

Love, Money, and Lover Boys: Exploring Japanese Host Clubs' Commodified Intimacy and Consequences

恋愛、お金とイケメンたち- 愛情を商品化する日本のホストクラブとその影響
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Introduction

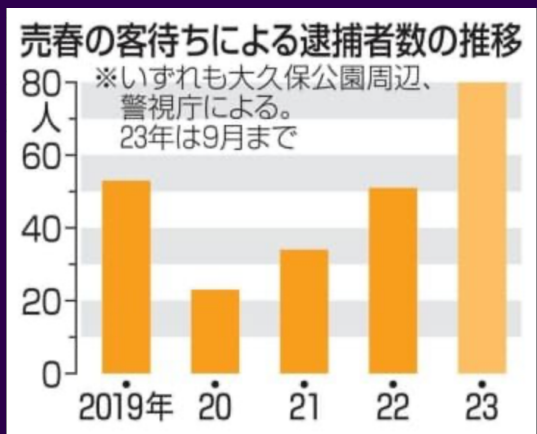
Host Clubs:

Post WWII Japan: growing need for entertainment venues that catered to the changing dynamics of society

1966	1970s	1980s	1980s onwards
First host club in Kabukicho	Extension of services	Major player Competition	~200 clubs >5000 hosts in Kabukicho

Tachimbo 立ちんぼ

A form of prostitution that involves solicitation and price negotiation in public places. (Weblio, 2023)



Thesis:

Although host clubs have been a place claimed to be purely for entertainment, it has been a gateway to prostitution with their emotional manipulation. Girls are exploited and trapped in a society where love is traded at the cost of their finances, body, and health.

Concepts

Intimate labor (including emotional labor):

who "rely on the maintenance of precise social relations between employers and employees or customers and providers" in such spheres as care, sex, domestic work, or entertainment (Boris & Parrenas, 2010, p. 3).

Commodification of intimacy is an important aspect of host clubs since hosts are dependent on the services catering to "women's erotic fantasies" as professional entertainers but not sex workers (Takeyama, 2016, p. 21).

Those 'living on the edge' (in precarity) are finding employment, "home," and a "sense of belonging" in host clubs (Mahdavi, 2017)

Host Club Attraction: An Escape into A World of Fantasy and Desire

Young Girls as Consumers of Host Clubs

Cause One: Escape from Harsh Reality into a Host-made Fantasy

Cause Two: Desire for Attention and Validation in a Lonely and Isolated World

- Host boys as facilitators of dreams and healing protectors as they encouragement those who lost the will to live and to dream (Henson, 2013, pp. 56-58).
- Host clubs offer temporary respite from social pressures and allow girls to forget daily struggles by creating a fantastical world exempt from work culture and traditional expectations.
- Many girls' justification for spending money on favorite host boys to boost their rankings is to show their affection.

- Host boys performing "emotional labor" by generating emotional intimacy and companionship for those who desire for affection, validation, and feeling wanted (Fitzsimmons, 2021, pp. 8-9)
- Hosts are especially appealing to those who feel isolated or lack support since "chivalry" and "romance" set them apart from normal Japanese men.
- Host boys possess specific "intimate" skills and understanding of emotional vulnerabilities.
- These emotional vulnerabilities are exploited by host clubs, leading to cases of becoming "tachimbo" to fuel their love for host boys.

