

Prelude

Four *sarariman* (white-collar workers) in a large corporation in Tokyo have been asked by their boss to go out drinking after work. Leaving the office about eight o'clock, they first have a light dinner, then head for a place where they can further unwind.¹ As soon as they are seated at a table in the small, dimly lit room, a waiter brings a bottle of scotch, kept at the club in the company's name, and within five minutes of their arrival drinks are poured. Nakajima, the boss, offers a toast, calling on the men to forget their worries and enjoy a well-earned evening of relaxation.

The men sit back and drink up. Looking around, they recognize the marks of an expensive club: imposing furniture, fresh flowers, conspicuous art, a gold phone. And they know that they can expect service as polished as the decor and the accoutrements. The waiters, dressed impeccably in tails, stand ready to attend to their needs—pouring drinks, lighting cigarettes, replenishing bottles of water and buckets of ice, almost without being asked. The provision of a baby-grand piano and a piano player to accompany those who will break out in song when sufficiently drunk is a further sign that the club belongs to a class above clubs which offer only taped music.

The men's attention shifts to the surrounding tables. They see men much like themselves: middle- or higher-level executives, officials, and white-collar workers dressed in dark suits. Most of the groups consist of boss and employees; a few include clients or friends who may bring in some business. In this intimate room, as in a Japanese business office, all can see and be seen, but rarely does communication with other tables exceed the few words of a joke or a brief aside. Instead, members of a group concentrate on each other, maintaining the business connection that circumscribes their relationship.

1. The description here is culled from the fieldwork I conducted in 1981 at one hostess club in the Roppongi district of Tokyo. I introduce and describe this club at length in part 1 and call it "Bijo," a pseudonymous name that means "beautiful flower."

Now the men try to relax. To cast off the worries and responsibilities stemming from their office roles is their common goal. In the company of coworkers and perhaps clients, the propriety that governs relationships during the workday must be replaced with genial camaraderie. Fidgeting, each man silently downs his first drink, aware that shop talk is to be avoided and that any mention of his private life—home and marriage—would be inappropriate. Unsure of what to say to achieve common ground, they view the approach of a hostess with relief. With her, they know, there will be conversation in which they can participate simply as men.

The woman, asking politely if she may join them, takes a seat next to the boss, whom she has previously met at the club. Though Nakajima has forgotten her name, she remembers his; and she tells the others that the story about bean stalks that Nakajima told the last time he was here kept her laughing for days. Giggling at the thought of their poker-faced boss telling a joke, the younger men ask the hostess to repeat it. She declines, saying that Nakajima has been remiss about visiting the club of late and that, as punishment, he must repeat the joke. The employees clap their hands in hearty agreement, and Nakajima, reluctantly acceding, repeats the story. The listeners applaud; Nakajima wipes his brow, and the hostess, who orchestrated the whole scene, pours everyone another drink.

Now the atmosphere has warmed up, and the men begin to talk. They ask the hostess her name; she spells out *Emiko* and asks each man how his name is spelled. She tells Yamamoto that she used to have a boyfriend by the same name; the other men suggest that this Yamamoto could charm her as well. Nakajima asks how many boyfriends the hostess currently has; Emiko answers none, because she has been waiting for Nakajima to ask her out. At this last remark, the men advise Emiko to look elsewhere. Their boss is already aging and gray; he demands that everything be done exactly his way, and he is too serious for a free spirit like her. Cuddling up to Nakajima and placing her hand confidently in his, Emiko disagrees: he is distinguished, not old; sure of himself, not selfish; not stuffy, just quiet. Nakajima, in short, would make the perfect lover for a woman like herself, and she can only envy the one he must surely have hidden away in some luxurious apartment. Quiet until now, Nakajima laughs out loud, denying that a man as straight as himself would even know how to go about finding a mistress on his own. At this, however, another in the party declares that such a comment is itself evidence that Nakajima is intimately involved.

All the while, Emiko has been adding ice to the drinks, lighting cigarettes, and refilling the glasses after each swallow of scotch. Sipping a drink

that's mostly water, she is the first to notice the Mama's entry into the room and points her out to the four men who are seeing her for the first time. A slender woman of about thirty, the Mama wears her hair in traditional fashion and is robed in a spectacular kimono with perfectly matched accessories. Smiling serenely, she greets the men at a nearby table. Emiko remarks that tonight the Mama looks particularly stunning, and the men reply that the Mama is indeed a *biyin* (beautiful woman), attractive in a traditional Japanese way. Nakajima, looking pleased, admits that the Mama is the reason he brought them all here tonight. Besides being a beauty, she maintains a level of service in her establishment rarely found in clubs today. For example, the Mama sees all guests off personally when they leave the club, sends Nakajima a gift on his birthday, and forbids her hostesses to smoke or eat in front of the customers. This attention is taken to be a measure of the club's elegance as well as the high status of those who entertain or are entertained here.

At this point, the Mama approaches the table, and Emiko relays the compliments of Nakajima and the others. Smiling, she takes Emiko's place beside Nakajima and asks him if he has recovered from the stomach ailment he was complaining of the last time he was here. Nakajima can't even remember having a stomach problem, but the Mama says, admonishing him lightly, that's because he hasn't been here for so long—three months, to be exact. Now that she has seen his healthy face, she adds, she's much relieved. Nakajima appears embarrassed. Emiko, however, gaily summarizes the discussion they've had about Nakajima and passes on the group's conclusion that he undoubtedly has procured a mistress. Smiling enigmatically, the Mama says, "Of course," and, leaning close to him, goes on to say that Nakajima is an attractive man, one with much appeal for a woman such as herself.

After learning the other men's names and asking whether they find her club a nice one, the Mama engages Nakajima in private conversation. Emiko talks nonstop to the others, telling them how much she likes Chinese food, asking for the names of good restaurants, wondering if the guest named Minami eats a lot, and inviting herself out with them one night to a place across town that serves great noodles. Yamamoto suggests that maybe she could go into the food business, since it seems to him she's getting too old for this type of work. Emiko, pulling her blouse out a couple of inches and looking down, retorts that if firm breasts are a measure of a woman's age, she is quite young. The men, laughing loudly, shout that they must be the judge of Emiko's breasts. When one man tries to take a look, Emiko grabs

his hand, allows a brief touch, and then demands judgment. "Beautifully firm, right?" Emiko urges. "So firm, you can't be more than ten," comes the reply.

The Mama has been chatting with Nakajima for five or ten minutes. Her hand in his, they have been laughing softly, like lovers on a date. She now turns to the other men at the table and asks who will join her in singing a duet. Nakajima resists, claiming he can't carry a tune. He suggests Tanaka, who sang in a chorus during his high-school years and has even gone abroad on a concert tour. Tanaka tries to pass the task on to Minami, Minami to Yamamoto, Yamamoto to Tsuda, and Tsuda back to Nakajima, but in the end the Mama prevails on Tanaka to get up and sing a song she has selected. The room hushes as the two stand next to the piano, Mama looking coquettishly in her partner's direction but plainly serious and concerned with singing well. When the song is finished, everyone applauds. Those at other tables comment on how well the two have done, and the men of Tanaka's party go on at great length about his brilliant performance. A waiter who snapped a picture of Tanaka and the Mama brings it to the table, along with a flashlight so that Tanaka can see it in the dark room. The photo is passed around, commented on, and lavishly praised until Tanaka finally slips it into his wallet, from which it will be retrieved from time to time throughout the evening.

The Mama sweeps over to praise Tanaka for his fine job and encourages the others to sing too. Each does so by taking a turn at singing alone, and though none has Tanaka's flair, all experience both a sense of relief at having made the effort and a closeness with the others who have also exposed themselves.

An hour has passed since the group first entered the club, and the men have become relaxed and fairly drunk. They exchange stories they all laugh at. Their topics of conversation—brands of liquor, dirty jokes, insults to the boss, Sunday golf—change rapidly and are unlikely to be remembered the next day. For tonight, however, this random talk identifies the participants less as workers than as men who, when enjoying such pleasures as women and drink, behave as equals.

