

Women of the Night - Japan and the Allied Occupation

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PROLOGUE

The photos in this section concern the PO&SR Division study of "Japanese Attitudes Toward Prostitution," of which more in a moment. However, we are also including a series of Journal Extracts relating to other aspects of the entertainment industry in the Tokyo area. And in other portfolios can be found more photographs of entertainment subjects and districts.

The PO&SR study of attitudes toward prostitution had a background in the moralistic concerns of some of the Occupationaires--especially their wives. Once the dependents began arriving, certain aspects of the interaction between the Occupation people and the population began to change, especially in contexts of heterosexual relations.

Japan was famous for its tolerant attitude toward female employment related to sex, and some Occupation authorities spent considerable time and effort discouraging GIs from engaging the various services. Toward the end of the Occupation pressure began to build for a policy encouraging the Japanese to outlaw all prostitution, and our PO&SR Division was ordered to conduct a stratified national sample survey of the attitudes of the population toward prostitution. We constructed interview schedules with the assistance of our chief arm in the Japanese government, the Prime Minister's National Public Opinion Research Institute. The results of the survey indicated that while the women were mostly critical of prostitution, and resented their men using the facilities, men were much less concerned, and in any event, there was no strong feeling in either gender that prostitution was a grave moral issue. The survey confirmed what Ruth Benedict and any student of Japanese culture have pointed out, that Japanese people, lacking a strict universal religious morality, tend to judge things as good or bad depending on situations and consequences.

JOURNAL EXTRACT: A TRIP TO KYOTO; PROSTITUTION AND RECREATION

11 JULY 1949

Kyoto streets are lined with wonderful and intriguing shops, selling the crafts and art goods made and collected in Kyoto. We didn't have much time to walk around, but what we did see was like a dream. I got you a marvelous set of little ceramic Noh masks, and an assortment of small junk for the kids, plus some wonderful folk art fans. At night we went to a tea house in the depths of the ancient Gion--the geisha and gay quarter of the city. This place is as ancient as the hills, and every geisha house within it has a shrine recording the visit or hiding-out of some celebrated samurai, priest, or whatnot. Anyway that night we got roaring drunk, sang, and in general enjoyed ourselves while the wonderful old woman who ran the place got drunk right along and showed us her extensive collection of pornographic art! All this with an assortment of invited geisha. This was no ordinary visit--the place was the youthful hangout of Numasasan, the director of the Jiji Press public opinion unit, who accompanied us to Kyoto, and his return there was a kind of sentimental pilgrimage. The next night we spent likewise in the Gion, but this time in the most honored geisha house in all Japan--the Ichiriki (literally "first force"), an incredible place, in existence 400 years, and loaded with historical legend. One of the 47 ronin--the famous renegade warriors who got involved in one of the conflicts between the various forms of obligations Ruth Benedict writes about--hid out there for two years. Shrine for him, of course, which we all bowed before and clapped our hands (the regular Shinto form of respect and prayer). The building must have 50 rooms, stretches and rambles out for yards and yards, with numerous courtyards in the Kyoto style, full of wonderful old trees and moss two inches deep on the soil around them. The Kyoto style of architecture is very different--the houses are plain on the street front, then open up inside the block into a maze of rooms, passages, and courtyards.

Anyway the chief item of the evening there was the attendance of two maiko, the "budding geisha" or apprentices--an arrangement peculiar to the Kyoto geisha industry. I am enclosing some postcards with pictures

of the maiko, in their queer obis and hairdress. The girls with us that nite were in full regalia, but in the last analysis they reminded me powerfully of couple of young girls going thru a Catholic confirmation. Essentially the maiko stage is a kind of confirmation period. The young girl has now passed all the catechisms, she has learned all the basic skills of the geisha, and now she is out on display, in costume. She is expected to behave quietly, formally, and stiffly--even uses a kind of special language which is difficult even for Japanese to understand. Her face is painted dead white, with bright red lips, or rather the upper lip only--she wears masses of kimono and long obi, and a fantastic headdress on her long hair. One of the maiko with us had a red patch on the front of her hair, which signified that she was still a virgin, while the other had none, signifying she had been had! All these things were objectively pointed out to us, while the two kids sat nonchalantly fanning themselves and looking mysterious. Eventually came the music and dances, etc., and finally the maiko retired in a most dignified fashion. After that the party got good and wild, with the older geisha taking over and everyone having a good drunken time. Herb played a flute while I beat on one of the special drums while we went thru some of the semi-ceremonial geisha songs. How and when we got home is a mystery, but we didn't spend the nite there!

