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Ore Giapponesi: A Shinkansen through Prostitution

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Introduction

The thesis treats prostitution, in all its shades, as a political substance rather than an economic transaction: the living remnant of a world system that has, for centuries, designed women's submission as the invisible foundation of social order. It seeks to regard it as a mechanism that normalizes violence and perpetuates women's disposability under androcentric law. It examines prostitution not as a market exchange between individuals, but as a class struggle, as a political institution that codifies male power, finances sexual domination, and renders women's subordination unobjectionable.

Building upon Silvia Federici's majestic work on the Caliban and the Witch, this research contends that prostitution embodies the political continuity between the historical expropriation of women's bodies in early capitalist accumulation and their present-day commodification under global patriarchal capitalism.

It employs cultural and spatial representations of prostitution in Japan—the JK (*joshi kōsei*, 女子高) business and its fetishization of schoolgirls; pimps' henchwomen and their debauching in the crowd alleys of Tokyo's Kokubunji; fluorescent brothels with glow red neon light glancing at the bystanders through the endless night, invisible by day—to reveal how male jingoist ideology constructs and sustains it as a normalized political institution. Japan offers a panoramic mirror of this global order for prostitution as a cumulative worldwide condition, especially for its landscape: where anonymity, conformity, and sexual discipline intersect, where the faceless woman becomes the perfected figure of modernity: where the invisible women become truly invisible.

Drawing on Joan Scott's concept of gender as a category of historical analysis, the research situates prostitution within global sexual politics rather than national or economic frameworks. This thesis thus examines prostitution in Japan as a political institution sustained by a broader cultural system of emotional repression, social duality, and institutional ambiguity. Japan is selected as a society where the contrast between *honne* (inner feeling) and *tatemaie* (public façade) structures social relations and creates the conditions under which sexual economies flourish.

Japanese individuals often report a sharp divergence between outward conformity and inner emotional reality: this junction forms the background against which sexuality becomes both repressed and commercially displaced.

The thesis argues that repression does not reduce sexual expression; rather, it reorganizes it. In Japan, this process produces a highly developed sexual marketplace that includes *soaplands*,

JK businesses, enjo kōsai, hostess and host clubs, and an extensive pornography and manga industry. These industries do not arise in spite of cultural restraint; they arise because restraint redirects desire into managed, institutionalized forms. The state's legal ambiguity, which will be evaluated in chapter II, —criminalizing prostitution at the level of principle while permitting it through regulatory loopholes—further reinforces a system in which sexual commerce becomes normalized yet publicly unacknowledged.

The theoretical framework draws from Joan Scott's conception of gender as a primary way of organizing power (1986)¹, combined with Silvia Federici's analysis on capitalist and patriarchal systems and how they appropriate women's bodies (2004)². However, the Japanese case reveals that gender hierarchy operates not only through economic structures, but also through culturally codified emotional norms. The thesis therefore links macro-level gendered governance with micro-level affective discipline, arguing that Japan's sexual economy can be understood as a political outcome of a society that values surface harmony over emotional transparency.

By situating prostitution within this configuration of repression, duality, and gendered hierarchy, the study contributes to feminist political theory, Japanese studies, and debates on sexual labor. It proposes that Japan offers a paradigm case of how modern states manage sexuality through silence, emotional discipline, and controlled visibility, demonstrating that prostitution is not simply an economic transaction, but a political technology embedded within the organization of social life.

Japan is not chosen in this thesis as an interchangeable example of a society where prostitution exists. It is chosen because prostitution in Japan emerges at the intersection of cultural repression, emotional duality, and institutional ambiguity in a way that is analytically distinct. While many countries regulate or tolerate commercial sex, few exhibit the structural coexistence of outward conformity and inward dissonance that characterizes everyday social life in Japan. The tension between *tatemaie* (建前), the polished, socially appropriate façade, and *honne* (本音), the private, unspoken self, forms a central axis of Japanese social organization and provides the conceptual key for understanding the country's sexual economy. This duality does not merely shape interpersonal behavior; it creates a cultural architecture in which desire is both contained and displaced. In many accounts, individuals describe the

¹ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075.

² Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004)

difficulty of expressing dissent, frustration, or emotional complexity within formal or workplace settings; such emotions are therefore pushed into the private sphere or sublimated into structured outlets. The culture of long working hours, evening drinking rituals with superiors, and the reliance on neutralizing environments such as pachinko parlors illustrates a broader pattern in which emotional self-regulation becomes a social expectation.

This environment fosters a distinctive relationship between repression and sexuality. Clinical literature on repression suggests that sustained emotional inhibition often produces compensatory behaviors, including heightened fantasy, compulsion, and displacement. Japan's sexual marketplace reflects these dynamics: from *JK businesses* to *image clubs*, from schoolgirl fantasies to host clubs offering manufactured affection, the sexual economy mirrors the psychological split embedded in everyday life. These industries function as managed zones where forbidden or unspoken impulses are allowed structured expression.

Prostitution in Japan, therefore, cannot be adequately analyzed through economic or criminal frameworks alone. Instead, it must be situated within a political understanding of gender and power. This thesis argues that Japan's sexual marketplace is a political institution that relies on the disciplined availability of women's bodies within a cultural system that simultaneously demands female chastity and provides outlets for male sexual consumption.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that prostitution in Japan is not an anomaly, nor simply a historical artifact, nor merely a market response to demand. It is a product of a society organized around emotional restraint, surface harmony, and gender hierarchy—a society in which sexual expression is officially suppressed yet ubiquitously commodified. Japan thus provides a uniquely revealing case for understanding how repression produces sexual systems, and how gendered bodies become instruments of political order.

Modern Japan provides a particularly revealing environment for examining how female bodies become sites of political regulation, emotional displacement, and structural subordination. Any attempt to understand prostitution in Japan must begin with an examination of the cultural and historical forces that shape the way desire, authority, and obedience are organized. Unlike many societies where the contradictions of gender hierarchy manifest in overt moral discourse or visible institutional control, Japan cultivates a regime in which emotional repression, behavioral duality, and silence function as primary technologies of social order. The well-known distinction between *honne* and *tatemae* is not a superficial cultural trait, but rather a deep grammar through which social life is meticulously organized. The duality does not disappear in adulthood: it becomes the very mechanism through which the individual learns to

maintain harmony, avoid conflict, and suppress the impulses that might destabilize collective expectations.

Emotional repression carries significant political effects. It produces a subject capable of smiling while enduring frustration, of performing enthusiasm while feeling exhaustion, and of concealing interior discomfort behind a ritualized politeness. This emotional discipline creates the conditions for the displacement of desire into structured realms of consumption. What cannot be expressed interpersonally is diverted into spaces where expression is permitted, sanitized, and paid for. Prostitution in Japan does not emerge in spite of repression but also because of it. It belongs to a larger architecture of socially managed relief, where desires rendered inexpressible in everyday life are redirected into organized forms of commodification. The genealogy of this architecture cannot be separated from the transformations that took place after the Second World War. The North American occupation introduced not only political reforms but also new forms of leisure, entertainment, and distraction, establishing the cultural foundations of modern mass consumption. Among these, pachinko rose to a status that remains one of the most striking illustrations of post-war Japan's emotional economy. Fosco Maraini, in *Ore giapponesi*, to which I humbly borrow the name for this thesis, interpreted the sudden and overwhelming proliferation of pachinko parlors as a symptom of occupation-era transformation, a "*flagello*" (scourge) born in the wake of foreign influence. Yet his deeper insight concerns the nature of pachinko's appeal. Its repetitive mechanical rhythm, the incessant rain of steel balls, the smoke-filled atmosphere, and the totalizing noise create a space in which the individual enters a suspended state of consciousness, neither fully present nor fully absent. Maraini suggested that this repetitive absorption, while secular and commercial, resembled in a distorted way the meditative practices associated with certain Buddhist traditions, in which repetition facilitates the emptying of the mind. Pachinko thus offered a form of culturally comprehensible escape, not toward enlightenment but toward emotional anesthesia. It became one of the central mechanisms through which post-war Japanese society absorbed and neutralized frustrations that could not be expressed publicly.