Emiko has been replaced by Yumiko, a gregarious hostess in her early twenties, wearing a low-cut vermilion dress. The men have noticed the size of her breasts and have told her she's a bit pudgy and could stand to lose some weight. A second hostess, Mieko, has been brought over, and while Yumiko holds Tsuda's hand, she cuddles against Nakajima. He tells his hostess that she's pretty and feminine, a woman he'd like to see again. Yumiko

flirts with the others, noting that while they are all cute, Tsuda is good-looking enough to be an actor.

Suddenly Nakajima announces to the party that they're leaving. He signals to a waiter for the bill and signs nonchalantly for an amount his company will pay on their monthly account. The Mama, informed of their departure, hurries over, and Yumiko, who's been directed to another table by a gesture from her boss, comes to say good-bye. The guests walk out quickly and are thanked obsequiously by the waiters at the door. Mieko, who had been telling Nakajima that she loves him madly, accompanies them down in the elevator and kisses him on the cheek. The Mama waits with the party until a cab pulls up. She cautions Nakajima to be more careful with his stomach in the future so it won't be another three months before he comes again.

For an hour and twenty minutes at this one club the company has paid approximately 13,000 yen (\$65) per man.² The price includes a plate of cold bean pods for each man, several bottles of mineral water, a few buckets of ice. No new bottle of scotch has been purchased this evening, so the price of the liquor is not included in the bill. The men go to two more clubs. At one they have some food, at the other only liquor. All the costs, including those for the taxis and the light meal they had eaten before going to the first club, are borne by the company, through Nakajima.

The Mama will call up Nakajima the next day and thank him for his patronage the previous night. If and when their customers return, Yumiko, Emiko, and Mieko will try to greet them by name. The men will pat each other on the back at work the following morning and exclaim about the fine time they had the night before. The wives of these men won't know where their husbands were until past midnight, nor will they ask. The company will pay the club's bill at the end of the month.

This nightlife, this after-work activity, is a fixture of life in Tokyo, particularly among corporate, middle-class men. The question is, What kind of fixture is it? And what does it fix, to what end, and for whom?

2. Monetary equivalents throughout are consistent with the exchange rate at the time I conducted fieldwork: 200¥ = \$1. Since that time, prices in Japan have escalated, with the rate as of this writing (August 1992) at about 122¥ to the dollar—so the price of the visit described would be about \$106.

Introduction

Hostess clubs differ from the other clubs, bars, restaurants, and sex joints in the *mizu shōbai* (literally "water business," the nightlife of urban Japan) by providing hostesses for their customers. While most of the businesses in the *mizu shōbai* have staffs that consist exclusively of women, the role of hostess is distinguishable from that of the others: the singer in jazz or chanson clubs; the singer who sings naked (*no-pan karaoke*); the waitress in bars, pubs, "snacks," restaurants; the waitress who waits tables without underpants on (*no-pan kissa*); the "soap girl," who soaps up men and performs sex acts (*so-pu* = soap or soaplands); the "girl" who gives "assisted masturbation" and oral sex (*pinku saron*); the model who poses half-naked (*nozoki* = Peeping Tom clubs); and the Mama, who manages and often owns her own "snacks," bar, or hostess club.¹

Precisely what kind of service is given at a hostess club and by what kind of woman depends somewhat on the individual club, particularly on its prices and its degree of classiness. Four factors, however, are universal: the hostess must be, or must act like, a woman;² the hostess must treat the

1. *No-pan* means literally "no panties." *Karaoke* (literally "empty orchestra") refers to a cassette system that provides accompaniment for customers who sing their favorite songs into a microphone. Many bars and clubs have *karaoke*; *no-pan karaoke* are clubs that provide the service of women wearing no underpants, who will sing duets with customers at the front of the room. *Kissa* is the abbreviation of *kissaten*, "coffeehouses." *No-pan kissa* are *kissaten* that offer a limited menu, served by waitresses wearing no underpants. Customers are generally forbidden either to touch or to talk with these women. Soaplands are probably the most common place for prostitution in Japan. Once called *toritoko*, their name was changed when the Turkish Embassy protested the reference. Several services are usually offered by *pinku saron*: *fellatio*, "assisted masturbation," and other sex acts. For a recent account of a *pinku saron* and profiles of women who work in them, see Kakinuma 1992.

2. What it is to be or act like a woman is one of the main subjects of this book. Here, using Butler's notion of gender as performance (1990), I am simply pointing out that a hostess must be willing to assume a type of public and performative stance that is gendered as "female." Far less important is the anatomy of the hostess or even her sexual preference as acted on outside the club.

customer as a superior and tend to his various desires: the service, while alluding to sex, cannot proceed to genital penetration or oral sex; and the service is conducted primarily at the level of conversation. In short, what characterizes the hostess and differentiates her service from that offered by others in the *mizu shōbai* is that her medium of service is primarily talk. The job of the hostess, as both speaker and listener, is to make customers feel special, at ease, and indulged. Or, as one Japanese man told me, the role of the hostess is to make a man "feel like a man."

In practice, how a hostess serves customers comes down to something like this. The club is ranked high—an exclusive club in Akasaka or the Ginza—and the room is small, seating only thirty customers. The Mamma, who owns and runs the club, is an elegant older woman. She has five hostesses working for her, all under the age of twenty-three, all beautiful, refined, well educated, and exquisitely dressed. When men come in, they are seated at a table by a waiter and then joined by one or two hostesses, perhaps those they have requested. The women light their cigarettes and keep their glasses filled, meanwhile maintaining a conversation that engages the men and flatters their egos. The hostesses are witty and charming, yet also worldly and not beyond the suggestiveness of flirtation, sexual innuendo, and erotic foreplay. They smile and touch the men's hands or arms, but while sexual intimacy may be implied, both their comments and their actions remain guarded and indirect. When the men leave, the hostesses may give them a good-bye kiss on the cheek and ask them to return soon. For this service, the cost per man per hour runs from \$300 to \$500.

At a club of lesser rank the scenario will differ. The club may be either small or much larger—the huge open room seating hundreds close to the station at Shibuya, for example. The decor is glitzy, the furnishings chosen more for utility than for chic. The atmosphere may be cozy if the club is small, the Mamma friendly, and the hostesses familiar to the customer. The service will be personal and the talk suggestive. In a big club the mood will be less intimate and the service more regimented. Once a party sits down, hostesses will immediately appear at the table, lighting the men's cigarettes, serving them drinks, encouraging everyone to sing,³ and starting a conversation that veers repeatedly into sexual terrain. Periodically, men are allowed

3. This system of participatory singing is very common in Japan today and occurs in a variety of establishments in the *mizu shōbai*. At certain places, usually the higher-priced ones, a piano may substitute for the more common *karaoke*, and a piano player will accompany singers.

to touch or grab at the hostesses' bodies, and a hostess may return a touch in kind. The profiles of hostesses who work in lower-ranked clubs are far more varied than those in upper-level clubs. They are more likely to be older, plumper, less educated, less sophisticated, less well dressed, less conventionally beautiful, and certainly more brash. For service in such hostess clubs the price range is from \$80 to \$120 per customer per hour.

The subject of this book is not hostess clubs per se but the setting they provide for business outings paid for by corporations. The activity, generically referred to as *kōsaisettaihi* (*kōsaihi* is company expense, and *settai* are the outings themselves, which are also referred to as *tsukai*), became popular in the period of postwar economic growth, particularly in the years following Japan's astounding spurt of growth in the late 1960s. Its principle is to entertain workers and clients at some place away from work—golf course, restaurant, bar, hostess club—as a means of strengthening work or business relations.⁴ Big business perceives that corporate entertainment is a means of making itself stronger and more competitive, and therefore corporate expenditures for recreation increase even in years when the economy is depressed or when the real economic growth is lower than expected, as in 1986 (Table 1986.1). Belief in its economic value led the Japanese government to endorse the practice with a corporate tax law that, between the years 1954 and 1982, allowed most corporate entertainment to be written off as tax-deductible.