JOURNAL ENTRY: (PROSTITUTION AND SEX; COMMUNIST PROVOCATION)

29 JULY 1949

Last night Herb and I decided to go to a movie, a special documentary film made by a couple of Americans who got licensed by the Occupation to produce films for the Japanese. It turned out that the film was not at the theater, but since we were in the neighborhood, we went into what we thought was a movie version of a famous short story which appeared in Japan right after the war. When we got into the theater, it turned out to be a stage play, and it was a remarkable sight. The story concerns a group of young girls who live underneath the elevated railroad embankment in Tokyo, in the cavernous rooms inside the brickwork. They are all orphaned by bombs, and have a kind of blood sisterhood, vowing never to have anything to do with men, etc. Into their life comes a young fugitive from the police, a man, who hides with them. They all fall in love with him and this breaks up their sisterhood. Full of "lower depths" stuff--a famous theme in Japanese literature, mostly copied out of Gorki. Anyway, the play is something terrific--by no means an erotic display or anything--just straight "realistic" Japanese drama. Includes three fights, two between the girls, one drunken brawl, a rape scene taking place just offstage, two whipping scenes, one including stripping a girl to the waist. The kids who did it all were hardly polished actors, but they sure had spirit. How they can put on three performances a day was beyond us--by the end of the play they are sweaty, dirty, clothes really ripped, etc., and generally pooped out. Japanese really put their souls into acting--it is the same in kabuki, only much tenser and suppressed. I think they are potentially the greatest actors in the world. But more interesting are the psychological implications of all the brutality, which is featured in all modern Japanese shibai, or drama (all modern drama is put on by small troupes like the one we saw - no professional legitimate stage like we have). On the stage all the highly repressed aggressions are played up and made the feature points of the drama. Violence and brutality are certainly not especially common in Japan, but they lurk beneath the surface, and come out in the drama and movies, the audience getting vicarious thrills out of it. The kiss, which in Japan is roughly comparable to a man feeling a girls sexual organs, but in addition has some special significance of its own (even hardened prostitutes will often avoid kissing), is usually highlighted in realistic love drama as a climax--after a kiss intercourse is inevitable. In the play last night there was only one kiss. This was masked from the audience by having the girl stand in front of the man (she merely laid her cheek against his), and hung on for a full two minutes. The man finally tears himself away, staggering, muttering some comments I didn't understand. In this case the kiss was so obscene in the continuity of the play that the man turned from this girl to another, and has intercourse with her. Actually the kiss was played up as even more intimate and daring than the intercourse later. The audience must be shaken to its roots at such stuff. The movies, of course, can't be that lewd - kisses are approached and veered away from, and that much only once or twice in a whole film which may deal with some really passionate theme. More than this--the attitude means that it is extremely difficult to have any sexual relations with a Japanese woman who, although she may want it, need it, etc., cannot have it because she is a "lady" and not a prostitute. Japan hence is a nation of frustrated men and women who often get married wildly simply because they are frustrated and need sexual experience. A woman who chooses a career means that she will probably not get married, and this means that she won't have any sexual experience. Hence even more severe repressions than exist for a housewife who becomes a chattel of her husband. Of course changes are taking place rapidly in all of these things--witness the pan pan--but it will take a long time for the system to really change so it affects the majority of

women--that is, provides a definition of sexual experience as a legitimate accompaniment of an interpersonal relationship, if the relationship is structured in those terms.

After the play, Herb and I walked around the district. We were in Shinjuku, one of the four or five great decentralized shopping and amusement centers in Tokyo, grown up around the densha (the big electric interurban system) stations. Others I have mentioned are Shimbashi, (near the Daiichi Hotel [my official billet]), Asakusa (the big black market and organized prostitution area), Ueno (something of everything), etc. Shinjuku reminds one strongly of the 63rd and Halsted district in Chicago [in the 1940's]. Anyway, it has become one of the major centers for amateur and borderline professional prostitution in Tokyo. What you have are two intersections of main streets, and then inside the blocks a maze of alleys lined with tea houses and bars, each with bedrooms upstairs, and each with a flock of girls. You walk down one of these alleys and at each doorway there are five to twenty girls, grinning from ear to ear, all of them pretty, and all of them doing their damndest to beckon you inside (they don't dare run out and capture Americans the way they do Japanese). It is quite an experience. You run a regular gauntlet, hardly daring to look to the side for fear that they will erupt out of the doorways and surround you, and believe me they do it, too, if you give them encouragement. Then they aren't soliciting--only helping you inside!