From Consumers to Sellers of Intimacy: How Girls become Tachimbo

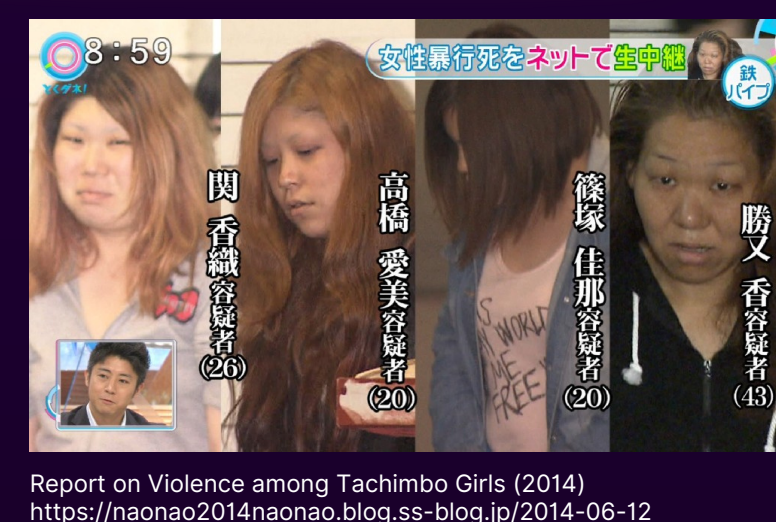
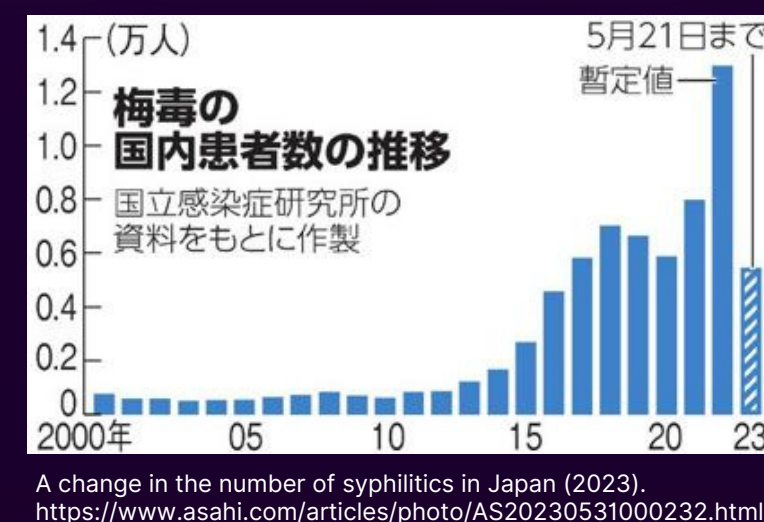
Social Changes & Gateway to Tachimbo Opened by Hosts

- In Heisei era, host clubs had stronger abilities to attract customers with the great influence of some charismatic hosts appearing on TV.
- In 2013, an anti-touting ordinance was enforced, making it difficult for host clubs to gain new customers. They have started to aim at those who were addicted even to sacrifice herself for them with higher spending (Kawano, 2023).
- The "kake" pay-later mechanism at clubs pushed girls into heavy debts (Tanaka, 2023)

Wine and dine gorgeously even if you do not have much money on hand!

Fueled by Desire of Love

- 40% of those who engaged in tachimbo/street prostitution are to cover their debts including payments to hosts (Metropolitan Police, 2023, as cited in Sankei News, 2023)
- A 23-year-old woman provided her favorite host with 40 million yen over the past one year and four months (Abema Times, 2020)
- One host was arrested for enticing a customer into doing tachimbo in April, 2023. She was also arrested for continuing tachimbo for about 40 days in a row and spent 80% of earnings for him (Bunshun Online, 2023).



Risks of Being Tachimbo

- Secret photographs, violence, abductions (TBS, 2023), or sexually transmitted diseases (Daily Shincho, 2023)
- An unsolved murder was occurred in 1997. An office worker, who also did tachimbo in Shibuya at night, was killed in her apartment (Friday Digital, 2021).
- Four "tachimbo" girls instigated an organized murder in 2014 (Honbashi, 2023).

Discussion: Justification and Devaluation

- Absence of descent laws or regulations to punish buying sex
 - Prevention law for prostitution defines prostitution as an illegal act, but no specific punishment against "buying sex."
- buyers are free from the risk of being penalized, easier to buy tachimbo/sex

"Such a place (to sell and buy sex) is important for the tachimbo to sustain their lives financially, and those opportunities lessen the sex offense in society ... I know I'm committing an illegal act, but I have no sense of guilt in terms of morals ... because we are devoting a of money to tachimbo and they are getting benefits from us (buyers)" (Daily Shincho, 2023)

A man, who has bought the tachimbo more than 10 times



Young Tachimbo: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIC-Kp2dXk

「貧困に陥った若者。男は犯罪、女は性産業に。」

- Japanese society stays patriarchal, and gender gaps still appear obviously. Income gaps and differences in social status/expectations between men and women in Japan still exist.
- The "price" of the female body in Japan continues to deflate, and it has become easier and cheaper for men to "purchase" sexual services from tachimbo in current days.
- "Becoming sex workers is the "only way out" for Japanese women who once fell to the bottom of the society (Nakamura, 2023).

Conclusion

Connections between host clubs & tachimbo:

- Pursuing love from others and the fulfillment of emotional needs, some young women are exposed to emotional, economic, and physical exploitation, depending on host clubs.

- To cover their debts from host clubs, some even engage in Tachimbo, partly because of the enticement/enforcement by hosts, understanding it is illegal, but an easy way to earn money.

What needs to be done:

- Awareness for consequences of social inequalities in terms of finance and social status, especially to women in the context of Japan
- Revision of Anti-Prostitution Act to introduce penalties for commercial sexual exploitation
- The necessity of mental care, legal protection and safety net for women

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