The economic slump of the early 1990s is affecting *kōsaisettaihi* even more severely than in the 1980s. It is now most widely used by medium-to-large companies that are financially stable or growing, in businesses relying on trade, investment, or big sales.⁵ For these firms, corporate entertainment can consume as much as 5 percent of annual operating expenses, and is considered an "indispensable expense of industrial operations" (Table 1986.204). The biggest spenders are those with the highest national and transnational prestige, such as Mitsubishi, the trade company that ranks as the top or one of the top *kōsaihi* spenders annually (197). Similarly, those workers who are most frequently entertained on *kōsaihi* are the elite of the

4. There are two kinds of such relationships, those between workers at the same company (a boss taking out his employees, for example) and those between members of one company entertaining a client or potential client from another company. The principle of corporate entertainment is basically the same for both these relationships, I was told, though companies spend more money on intercompany than on intracompany entertaining.

5. According to a ranking of the two hundred top-spending companies of *kōsaihi* issued since 1979 by the magazine *Shūkan Daikyomondo*, the ten biggest spenders are invariably trading

corporate working world: the *sarariman* (literally "salaried man"), who is a male white-collar worker in a prestigious firm. He has achieved such a position by passing the competitive entrance examinations to a top-ranked university and gaining access to an "elite course" open only to those who can succeed in the rigors of "exam hell."⁶ For an employee of this caliber, companies will pay as much as \$6,000 a year on corporate entertainment. The rationale is double. First, as a perquisite to the work of a *sarariman*, outings to fancy places are a way of augmenting and glamorizing jobs that, despite their prestige, are often boring and underpaid. Second, as a business ploy, the aim is to bond the worker to his company or the company soliciting his business.

In this book, I will examine a particular arena for company outings—a high-class hostess club that is considered by many to be a highly desirable or even the most desirable site for corporate entertainment. I will describe events of *settai* at a hostess club, link the specifics of these outings to the stated objectives of corporate entertainment, and analyze why, how, and with what various effects this practice of Japanese business is structured through rituals of masculine privilege serviced by women in the role of hostess. My focus is on precisely what takes place in outings doubly marked as work and play, business and entertainment, worker and male, and how these doubled categories—in the context of a corporate practice observed in the early 1980s, and intended for one group of male white-collar workers—construct and condition one another.

The Subject of the Book

In this study, I am motivated by a number of issues in anthropology, gender studies, and feminism as well as by a number of gaps in the study of Japa-

companies. Other top spenders are brokerage firms, construction firms, and pharmaceutical businesses (Iabe 1986).

6. The Japanese term for the connection between career and educational record is *goku-reki shakukai* (literally "society of academic record"). What university one attends is the single most important determinant of one's adult career, particularly for a male. Acceptance into a university depends on a single criterion: results on entrance examinations, which are nationally standardized and given once a year. (For a critique of this system, see Horio 1988.) Those admitted to top-ranked universities are virtually guaranteed graduation and thus prestigious positions afterwards. The positions with most social status are in medicine, law, education, high-ranking departments in the government, and executive posts in big companies. The attraction of becoming a *sarariman* in a major company is security, for, in practice, only full-time, white-collar workers in medium to large companies are assured of what, in principle, is a Japanese labor policy—lifetime employment (*nenbō jōryoku*). Well-placed *sarariman* can count on steady promotions, salary increases, and respectable work.

nese culture. The latter is what initiated my research, for as I entered this field as a graduate student in anthropology in the late 1970s, I was struck by the scant attention given three subjects in the literature—sexuality, women, cities. The inclination at the time was to focus on the more traditional, rural, and so-called normative aspects of the culture, those behaviors that could be traced back in time and were thought to define Japanese as culturally distinct. John Embree's village study *Suye Mura* (1939), and Ruth Benedict's totalizing culture study *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), were, though outdated, not yet displaced as paradigms for researching Japan. Influenced by moves in anthropology to give our studies of culture a historical dimension and to locate the behaviors of people within relations of power, economics, and institutional policy that are neither static nor reducible to customs adopted by all members of a population, I sought to examine some aspect of Japan that was urban, modern, and an effect of cultural, political, and economic relations. The scholarship on Japan, I might add, has increasingly turned in this direction over the past fifteen years.

Motivated as well to develop the still nascent interest in issues of women and gender in the Japan field, I encountered coincidentally the subject of the *mizu shōbai*.⁷ Japanese, I found, reacted curiously to this topic. On the one hand, their openness about bars, clubs, and sex joints extends to laxness in zoning even explicit sex clubs, frank advertising by call girls in news-magazines, acceptance on the part of many wives of their husbands' visits to soaplands, and a general cultural indulgence of drinking and drunkenness, particularly for men. Japanese are not prudes or puritans when it comes to matters of sex, drink, and varied kinds of sexual entertainment, all of which are considered "natural" desires for a man. Yet almost no Japanese I mentioned it to thought the *mizu shōbai* was an appropriate topic for anthropological research. Other foci would, they implied, convey a "truer," "better" side of their culture. The *mizu shōbai*, they insisted, was a trivial, insignificant part of the urban landscape. When I would point out that thousands of bars and clubs existed in Japan's cities and that an incredible amount of business was conducted there every night, except perhaps on Sunday, they would still insist that "culturally" the *mizu shōbai* was not a factor at all in the "essence" of Japanese behavior.

Emerging was a very limited concept of culture, one in which Japa-

7. Gender, too, has been increasingly addressed by other scholars in recent years, for example, Bernstein 1983, Robertson 1991, 1992, Tamanoi 1991, Imamura 1987, Rosenberger 1991, 1992, Kondo 1990.

nesses—what Japanese do because they are Japanese—was confined to certain institutions, behaviors, and traditions. In this view, the *nihonjinron*, the debate about who and what the Japanese people are, seemed to the Japanese to be reasonably consistent with what constituted the study of Japan in this country. Sexuality fell outside of both and, as such, constituted a type of cultural “other.” Indeed, as Japanese scholars either suggested or stated, anything that deals with sex or sexuality (unless the angle is physiology or reproduction) is not suitable for serious scholarship. The *mizu shōbai*, by association, is verboten, and little about it has been studied by Japanese academics. Because of its marginality both in the literature on Japan and in a dominant model of “culture,” I decided to pursue some aspect of the *mizu shōbai*. To do so would fill in, at a descriptive, ethnographic level, domains of Japanese life relatively unrecorded. And examining a behavior indulged in by Japanese people, though dismissed ideologically as of no cultural significance, would provide an approach for understanding culture different from that usually taken: not only what people say it is, but also what they say it is not, and how both of these attitudes affect behavior at an everyday level.⁹ To borrow a concept from Lacan, I surmised that what is culturally “not” gives form, meaning, and substance to that which culturally “is.”¹⁰

Work

Within the broad parameters of the *mizu shōbai*, I became increasingly interested in two specific behaviors: the use of *mizu shōbai* by big business, and the activity in the class of *mizu shōbai* establishments whose service includes sexual talk—hostess clubs. I learned quickly that these two dimensions of the *mizu shōbai* are intertwined. How deep that intertwining is, what it

8. This blind spot, like that concerning gender and women, has also begun to be corrected. English scholarship on these subjects includes Smith 1982; Robertson 1991, 1992; Silverberg 1991, 1992; Buckley 1991; and Tamanoi 1991.

9. Again, I'm not alone in approaching cultural issues by way of behavior that some deem to be deviant, subaltern, or marginal. Others whose work on Japan has been similarly directed include Sato 1991; Silverberg 1991, 1992; and Buckley 1991.