Now these girls are all teenage kids, runaways from farms or city homes, who are not bound by contract, and are in the business in an amateur way. It appears that all of them love the work, they are all highly motivated sexually, and go out for it in what can only be described as irrepressible girlish glee [I doubt the validity of these generalizations--February 2000]. You can see it on their faces--they eagerly come out in the best kimonos or dresses as soon as twilight falls, and compete with one another for the men, as if it were no different than picking up dates at the corner drug store in the states. What is behind the phenomenon is hard to say--something of the sort always existed in Japan--the pan pan or street girls are not new. But the magnitude and garishness of the present situation is unheard of. In Shinjuku alone there must be at least 3000 of these kids--this is no exaggeration.

In another part of Shinjuku one finds a different ecology. Here there are houses which consist of a beer hall, and then a maze of tiny bedrooms sticking out from the sides of the place like boxes glued on. These places are really whore houses proper, and the girls in them are semi-professionals--mostly pan pan who have settled down to a regular life of prostitution, and are beginning to do it for the money. The atmosphere is quite different. The excitement, the glee, the swarms of girls are missing. Instead one or two stand in the doorways and talk softly to the passerby, asking him if he wants to come in. The girls themselves are usually older and harder.

Then in the Asakusa area one finds the big fancy houses--once legally licensed, but not since the Occupation. Here is the deluxe stuff--the high priced beauties who are in the business, all of them in a kind of indentured relationship to the danna (master) (no madams in Japan!) who got them on contract from their parents. Many of these girls had geisha training, all of them have some of the geisha skills and personality. That is, they are cut on the ideal mode of Japanese womanhood--a clinging, dependent, need-gratifying person for men, who is freed of the childbearing function, but who in turn is more of a slave than a wife.

It is becoming clear that the Communists have embarked on a really tough policy of provocation. The recent episode in which a man was allegedly killed by the police has been used by the commies as an instance of police brutality, etc., and MacArthur let loose a blast about it recently. Ted Cohen [chief of the Occupation Labor Division] has been doing some research on the whole case, and it now appears that the guy was not killed by the police or anyone, but was trampled by the crowd. He didn't even fall out of a window, or was pushed out, as claimed. There is some grounds for thinking him clubbed to death - could it be by the Communists? Not only that, but it now appears that the police used remarkable restraint. The crowd had a permit for a demonstration from 12 noon to 4 PM. Long enough. They kept hanging around, trying to incite the police until 10 PM, at which time the police finally began to take measures. This was what they wanted, and the crowd started rioting. "Crowd" consisted of trained commies plus several thousand hangers on, mostly communist-led union members. Anyway, the Russian delegate on the Allied Council let loose another blast this week, and Ted just finished a draft of a radiogram MacArthur will send to the US government, blasting the commies for their deliberate

exploitation of what seems to be a staged provocation. If Washington releases the radio, you will probably have seen it by now.

Back to the kiss for a moment (!) I forgot to mention what seems to be behind the thing is that the Japanese give the kiss the fullest possible sexual significance, whereas we have progressively attenuated its meaning. A kiss is virtually equivalent to the sex act, and if a girl gives a kiss, she automatically gives permission for intercourse. In the traditional circles and villages, even if a girl gives a man her hand she grants permission for fucking. This implies a general tension over physical contact, and this is borne out in such things as the insistence on bowing instead of handshaking between all people, and the real reluctance of Japanese to accommodate themselves to the American handshake custom. People just shouldn't have contact with each other, especially across the sexes. This is breaking down in the cities, of course.

Another interesting traditional custom which is now passing is yodai, or night crawling, which was and still is in some areas, especially rural, a courtship system, a kind of trial marriage, in which a man puts a mask on his face and sleeps with a girl in her home. The parents aren't supposed to know about it, but do, of course. It is obviously an old Oceanic institution - sexual license or pre-marital experimentation. Find it in Polynesia and Melanesia.

21 JUNE 1949

Saturday night it was, for a miracle, not raining, so I went to the Asakusa district with Ted and Mitzuko. Remember, I went there with Herb one afternoon shortly after I arrived? It is the black market shop district, major prostitution area, home of all organized crime, and a kind of circus carnival--not to mention the fact that the whole district revolves around the Kwannon temple and a famous Shinto shrine! Typical Japanese situation--the temple and the shrine became the focus for a market in feudal days, which then developed into a tough district of Tokyo, but the religious aspect of the place continues to thrive. Actually at night it closes down early, so most of the shops were shut. The night club district was open, however. This is absolutely unreal. Tiny little winding alleys with brand new, cake-like, pastel bars and night clubs, the street paved with stone blocks and everything neat. It is a dead ringer for a "Street in Tokyo" at some world fair. The whole business looks so damn impermanent and unreal. Since all the doors and windows are wide open, you lose all sense of being outdoors, especially on a warm, still night, which Sat. was.

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