *mama* carefully. In spite of his careful screening, he did have a number of cases where the hostesses failed to pay back the loans and disappeared. In those cases, searching for them in Japan, South Korea, and beyond, was the way to make them pay back their own loans or their customers' bills. However, *Big Mama*, the owner of the club, never asked him to pay back these delinquent loans, for which he was thankful.

Mao reminded me of a male-role actress of the all-female Takarazuka theatre companies. She was tall and slender with slicked back, short hair. Her appearance was unique at Club Rose where *Big Mama* did not like short-haired hostesses. As Figure 2 shows, Mao's employment record (horizontal axis) extended over three years with two interrupted periods. The second interruption was over twenty months, but Mao and Club Rose seemed to have a good relationship overall. She worked at the club in three phases: pre-raid by the Entry Control Bureau (from July to October 1997), post-raid (from December 1997 to February 1999), and in a third-phase of employment (from October 2000 to 2001). The first interruption was after about a month in November 1997, after the Entry Control Bureau raid, and her two-month absence suggests she might have had some visa issues that came up then. When the club re-started its business, Mao received a 700,000 JPY (USD 7,000) loan. During the post-raid period, she was given two loans of 2,000,000 JPY (USD 20,000) in the first half, and 1,000,000 JPY (USD 10,000) in the second half. These fluctuations reflected her credit needs as well as the club's financial situation. The JYP axis, on the lefthand vertical side, ranges from zero to 1,000,000 JPY (USD 10,000), twice as much as Naoko, which shows that Mao's work and sales were more extensive than those of an entertainer, while her income also fluctuated more drastically.