10. Lacan speaks, for example, of the relationship between what he calls the Real—the “the hard, impenetrable kernel resisting symbolization” (Žižek 1989:169)—and the symbolic—the processes of linguistic and social forms. While the Real is structured in terms of a lack that seemingly opposes and resists society's symbolic, Lacan argues, according to Žižek, that this opposition is illusory. The Real doesn't precede or stand outside the symbolic, but rather is produced by the symbolic as its antithesis. As Žižek puts it, “The real is simultaneously presupposed and supposed by the symbolic” (169).

consists of, and how it affects a variety of behaviors (that is, constructions of worker, family, gender, sexuality, national identity) far beyond the narrow borders of the *mizu shōbai* itself became the questions that I devoted my research to and that form the central issues of this book.

Of particular interest to me was the nexus between play and work. Why did businessmen convene at a place like a hostess club, what precisely was it they hoped to accomplish, how were these objectives met by being entertained in the company of a hostess, and were these outings a mere extension of work or a form of pleasure made possible only by work? I investigated these issues by a number of means: (1) I worked in a hostess club for four months. (2) I interviewed a number of Japanese (married men and women; unmarried men and women; *sarariman* who frequent hostess clubs at company expense and wives of these men; new company employees; managers of various *mizu shōbai* establishments; the Mama and the manager of my club plus many of its customers; researchers of family issues, gender issues, and sex; journalists; a sex counselor; gynecologists—all these I interviewed about issues pertaining to the *mizu shōbai*, its endorsement by big business, and the impact of corporate entertainment on other realms of social life. (3) I gathered, read, and analyzed various materials and the scholarship of Japanese on the above issues. (4) I engaged various works and concepts in analyzing my data, such as Horkheimer and Adorno's essay on the leisure industry (1991), Marcuse's theory of alienated sexuality in societies of late capitalism (1966), Butler's thesis of gender as performative (1990), Silverman's concept of fantasy as dominant fiction (1992), Lacan's essay on the mirror stage (1977), the Comaroff's model of ideology, culture, and hegemony (1991), and Barthes's concept of the alibi (1972).

What emerged from these various investigations was a recognition of how vague the conception of corporate entertainment is, compared with the actual practice, and how limited the practice, restricted as it is to elite companies and elite male workers. When I asked Japanese to state the objectives of business *settai*, for example, the responses were typically imprecise. The most common answer was that it is important to relax, unwind, let off steam, have a good time, be oneself, become friendly, and to pursue these activities in the company of fellow workers, one's boss (or one's employees, depending on the position of the speaker), and business associates. But precisely for whom and for what these opportunities for “opening up” (*uchikeru*) and “relieving tension” (*kinchō o yurumeru*) are important were matters avoided or addressed only in oblique fashion. One attitude was that the subject is so obvious it “goes without saying” (Barthes 1972:143). A

realm of the commonsensical—this is what Barthes calls “myth” (1972:142–45) and the Comaroffs (1991) call “hegemony,” referring to aspects of behavior considered so “natural” that their envelopment in or by relations of power and economics is invisible and, in this sense, naturalized. What is a policy of big business as corporate entertainment, in other words, is accepted as a tradition of Japanese culture: a custom of sharing entertainment as a group that is common among groups of all kinds of people in Japan.¹¹ That it is only certain members of certain groups that entertain at company expense in places such as hostess clubs, however, was a factor of corporate entertainment left unstated or understated by many respondents.

Those who accepted *kōsaisettaihi* as only natural tended to frame it in terms of *ningenkankei*—the sets of human relationships which form and weave the Japaneseness of business in Japan. It is *ningenkankei*, I was told, that differentiates work patterns in Japan from those in other societies at a comparable stage of industrialism. Japanese work hard, are loyal to their company, and structure their work relations on a model of family. Workers must consequently feel, or be made to feel, strongly attached to their workplace, and the attachment must be based not on a rational calculation of self-interest but on a warm, “human” connection that is shared with fellow workers. To kindle and rekindle this “humanness” (*ningenni*) of work relations is the principal aim of corporate entertainment. And the payoff, by this logic, is to worker as well as company: the worker is made to feel more human, and these feelings of humanness build the ties needed between those who work or do business together.

Play

In practice, what is needed in order to realize the objectives of company outings is an environment in which workers can “play” (*asobi*). The word is commonly used to reprimand or encourage anyone appearing to be stiff or serious. Delivered as an imperative (*Asobi!*), it is a directive to engage more enthusiastically in drinking (and behaving as if drunk), singing (in front of the room, at a mike, and to the accompaniment of a piano), talking (of inessential, unimportant, noncontroversial, or ridiculous things), joking (preferably about bawdy or sexual matters), kidding (sizing up, discussing, propositioning the hostess) and flirting (acting as if smitten with her). I was

11. For discussion of group membership in Japan, see Nakane 1970; Benedict 1946; Rohlen 1974, 1989; Aida 1972; Minami 1978; and Tada 1974.

told that it was important for all members of a business party to participate equally in such play at a hostess club and thus to be similarly involved and exposed. All this leads to the opening up and releasing of tension sought for in such an outing and to the trust that is thus established between men who work together or are negotiating a transaction. It is this scene of camaraderie, rather than a discussion of actual business, that can lead to the signing of a contract the next day when months of haggling in an office might not produce that result. It is also this convivial companionship that breaks down the hierarchy of employer-employee relations operative at the office and allows accumulated strain a periodic release.¹²

What role does the hostess play in corporate outings? She is functionally useful: she is what facilitates and expedites the night's event. As phrased by one Japanese woman, the wife of a man who frequented hostess clubs at corporate expense, the hostess provides a useful “service” for the business encounters between men. When asked precisely why or how, she answered vaguely. She had never been to a hostess club herself and didn't know the details, but she assumed that it had something to do with a hostess fixing the drinks and managing the table so that the business between men could proceed unobstructed. Male respondents were more specific. A hostess's skill in keeping men involved in conversation was mentioned most often, and next was her ability to give men a good time. When entertaining, my interviewees said, the host wants and needs his guests to be entertained. But this can be a burdensome task, one that a host is only too happy to transfer to a competent hostess.

Money

Given a functionalistic explanation for corporate entertainment, the hostess's role within it, while desirable, seems hardly necessary.¹³ After all, couldn't men relax and open up to one another in a vast range of other

12. It is accepted that when bosses are out drinking with their employees, the latter can treat them with a disrespect and impudence never tolerated at work. This joking can lead to insults and even physical violence, but a good boss is one who will “forget” such slights the next day when back at the office.

13. I use the word *functionalistic* to mean explanations which assume there is a function to a behavior and describe and analyze the behavior in terms of the assumed function. Almost all that I know of regard corporate entertainment as a practice that fulfills a useful function (and thereby disregard other questions about it, such as whom it benefits, whom it does not benefit, and what other effects it has on, for example, family life, gender constructions, sexual relations, and class).

settings? In principle, high-ranked *sarariman* in big companies would agree that they could: a cheap *yakitoriya* (a restaurant that sells skewers of meat, fish, and vegetables) or *akachochin* (a "red lantern pub"—that is, an inexpensive drinking place) could serve just as well as a high-class hostess club or expensive golf course. Yet in practice, the men admitted, *setti* in big companies are held almost exclusively in one of the latter. The reasons, when given, were the cost and (in the case of a hostess club) the women. As related to me by a man who had recently been entertained by a company soliciting his business, clubs are chosen that are not only pricey but that conspicuously display their priciness. In his case, this meant an evening of being taken to three opulent clubs, at each of which the party remained for one hour. For him, a rare critic of the system, the night was unpleasant because just as he was becoming comfortable with a hostess, his host would rush him off to the next club. It was by the expenditure of money alone that his hosts aimed to accomplish their objective—to project their own status as a prestigious firm and to project their esteem for him as a desired client. These intentions were, in fact, accomplished, for the man signed the deal despite the fact that he was less than entertained during his night of entertainment.

In Japan, utilizing money as a symbolic currency in social relations is a practice hardly limited to corporate entertainment. One sees it in the gift of exorbitantly priced fruit—for example, perfect melons that cost as much as \$200—and in the presents given during gift-exchange seasons that are chosen almost entirely by a calibration of price (Creighton 1992). Yet the principle—that lavish expenditure at a hostess club underlines the importance of both giver (the company) and receiver (the individual)—seems to contradict that other principle of *kōsaisettaihi*: developing human relationships. The latter promises something that is lasting, full, Japanese, and "human"—the fomenting of *ningenkankei*, which members of all groups in Japan depend upon and ritually ignite or reignite in outings. Yet the former is a commodity that is evanescent, an empty form, not uniquely Japanese, and hardly human—a transaction between people through money.

What is the relation between these two facets of corporate entertainment, both mentioned (though rarely at the same time by the same speaker) as critical to its operation? Is money a shorthand for "humanness," or does money displace something human? Is money what purchases the fullness of being human? Is money the sign of the Japanese human—the more money, the more human, the more Japanese the person? The eliteness of *kōsaisettaihi* as a practice, of course, undercuts its advertisement of itself as

indistinguishable from behavior that is culturally standard for any Japanese group. Corporate entertainment is increasingly a privileged activity for a privileged class of men. Yet exactly what does this privilege purchase? Is it something that is valuable in its exclusivity (which gives its participants greater access to some "essence" of Japanese-ness, for example) or something that is symbolically empty and transparent, as experienced by the prospective client who criticized the system?

Marx, of course, has written about the transformation of all "natural relationships into money relationships" (1978:185) during the course of industrialization into capitalism. More recently scholars such as Lukács (1971), Harvey (1989), and Haug (1986) have described the dominance of the commodity form (money being only one of its manifestations) in economies of late capitalism, under which all aspects of life become organized into objects that can be bought and sold on the market. As Haug says, the commodity form encodes a contradiction: the seller is only interested in its exchange-value (price), the buyer in its use-value (its uses). To enhance one's profits, the seller promotes the commodity as if it were full of uses. Increasingly what results are commodities that promise more than they can deliver (the gap between use and exchange value coming down on the side of the exchange)—thus depending on an illusion of benefit which will never fully or even approximately be realized.

Right from the start, therefore, because of its economic function, the emphasis is on what the use-value *appears* to be—which, in terms of a single sales-act, is liable to be no more than mere illusion. The aesthetics of the commodity in its widest meaning—the sensual appearance and the conception of its use-value—become detached from the object itself. Appearance becomes just as important—and practically more so—than the commodity's being itself. Something that is simply useful but does not appear to be so, will not sell, while something that seems to be useful, will sell. Within the system of buying and selling, the aesthetic illusion—the commodity's promise of use-value—enters the arena as an independent function in selling. (Haug 1986:16–17)

The sites most preferred for *kōsaisettaihi*—exclusive golf courses, top-ranked hostess clubs, expensive restaurants—all have two characteristics in common: a high price and an aesthetic perfection that is encoded in the word *service* (*sa-bisu*). In the case of the hostess club where I worked, for example, the furnishings were all exquisite, the maintenance was flawless,

the ice buckers were crystal, the waiters wore tuxedos and the Mama expensive kimonos. Like any exclusive spot for leisure and entertainment in Japan, this club sells what Haug refers to as a "sensual appearance"—a beautiful surface and excellent service. Does this sensual appearance, as he suggests, take on a life of its own and come to constitute the primary value of hostess clubs—a commodity of superficial beauty from which any utility, including "human bonding," has been displaced? Certainly there is a contradiction between these two services of the hostess club, and it is one that some customers at Bijō alluded to—a contradiction, to use Barthesian terminology (1972), between a form that is empty (money, image, surface) and a meaning that is full (humanness, Japanese-ness, work relations).¹⁴ In my experience at Bijō, I found that customers would often speak for and from both of these positions (though rarely at the same moment)—that nights at hostess clubs were meaningless and empty and that they were engaging and fun (*tanoshii*).

Sex

At another level, there is a contradiction between the role of money in hostess clubs and the service it advertises—masculine pleasure. The nexus of this contradiction comes in the importance of women to a club's rank. While ranking of hostess clubs is affected by other factors—decor, location, price, level of service—the ultimate determinant is the class of women serving as hostesses.¹⁵ For a club to be top-ranked, the women need to be beautiful, slender, young (no older than in the early twenties), sophisticated (preferably well educated), worldly, and well dressed. As these characteristics are conventionalized in Japan, such women are sexually desirable, yet this very class of desirability makes them, almost by definition, off limits for sex to all but the most wealthy or most powerful men. But despite the limited

14. Customers occasionally spoke of this contradiction in terms of the emptiness of the endless ritual of going out every night to hostess clubs that ultimately had no personal connection with them. In this context, a few men said they longed to be at home with wives and children. A few others said they longed to be doing something else, like pursuing a hobby that would be more fulfilling. By implication, both these alternatives (hobbies, family time) are inhibited by the obligations of work, which include long nights at hostess clubs.

15. For example, the club where I worked—Bijō in the Kōppongi district of Tokyo—was considered in every factor except one to be in a top-ranked class. The caliber of the hostesses was such as to bring the rank down, according to Bijō's manager and most of the customers I questioned, to a second tier. But since the ranking system includes about eight ranks, Bijō was rated high-class if not of the highest class.

availability of the hostesses, the people who discussed hostess clubs with me said that the clubs' greatest appeal is the women, because, as it was explained, it's "in a man's nature" to be sexual. In this context, the word used to denote male sexuality was, almost without exception, *sukebei*—one that translates as "lewd, bawdy, lustful, lascivious" (Kenkyusha: 1227) and is a crude rather than refined terminology. It is also a word heard often in the milieu of hostess club talk itself: a man will speak of the breasts of the hostess and refer to himself as a *sukebei*; a man will discuss among themselves who in their party is the biggest *sukebei*, and a customer will proposition a hostess while announcing that he is, after all, a *sukebei*.

To a hostess club whose class depends on the refinement of its hostesses come men who describe their sexuality in terms that are basic and crude. What precisely do they gain from interchanges that allude to sexual intercourse, that circle around discussion of body parts and desires, and that simulate an intimacy which promises realization, yet are all confined to the space of the hostess club and the dimension of talk? Some have suggested that this confinement does not register as absolute in the minds of the men. They hope that a woman will actually fall for them and that she will fall for love and not just money. This, of course, is how the hostess behaves, and the higher the class of the club, the more crafted the hostess's performance and the more tailored it is to the particulars of her individual customers. Her aim is to be convincing, covering any signs of relations with other men, invoking various signals to convey that her interest in a customer is special, and telling him that he is extraordinary and unique.

The hostess acts *as if* she were sexually and romantically interested in the man, and since there are always stories of hostesses becoming involved with customers, a man may assume he has a chance. Yet there is a fundamental hitch in this assumption, one that forms a contradiction in the system of hostess clubs itself. This is that as a club increases in rank, the more desirable the women become and the more convincing and personalized their performance as hostess, yet the less likely are they to form sexual liaisons with their customers outside the club. High-ranked hostess clubs may even forbid such alliances and threaten to fire any hostess who is so inclined (as did my hostess club). More to the point, perhaps, is the issue of money. A high-class hostess is an expensive commodity, and corporate entertainment rarely covers the cost of such liaisons.¹⁶ The man himself must foot the bill.

16. In the early 1980s, I was told, the going rate for a classy hostess was 10,000 yen, then about \$50. This would be for a sexual encounter in a love hotel, but if a man wanted to pursue

Hostess clubs provide what is commonly recognized and valued as a gendered and (hetero)sexualized service—the company of women who flatter men and imply a possible sexual or romantic intimacy with them. Yet the service stops at the implication—at the foreplay, so to speak, rather than the climax.¹⁷ What precisely is the commodity here? Is it deceptive advertising—a category of what Haug has referred to as “aesthetic illusion”? Do men actually believe the promise suggested by hostesses? Do they not? Does it matter? How does this aspect of hostess clubs connect to those other needs and desires dictated by corporate entertainment—to the building of human relatedness and the display of pecuniary importance?