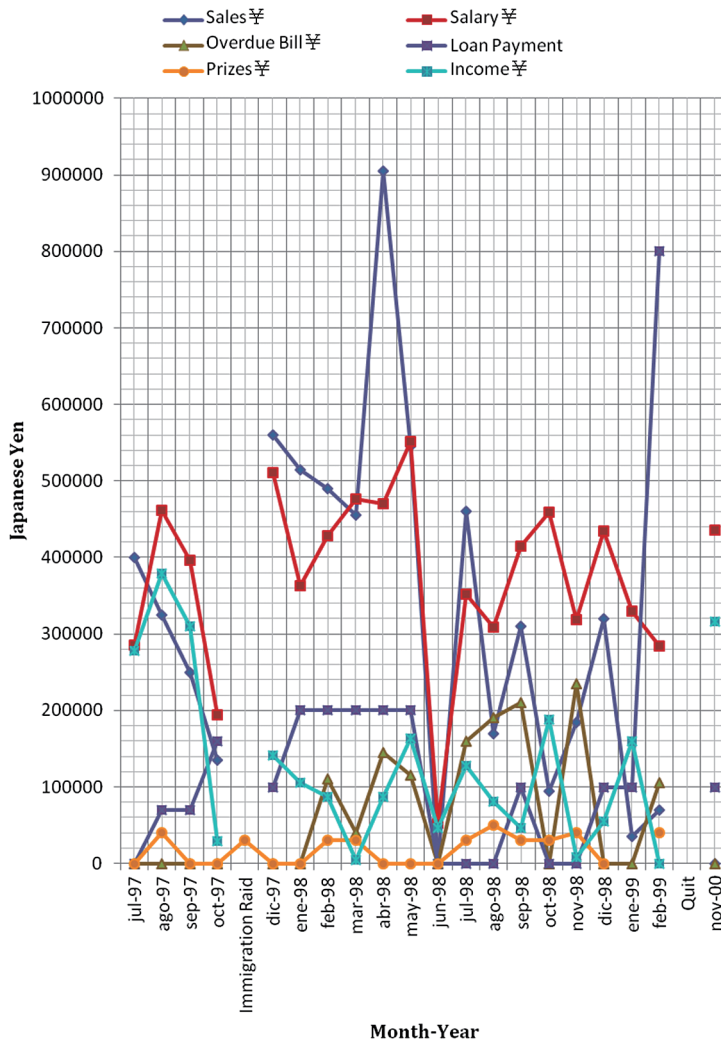


Figure 2 Hostess Mao

In the case of Miss Kim (Figure 3), the records show that she worked at Club Rose for only six months overall, over two separate periods. This period of time is closer to that of an entertainer like Naoko than to the trajectory of another hostess such as Mao. Her first term was nearly six months long, from February 1998 to July 1998, and the second one began more than two years later, in October 2000. In Miss Kim's first phase of employment at Club Rose, her sales increased impressively from 625,000 JPY (USD 6,250) to 870,000 JPY (USD 8,700), and up to 1,035,000 JPY (USD 10,350) from February to April 1998. As for bonuses, Miss Kim earned 30,000 JPY (USD 300), 50,000 JPY (USD 500), and 70,000 JPY (USD

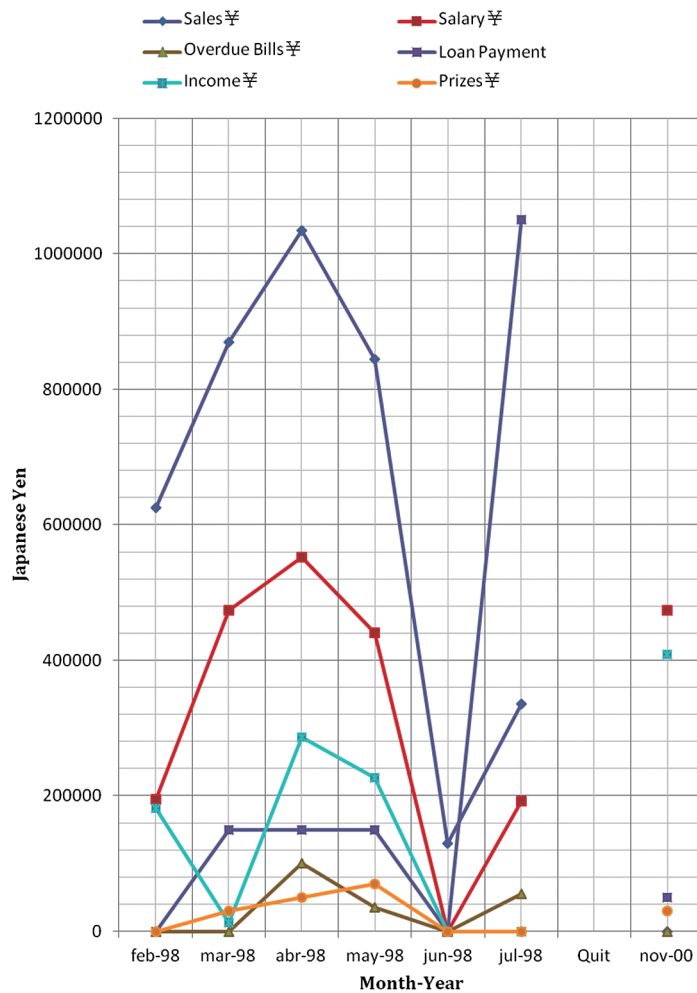


Figure 3 Hostess Miss Kim

700) in March, April, and May 1998, respectively. Accordingly, her salary steadily increased from 194,000 JPY (USD 1,940) to 474,000 JPY (USD 4,740), and to 552,000 JPY (USD 5,520). Miss Kim began paying back ten percent of the loan from March, a month after her employment, as most hostesses and *mamas* did. She paid back 150,000 JPY (USD 1,500) each month until May 1998. She did not have an issue with customers' overdue bills until April when 100,000 JPY (USD 1,000) was subtracted from her monthly wage. However, Miss Kim's actual take-home pay curved differently from her sales and salary, and it fluctuated from 182,000 JPY (USD 1,820), 12,000 JPY (USD 120), 287,000 JPY (USD 2,870), and 227,000 JPY (USD 2,270) from February to May, finally dropping to zero in June and July of

1998. In June, her salary, customers' overdue bills, income and bonuses were at zero, suggesting she was not working at the club because of some emergency that eventually led her to leave in the summer. Consequently, she could not pay back her monthly loan installment, even though her sales reached 130,000 JPY (USD 1,300), because her customers spent the sum mentioned and therefore the sales were credited to her account.

During the 1990s, Miss Kim had tried to change her career to beauty aesthetician for face and body, in Osaka. Although she loved and enjoyed her work, she could hardly make a living and had to resume working as a hostess. Miss Kim also told me about her experience when she was detained by the Entry Control Bureau and deported to South Korea. After the deportation, she ran a large restaurant for a while but the business failed and she tried to return to Japan. At that time, there was a demand and opportunities for hostesses, even for those of that age as long as they could maintain a certain level of sales, but the problem was that she was legally banned from re-entering Japan. Eventually, more than two years later, she came back in October 2000 using a broker to forge a new passport for her. When Miss Kim came back to Club Rose, she was around forty and had long, thick, black hair. As a devout Christian, she was an active member of a church led by a migrant Korean male pastor near the Minami district. This church had both Japanese and Korean congregations, with a simultaneous translation service from Korean to Japanese and Japanese to Korean. Miss Kim donated more than ten percent of her income, like many other Christian Korean migrant hostesses, and participated actively in the life of the church, not only at weekends but also during the week, at night after working at Club Rose. Eventually, Miss Kim married a Japanese husband through a marriage broker so that she could resolve her visa issues, once and for all. Although their marriage was a "paper marriage," and they lived separately, she visited her husband's apartment every morning to carry out domestic duties as a wife would do.

When she visited her husband's hometown for the New Year's holiday, she stayed at the house of her parents-in-law and spent time with her husband's family and relatives. They welcomed her warmly because they did not know that their marriage was for visa purposes only. When she finally obtained a spouse visa, she thanked God but, at the same time, had many mixed emotions and was overcome by a feeling of guilt. Despite the need to survive, she suffered and she felt that she was violating the law and deceiving people like her in-laws. Testimonials such as Miss Kim's make us aware that practices we may call "fraudulent marriage" or "fake marriage" overlook the feelings, cares and nuances which, day by day, blur the boundary between a "true" and a "fake" marriage. Family issues were not the only reason for her religious devotion. Her precarious visa status and the high-pressured work as hostess also made the church necessary as a refuge where she could seek solace. Until she received her spousal visa, she was worrying whether she could



get it. After she got it, she felt guilty and somehow expected that the Entry Control Bureau might find out about her contractual marriage, revoke her spousal visa and deport her to South Korea. Miss Kim also expressed the work-related pressure she was suffering by saying: “I did OK with accompaniment in November but I was really worried about the sales. The club was lenient only the first few months. If we do not perform well, we cannot keep our jobs.”

### 5.3 Associate *Mamas*: Between Hostess and Manager

The responsibilities of an associate *mama* were even greater than those of a hostess, as she had to manage the issues of the hostesses belonging to her faction (*habatsu*). At Club Rose, each associate *mama* loosely had her own faction of hostesses. The associate *Mama* Park began working at the club in October 2000, the same month as Mao and Miss Kim joined as hostesses. Park *Mama* played a key role in their recruitment and they joined her informal faction. She introduced them to her customers while they contributed to her sales. Park *Mama* and Miss Kim shared a three-bedroom apartment with Park *Mama*’s contractual Japanese husband, a couple of subway stations away from the Minami area. Although both Park *Mama* and Miss Kim were devoted Christians and seemed to be close, they attended different churches. Mao lived in a different apartment, but she also worked at Park *Mama*’s second-shift bar after Club Rose, every night<sup>22</sup>). Despite this, Mao and Miss Kim established ways of securing separate venues and outlets in order to maintain a healthy distance from their informal boss, Park *Mama*.

There were two types of associate *mama* at Club Rose, depending on their pay scale: one associate *mama* who received a fixed salary from the club and four associate *mamas* who divided half of their sales with the club. Park *Mama* was among the latter category. She used to be a professional singer and had even released records in South Korea and appeared on TV shows, when she was younger. I only saw her sing on stage once or twice and she was the quietest *mama* at Club Rose, but her performance was solid and somewhere in the middle of the five associate *mamas*. The most distinctive characteristic of Park *Mama*’s management data was that she did not need a club loan in her first phase (from January 1998 to August 1999, Figure 4). Usually, that kind of loan was used to refinance a previous loan from another club. If she was coming from South Korea to work, she had to meet several expenses such as the apartment rent, clothes, jewelry, etc., not to mention the visa broker’s fees, but she managed to finance everything without a loan. Miss Kim told me that Park *Mama* used to have a sponsor who rented an apartment and even hired a maid for her.