What seems apparent in terms of this last question is that the utility of the hostess club provided by sexual promise does not depend on fulfillment of that promise—in fact, quite the opposite. Acts culminating in sexual release would seriously disturb the other two agendas of *kōsatsudai*. The first, achieving collective bonding, is much better served by keeping the woman sexually interesting—so that there is something and someone around to which all the men can bond—yet ultimately out of bounds to any one of them; thus the focus of the evening is kept on the relations the men share rather than on a pairing relationship that would remove a man from the group. The second agenda, displaying conspicuous consumption, is also better met by the service of a high-class woman who, by definition, is off limits or exorbitantly expensive for sex. A more sexually accessible woman would be cheaper in status as well as price, so the hostess capitalizes on her class by stressing her inaccessibility. In doing so, she hopes, of

a more extended relationship with such a woman, he'd be required to take her on expensive dates, buy her extravagant gifts, and set her up eventually in a luxurious apartment or condominium.

17. Defining sex or sexuality in terms of acts that culminate in sexual release is, of course, only one of many possible constructions. It is the one Freud adopted for the definition of what he called “normal” adult sexuality: acts of genital intercourse with a gendered other that end in climax (1962:107–8). By this model, which has been dominant and hegemonic, according to such theorists as Foucault (1980) and Marcuse (1966), in Western societies, any sexual form or act that is not heterosexual or does not reach climax is either subsidiary or deviant. It is by this model that “foreplay” acquires its name and status: as an activity that leads up to an act of genital contact and release. In the hostess club, customers would seemingly adopt this model in words and statements indicating their desire to realize sexual contact with a hostess. And it is this desire that is frustrated by sexually provocative talk that will rarely, if ever, end in a genital act. That Japanese men abide this structure of hostess club sexuality so willingly raises the question of whether it is so frustrating after all and, if not, whether hostess club talk isn't “sexual” or whether its “sexuality” is constructed, in fact, along a different model. These issues are explored in part 3.

course, to increase her desirability—desire being that which, as Lacan has argued, is unrealizable.

The sexual service of hostesses operates as a fetish.¹⁸ It is both a presence (the implied promise of sexual access) and an absence (the denial of access), and the simultaneity of these two operations is what makes it a valuable commodity. When either aspect diminishes, the commodity loses its value both to corporations, which purchase it as a business tool, and to the marketers of hostess clubs, who sell it as their product. To quote Haug:

Sensuality in this context becomes the vehicle of an economic function, the subject and object of an economically functional fascination. Whoever controls the product's appearance can control the fascinated public by appealing to them sensually. (1986:17)

What of that public, however? Are its members such passive dupes of a “functional fascination,” or have they, in the case of the hostess club, assessed its operation and clearly seen it for what it is: the come-on without follow-through that suits a business outing? Certainly the latter is what some men suggested. So far as genital release is concerned, hostess clubs are sexless. When a man wants such release, he goes to places that explicitly offer it.¹⁹ As one man explained, there is always the forty-minute set at a *pinku salon*, where a man can stop on the way home after hours spent in hostess-club talk. Why not just go home, one might ask, or has the commodity form so deeply insinuated itself into sex that not exchanging money for it impoverishes the act? This is the case, some men implied—not surprisingly perhaps, for the class of men whose jobs must require that they spend even their evenings where every intimacy is mediated in terms of both money and work. Yet how such men experience the relationship with a paid woman must be understood as well. In the accounts I heard and read, one element was repeated, no matter what type of woman it was or what the nature of her sexual service—narcissistic control. Men said that, by paying, they were relieved of the responsibility of having to be accountable (in whatever sense). This they experienced as a relief and often a pleasure.

In paying money for sex, men are not only buying a commodity but putting themselves into the commodity too. That is, there is a fetishization of subject (man) as much as of object (woman), and the customer is not

18. For his definition of fetish, see Freud 1962:42–43.

19. Kakimura (1992:68) has called this the ejaculation industry (*shasei sangyō*), referring specifically to *pinku salon*, 150 of such establishments, he says, now operate in Tokyo.

only purchasing one thing or another but is also paying to become one other as well. He seeks to be relieved of his everyday persona—the one to which various expectations are attached—and given a new script in which he plays a different role. In the case of the *pinku saron*, this may be just a man who can sit back and do nothing; in the case of a scapland, it is a man who is the master of a head-to-foot body “massage”; and in the case of the hostess club, it is a man whose every word will be listened to, accepted, and praised. Hostess club service, men said, is a known commodity, a reception that is guaranteed and guaranteed to be only flattering. So while the hostess may not deliver an act of sex, something most of them admitted they still desired, she will project an image of the man that is pleasing and potent. The service that is purchased, then, is an eroticization less of the woman than of the man—his projection as a powerful, desirable male.

In the language of Kaja Silverman (1992), this hostess-bred image of men is a fantasy encouraged and conditioned by the money and power of elite institutions. She argues, following Lacan, that all social existence entails a loss, and fantasy is what we use to compensate for the real “lacks” in our lives. Accordingly, fantasies are “scenarios” or “tableaux” that imagine, as completed, what in reality can only remain fragmented and partial. Fantasy gives form to desire, and imagination to reality, but is itself an impossibility. That is, fantasy posits objects that are “capable of restoring lost wholeness to the subject” and it gives “psychical reality” to these objects which, while not real in a phenomenal sense, “stand in metaphorically for what is sacrificed to meaning—the subject’s very ‘life’” (Silverman 1992:20).

Certain fantasies, Silverman points out, are politically or economically expedient. These “dominant fictions” are collectivized and institutionalized to suture over the losses subjects have incurred by their membership in certain domains or relations of power. Principally, the image projected is that of a phantasmagorically complete and ideal subject, one that compensates for and thus conceals the demands and expectations placed on real persons as they assume the subjectivity of a social role. It is a dominant fiction of masculine privilege, superiority, and perfection that big business in Japan is purchasing with its endorsement of corporate entertainment for one class and gender of its workers—well-placed *sarariman*. Only this stratum of employees is so compensated; and as a “perk” to their jobs, company-paid outings to exclusive places become a sign of elitism, indicating what kind of worker doing what kind of work is worthy of ideological and phantasmagorical completion. Other positions and categories of labor—the blue-collar worker or the mother laboring at home, for example—

are not given such institutionalized fictions, paid for as compensatory benefits of their employment. On the other hand, such workers consequently avoid being seduced into mistaking themselves as artificially complete—a fantasy that, managed by big business through the practice of *hōsaiettai*, not only flatters *sarariman* but bonds workers ever more closely, completely, and inescapably to their work.

Ideological Convergences

So is corporate entertainment, in the end, more privilege or manipulation? Is it a benefit, exclusive to one class, rank, and gender of worker, that confirms his work status by projecting his phallic desirability or is it a manipulation that extracts an almost totalizing work commitment by masturbating the ego? Certainly the answer is complicated, and it should not be reduced to an either-or alternative. Indeed, there are Japanese who would take great exception to the very posing of these questions. Scholars such as Tada Michitaro (1974), Aida Yūji (1972), and Minami Hiroshi (1978) have argued that the convergence of play and work, player and worker, exhibited in the corporate behavior of spending evenings and weekends entertaining in the interest of work relations, is unproblematic because it is culturally “Japanese.” As Aida has written, this is what a Japanese worker does because he is Japanese and is operating according to a traditional worldview in which the categories of work and play are not rigidly demarcated.