The situation was different in her second work period (from October 2000), and Park *Mama* had to take 5,000,000 JPY (USD 50,000) to finance herself. The following month, she began paying back 500,000 JPY (USD 5,000) as a monthly installment on the loan. Park *Mama* could get a loan that was ten times greater than

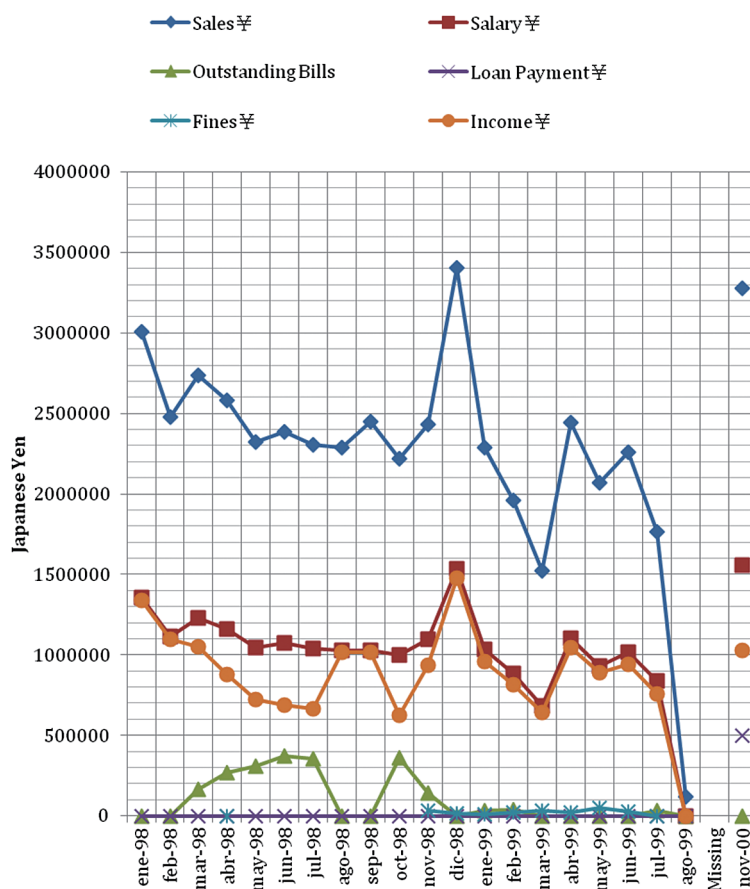


Figure 4 Associate Mama Park

Miss Kim's because of her solid sales record. In fact, Park *Mama* came back stronger than ever and her sales for November 2000 were 3,277,000 JPY (USD 32,770), her second highest record amount at Club Rose.

## 6 Conclusion: A Multi-exploitative Circle

In this paper, I have considered the work activity of hostesses, entertainers and associate *mamas* by comparing their sales, customers' overdue bills, loan payments, incomes, bonuses, etc. My aim has been to understand how their working conditions (economic obligations, job situation, labor relationships, etc.) were differently affected by their migration patterns and visa statuses. In light of this, it becomes evident that it is difficult for a hostess to achieve the sales quota set by the club. She has to engage in various sales activities (chatting, serving alcohol, playing, etc.),

and develop her marketing techniques and managing skills (Chung 2011). In so doing, a hostess has to manage not only the customers' but also her own emotions in a revealing example of what Arlie Hochschild (2003) called "emotional labor"—an activity that is frequently borne by women.

However, rectifying the gender bias inherent in the structural problems of the current Japanese visa policy is an issue that not only concerns immigrant hostesses but also female workers as a whole, companionship service workers in particular, and workers engaged in hospitality services in general. Migrant Korean entertainers, hostesses and *mamas* have to work under highly stressful conditions caused by the lack of an appropriate visa category and the absence of labor recognition for their hospitality services, paradoxically when their added-value activity is in demand, despite of a policy action that neglects the real interest of their social and economic activity<sup>23</sup>). This situation has resulted in a social context where sex work or sexual exploitation alone has been magnified, undermining the professions and livelihoods of female migrants, as noted at the beginning of this paper. As a result, immigrant hostesses are exploited not only economically by transnational production agencies, but also legally and emotionally, buffeted by the contradictions of the Japanese visa system that does not acknowledge immigrant hostesses as vibrant workers who are much needed by the night entertainment industry of contemporary Japan.

## Notes

- 1) A first draft of this paper was presented to the panel "Politics of Migration in the Age of Global Cultural Circulation: Japan as an Ethnographic Focus," organized by Blai Guarné and Shinji Yamashita at the 109<sup>th</sup> American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, held in November 2010 in New Orleans, Louisiana (USA). "Circulation" was the main topic of the meeting and my approach to its notion is in accordance with the AAA proposal for its definition (Heller 2009), and with the theoretical development proposed by Guarné and Yamashita in the introduction to this volume. I would like to thank the organizers of the panel, Blai Guarné and Shinji Yamashita, its discussant, Glenda Roberts, the fellow panelists and attending audience, and the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on previous versions of this paper. Thanks are also due to Blai Guarné for his accurate edition of this paper. The research presented in this paper was mostly conducted in Korean and Japanese. All translations are mine.
- 2) See Chung (2004).
- 3) See Buitenhuis (2000).
- 4) See Chung (2012a).
- 5) See Douglass and Roberts (2001).
- 6) See Allison (1994).
- 7) See the official website of the Immigration Bureau of Japan: <http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/index2.html>. Internet, 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2014.
- 8) All the names are pseudonyms in order to protect their real identities.
- 9) Senior-status hostess with management responsibility. See also Louis (1992).
- 10) Although what constitutes the "Koreanness" of a club would require a separate paper, I will only note that some Korean clubs do not explicitly suggest that they are Korean clubs, due to the complicating perceptions of Korea in Japan, where a clear indication of "Koreanness" may attract unwanted attention from the Entry Control Bureau (cf. Sakanaka 2005).
- 11) See Lee and De Vos eds. (1981). In addition, Korean bar hostesses in Japan often appeared in litera-

- ture (e.g. Wender 2005: 91, 135–6, 140).
- 12) Sales quota can be, minimally, two or three times one daily wage. It is interesting to note that accompanying (*dōhan*) their clients to clubs several times a month is often translated as “paid date” since a customer paid all expenses and sometimes even dating fees.
  - 13) A performance stage that has to be larger than thirteen square meters.
  - 14) On this concept, see Section 4 in this paper.
  - 15) It is worth noting that neither the content of their work nor their labor hours resembled the conditions of a victim of human trafficking.
  - 16) Unlike many other sectors such as restaurants, shops and supermarkets where international students are permitted to have part-time jobs, hostess work is excluded from the work activity list because of its specific regulation under the Entertainment Business Act.
  - 17) Another key factor for such an opening, closing, renovating, and re-opening circulation is for tax purposes, as Director Hong at Club Rose pointed out to me during my fieldwork. Director Hong was one of the most respected directors in the Minami’s Korean club industry. The owner of the club was aware of it and she recruited him from another Korean club in the fall of 1997, when the club had to close down after an Entry Control raid. Director Hong’s experience was responsible for rescuing Club Rose, which re-opened the following month, and whose management skills earned him the full confidence of the owner.
  - 18) On the contrary, those clubs without entertainers only hired about 20 people or fewer.
  - 19) Personal communication from Director Hong at Club Rose.
  - 20) See Bowie and Buttle (2011), Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010), Lashley and Morrison eds. (2000), and Tranter, Stuart-Hill and Parker (2009).
  - 21) Mainly, director, manager, waiters, bouncer, cashier, and musician.
  - 22) For a detailed discussion on the issue of second-shift bars in Minami, see Chung (2012b).
  - 23) See Chung (2011), and Suzuki (2009).

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