Members of the Frankfurt School, by contrast, have argued that the convergence of play and work and player and worker, supposed and presupposed by the institution of company-paid entertainment, is a feature of any society progressing through the late stages of capitalism. The boundaries between such spheres as private and public, home and work, culture and industry disappear as the result of economic rather than cultural conditions and do so inevitably no matter what culture is involved (Horkheimer and Adorno 1991; Marcuse 1966; Habermas 1989). In the case of Japan there are certainly both economic and cultural factors shaping the confluences at work in corporate entertainment. And these confluences are further complicated by being crosscut and differentially affected by relations of gender, class, race, and power. Because Koreans and *buraumin* are discriminated against in staffing executive positions, for example, they rarely, if ever, participate in exclusive *settai*.

Hostess clubs and golf courses have become so exorbitantly priced in recent years, as a result, in large part, of their use for company entertain-

ment, that individuals can no longer afford them. Nada Inada has observed that the leisure industry (*reia-sangyo*) is the big beneficiary because it can target its fees to the budgets of big companies rather than those of private individuals. He writes further that all individuals are losers in this process because work becomes inextricably linked to the play activities of golf and high-priced drinking (Nada 1992:24). Yet even by this calculation, not everyone "loses" in the same way: while certain workers are denied access to the most desirable forms of commodified play, others have access but must play in a manner that is legitimated or endorsed by their work.

Still, in a society so thoroughly organized by relations of money and work, isn't it the *sarariman* who is in a position of privilege, a privilege exhibited in the corporate policy of entertaining only this one class and gender of worker in places increasingly off limits to anyone else? It is they, after all, who become the recipients of a high-priced ego massage, a service that other men whose jobs do not include it speak of with envy and lust. A hostess satisfies what is a desire of every man, I was told, a desire for what Yoda (1981) has called *jikokenjyoku*, which translates awkwardly as the wish to expose oneself and have this self-exposure well received. This is the service a good hostess can give a man by listening to him, encouraging him to express himself, and building him up. These behaviors replace something in the man, Yoda implies, that becomes depleted in the other spheres of his life—mainly home and work, where the weight and obligations of his various roles (husband, father, worker) take their toll. So when what is partly taken away by and at work is partly replaced by a practice endorsed by work, it is a privilege, according to many Japanese men whose own jobs do not include such a regular benefit.

That women are less likely than men to hold this view is hardly surprising. For those who are themselves in the working world, the practice of corporate entertainment is often seen as the sexist policy that it is, one that fosters an attitude of chauvinism in the workplace and excludes women from the activity of networking and status building so important to business. As a gender-based practice, *seitai* in places like hostess clubs is a reflection and construction of work as a gender-based role. Women can work but only men can have careers. The assessment of women whose husbands participate routinely in company entertainment is framed in similarly pragmatic and sober terms. Outings may be essential to and for a man's job, but the sacrifices called for from family, wife, and marriage are considerable. Because some husbands are rarely seen at home, domestic life is centered on the mother-child bond. Further, when men whose jobs keep them away

at night assume little in the way of responsibilities for children and home, and when women's own career aspirations are obstructed, marriage has little opportunity to be anything but a relationship of expediency.

Finally, what of the men themselves, for whom hostess clubbing is both a legitimate and an expected part of their jobs? How do they relate to, conceptualize, and experience a practice overdetermined by multiple and contradictory meanings: play/work, human-relatedness/ego building, flashy display/friendly relating, duty/privilege, heterosexuality/homosociality, sexual flirtation/sexual frustration? Do they actually believe that hostesses are sincere in their affectionate treatment of customers, that they are motivated to display affection and approval by anything but money and the requirements of their job? The answer seems obvious. The performances of hostesses are too repetitive and formulaic to be anything but a contrivance to insure good business for them, for the hostess club, and for the companies paying so much for their services. Yet, as I came to understand, the principle of hostess club business (in the double sense of a business itself and as a site for the business of big corporations) is neither dependent on a belief in its sincerity nor defeated by recognition of its impersonal basis. Men would "see through" the ploys of hostesses, telling me how boring or artificial they were and how much an encumbrance rather than a pleasure it was to spend nights in the company of such women as a part of one's job. But even these men would readily turn to a hostess only minutes later, laughing, talking, and flirting with them as is customary.

Men "play," in other words, even if they don't believe. Or, to restate this, "play" is not dependent on belief, partly because play is not just play but also work.²⁰ And it was my impression that as time goes on, as men grow older and as the nights at hostess clubs turn into years, words of protest about hostesses and the artificiality of their performances tend to disappear. The *mizu shōbai* scene then becomes, for better or worse, the scene of desire and fantasy—what Abe, the manager at my club, called the *sarariman's* "bad habit" (*warai kuse*). What men are given, get used to, and eventually come to expect are women who massage their ego and assure them of their masculine worth.

It is also what becomes the site for a desired and imagined subjectivity as men come to recognize themselves in the images created for them by paid hostesses. A system used to extend and accommodate business, in

20. According to Žižek, belief is no longer necessary to sustain an ideological operation in what he calls our "post-ideological" age (1989:33–43).

other words, becomes internalized into the structures of male desire and self-recognition. And it is from both sides of this relationship that a man must disengage at the time of retirement. He stops working and stops the company-paid jaunts to hostess clubs. Two identities, in their interconnectiveness, are also stopped: one as *sarariman* and the other as glorified male—the phallicized self-image bred by hostesses that will be a commodity too expensive for most men to continue to afford. So divested, a man returns to his home, a space in which he has probably been more an absence than a presence during his working years. And it is here, as a retiree, that he must resume or assume a subjectivity, so often satirized in the popular press, as “just” a man.

The Work of the Book

The first half of this book is what anthropologists refer to as ethnography, a description of a particular phenomenon based on various anthropological methods for gathering data. In my case, I decided to conduct research in only one hostess club rather than many, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the interpersonal dynamics constituting *settai*. In 1981, as a participant as well as an observer, I worked as a hostess for four months at Bijō, a high-class club in the Roppongi section of Tokyo. During that time, all the staff knew of my intentions, as did many of the customers; and most of my material comes from talking with the staff, talking with customers, observing interactions, and interacting myself. My focus was on the relationship(s) between the stated aims of company outings (opening up, relaxing with one another, bonding as fellow workers) and what actually takes place at a site for corporate entertainment—a hostess club.

As I have said, descriptions of real events in a hostess club are almost totally absent in the scholarly literature on Japan, whether in the English language or in Japanese. While more is written on the principles that are assumed or presumed by this corporate practice (male pleasure, *ninkenkaikai*, belonging to a group), little of it addresses how these principles operate in the sites and behaviors chosen for *settai*. Concentrating at this micro level, my ethnography is divided into three chapters. In chapter 1 I discuss Bijō through the dimensions of space and place—where it is located physically and socially, how it fits in with other spaces (of home and work, for example), how its interior is arranged, and what its visual aesthetics are.

In chapter 2 I describe what men actually do at Bijō, by way of hostess club activities that are highly but not entirely formulaic and standardized:

drinking, singing, joking with each other, speaking to and about the hostesses in a specific *mizu-shōbai* language, and “revealing” themselves through various kinds of anecdotes. In chapter 3 I examine the role and service of Bijō’s female attendants (the Mama and the hostesses) in light of the fact that the women are often said to be the reason that men, or the companies they work for, will pay such exorbitant prices to drink their own alcohol in places such as hostess clubs. These services vary both in content and structure and address the men, both collectively and individually. I ask what, descriptively, these behaviors are and how, structurally, they situate men in relationships conducive to business.

A word about my ethnographic style in part 1: I have attempted to make this section as readable and accessible as possible, assuming that many readers who are interested in the phenomenon of company-paid entertainment at hostess clubs will be uninterested in certain debates, theories, and discourses within the discipline of anthropology. For these readers I have tried to give a precise structural outline of what is most crucial in the relationship between hostess clubs and business *settai*. Both the structure and the account I give of the intersection of club and business have been conditioned by a number of factors. These factors are not always explicitly delineated in the text, however. The theoretical issues guiding my description, for example, I lay out in this introduction and in parts 2 and 3. Also, the specific interchanges, conversations, and customers on which descriptions are based are not always as fully documented here as they are in the rest of the book.

In Part 1 my aim was to present certain dimensions of the hostess clubs in as fluid, graphic, and comprehensive a manner as possible. I use stylistic devices—the third person, the present tense, and unidentified persons—that have been challenged in recent critiques of ethnography, for example, Clifford and Marcus (1986). It is for reasons of style and presentation, however, that I adopt these devices in the first part and, for reasons of ethnographic politics (to make visible the ethnographic process and my role as ethnographer), largely abandon them later.

Part 2 addresses a different set of concerns. Standing back from the ethnographic site of a particular hostess club, I ask how Japanese speak about, make sense of, and contextualize the specific practice of corporate entertainment in the *mizu shōbai*. Using three sources of data—interviews with participants in the practice, spouses of participants, managers of hostess clubs and other establishments in the *mizu shōbai*, researchers of related issues, statements or comments by Bijō staff members or clientele made in the course of conversation, and written material by Japanese scholars,

journalists, and specialists that focuses on or touches on this practice—I explore the dominant view of *kōsaisettaihi* as both legitimate and comprehensible in cultural terms—indeed, as an effect and reflection of the culture. Discursively, this represents an apparent contradiction. While explicit discussion of company-paid jaunts into the *mizu shōbai* is avoided because the content of these events (or their association with the commodified sexuality of the *mizu shōbai*) is regarded as culturally insignificant, the practice is spoken of indirectly and generally by reference to cultural behaviors that ground it as only “natural.” It lacks “culture,” yet is culturally based.

How Japanese speak of company outings in the *mizu shōbai* in terms of Japanese is formulated through a number of overlapping yet distinct cultural categories. Again, none of these specifically addresses the corporate behavior of *settai* (which becomes a de-centered subject as a result); yet each becomes a frame for contextualizing and legitimating this corporate practice. Each of the five chapters in part 2 focuses on one of these categories: Japanese notions of place and identity (chapter 4), Japanese work patterns (chapter 5), the Japanese family and a gendered division of labor rooted in the family (chapter 5), Japanese concepts of play (chapter 6), and the Japanese domain of and for male sexual license (chapter 7). These frames of intersecting, overdetermined Japanese are what give cultural meaning to *kōsaisettaihi* (for both participants and nonparticipants) and what sanction not only its business operation but also the relations of power, money, desire, gender, and work by which this business operation is organized. Cultural categories, in other words, are the guises and disguises of an economic policy—the props of an ideology. They are discussed in part 2 as a means for understanding the languages by which the ideologization of *kōsaisettaihi* can be carried out.

In part 3 I consider the implications of corporate entertainment as an ideology. To address the question of what the ideology is, for whom, and with what implications on various subjectivities, relations, and social domains, I return to the ethnographic “thick” of Bijo, and analyze first (chapter 8) how specific interchanges and behaviors structure what is consciously recognized and articulated to be the objectives of company *settai* (bonding, opening up, relaxing, humanizing business relations). I argue that it is the hostess as woman, with a particular construction of *mizu shōbai* femininity, that makes the selection of a hostess club for corporate entertainment so desirable. It is she who through her service, position, and discursive strategies masculinizes the customers, and it is the collectively realized and ritualized masculinity that serves the needs of business *settai*.

Next I consider (chapter 9) how the masculinization assumed and constructed or reconstructed by corporate entertainment operates at a level less conscious or harder to verbalize than that typically used to discuss this practice. By these features, constructs of masculinity that the *mizu shōbai* encodes and business adopts are hegemonic rather than ideological, using the Comaroffs’ distinction between ideology as that which can be formulated into conscious language and hegemony as that so “taken for granted” it evades the consciousness of articulation (1991). Questioning this masculine hegemonic in terms of where the sexual and gendered constructs implied in the hostess club come from, I challenge the common argument (as put forth by Ian Buruma [1984] and a number of Japanese scholars) that *mizu shōbai* women serve as mother substitutes for men who find the eroticization of maternity both satisfying and comfortable. I argue that this thesis is too simple and essentialist, reducing the heterosexual and homosocial relations expressed (as well as formed) in the *mizu shōbai* to dynamics of only the family rather than those of work, money, and business at work as well. I suggest instead that what is desirable is not a mother-like woman but a woman who acts maternal yet is not a mother herself. By encoding a split, the *mizu shōbai* woman is a fetish of both presence (motherly indulgence and ego support) and absence (lacking the emotional pull and interminability of real mother-child relationships) on which, I argue, the gendered and heterosexual pleasures of the hostess club rest.

Finally, in chapter 10 I ask what effects the system of playing with fetishized women in hostess clubs at company expense has on both those who are directly involved with the system and those who are not. First, as a material practice, corporate entertainment acts both to exclude certain categories of persons from assuming elite jobs as *sarariman* and to include *sarariman* so totally in their jobs that their involvement with home, marriage, and family is restricted. Second, as a practice with symbolic effects, I take an image of impotence commonly used to represent *sarariman* in the popular press as a commentary on the white-collar worker’s relationship to the work/corporate entertainment connection: while enticed by the flatteries of that connection, men are also reduced by a system that pumps them up as super-phallic and sutures this phallicism to their jobs. Corporate life depends on a commensurability between penis (real) and phallus (symbolic) which, as Silverman writes, “calls upon the male subject to see himself, and the female subject to recognize and desire him, only through the mediation of images of an unimpaired masculinity” (1992:42). That this commensurability is artificial is revealed on the body of the *sarariman himself* (satirized as impotent) at the point of losing or retiring from his job.

I would like to add a brief note about my conducting fieldwork in a hostess club. Some have questioned how the fact that I was different (at the time, I was the only foreign hostess working at Bijō) affected my reception as a hostess. There were many differences about me that were noted: my being an American; an academic, as many knew; an academic interested in hostess clubs, as was known by about a third of the customers. And certainly some men treated me with attitudes quite different from the way they treated the other hostesses, that is, with more apparent curiosity, interest, impersonality, reserve, hesitation, respect, fascination. I have attempted to factor these effects of my own position as ethnographer/hostess into my observations and analyses of Bijō and also to observe and report on as many encounters as possible between customers and other hostesses. Whether my account is nevertheless biased, I must leave to others to judge.

I would like also to comment on how fieldwork affected me as a woman and a feminist. Parts of hostessing were difficult and stressful, mainly because I had to accept the subordinate and sometimes servile position of servicer. Being a novice hostess, I was spared the touching accorded veteran hostesses, yet there were other behaviors I had to accept—constant references to my body, particularly my breasts; sometimes rude or deprecatory remarks; questions about my private life and references to personal matters; and the continual expectation that I would flatter and compliment even insulting men and never counter or protest what they said. Though many of the customers and the interchanges I had with them were pleasant, respectful, and refined, the element of crudity was ever present.

I cannot say that the disagreeableness of some hostess club behavior from the perspective of a woman working in this world has not affected my presentation and analysis of this activity. Yet my aim has not been to write a polemic on the chauvinistic or sexist attitudes of Japanese men in the nightlife or to reduce these behaviors to some essential attribute that is biologically male or universally patriarchal. Rather, in the tradition of such feminists as Linda Williams, who has written on Western pornography (1989), and Kaja Silverman, who examines phallic imagery (and its disruption) in Western film (1992), my objective has been the analysis of a masculinist behavior in terms of its historical, institutional, and ideological background. Consistent with this agenda, too, my aim has been to consider the implications of a phallocentric practice in terms not only of the privileges it accords men but also of the price it extracts from them.



Part One

Ethnography of a Hostess Club

Nightwork

Sexuality,

Pleasure, and

Corporate Masculinity

in a Tokyo

Hostess

Club



Anne Allison

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