The relationship between pachinko and prostitution is not superficial. Both belong to the same emotional economy built on repression and displacement. Pachinko absorbs restlessness, boredom, and domestic fatigue into a controlled trance; prostitution absorbs desire, loneliness, frustration, and the longing for intimacy into equally controlled forms of commodified contact. Both are tolerated by the state and socially acknowledged but not openly discussed. Both function as safety valves that stabilize the contradictions of daily life. Both allow the individual

to cross a boundary between the constraining world of *tatema* and the private world of *honne*, but only within highly regulated structures that prevent the collapse of the dual system itself. To understand why women, specifically, become the bearers of this system, it is necessary to return to the historical analysis developed by Silvia Federici. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici demonstrates that the subordination of women was not an organic cultural development but a deliberate political project that accompanied the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The witch-hunts, far from being an eruption of superstition or moral panic, constituted a systematic campaign to destroy women's autonomy, reproductive authority, and economic independence. Midwives, healers, sexually autonomous women, and women who refused obedience were targeted not because of individual deviance but because, as a collective, they represented a form of social power incompatible with the emerging capitalist order. Federici identifies the witch-hunt as the mechanism through which a new female class was produced: stripped of material autonomy, isolated from one another, and rendered available for the reproductive labor upon which capitalism depended. Women became new common goods, their work and bodies transformed into natural resources outside market relations.

The relevance of this framework to contemporary Japan becomes even sharper when placed in conversation with the class analysis articulated by Enzo Traverso. Fascist violence against Jews cannot be understood solely in racial terms. Jews were targeted as a political class: networked, educated, disproportionately represented among intellectuals, dissidents, and union activists. Fascism sought to dismantle not merely individuals but the collective structures that sustained their social power. The analysis resonates closely with Federici's interpretation of the witch-hunt. In both cases, a system of power identifies a class whose autonomy poses a threat to the established order and proceeds to dismantle that class through coercion, terror, or institutional restructuring (Traverso, 2003).³

The parallel is not metaphorical. Women, across historical moments, have repeatedly occupied the position of a politically inconvenient class whose autonomy must be destroyed for hierarchical systems to function.

Japan's sexual economy, when seen through this lens, appears as a contemporary apparatus for the management of the female class. It is not simply a matter of individuals purchasing sexual services. It is a system that converts women's emotional, physical, and sexual capacities into instruments for stabilizing a society organized around repression and duality. The insistence on female compliance in daily life, the demand for emotional performance in families and

³ Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 44–51.

workplaces, and the expectation of silent endurance all contribute to the construction of women as a class suited to the roles assigned within the commercial sex industry. The hostesses who perform affection, the *JK* girls who perform innocence, the *soapland* workers who perform intimacy, and the actresses of pornographic media who perform fantasies are not isolated individuals making isolated choices; they are part of a system in which the female body becomes the medium through which society resolves the tensions between hidden desire and public self-control.

Seen in this way, Chapter I does not treat prostitution as a marginal phenomenon. It positions prostitution as the continuation of a long historical trajectory in which the female body is reorganized for the purposes of political and emotional containment. Japan, with its striking combination of repression, duality, and institutional ambiguity, offers an ideal environment for observing how this trajectory unfolds in a modern context shaped by capitalist discipline, post-war transformation, and a cultural grammar that privileges silence over transparency. The subsequent sections of this chapter will further examine how emotional repression becomes institutionalized, how gender operates as a field of power, and how these forces converge to make prostitution not an aberration but a structural expression of Japan's social order.

CHAPTER I – Repression, Androcentrism, and the Construction of the Female Class

1.1 Post-war Discipline and the Emergence of Modern Escape Mechanisms



The rise of pachinko in post-war Japan offers one of the most revealing cultural lenses through which the emotional architecture of this society can be understood. In *Ore Giapponesi*, Maraini

observes that pachinko did not simply appear as a new form of amusement; it formed part of a larger constellation of entertainment structures introduced, cultivated, or amplified during the American occupation. Maraini saw pachinko as one of the cultural phenomena that transformed Japanese urban experience, not only because of its pungent sensory environment but because it produced an entire mental atmosphere in which the player could enter a state of suspended consciousness. Pachinko's popularity cannot be explained through gambling alone. It must be read as the materialization of escape: a socially permissible portal through which the emotional rawness of post-war disillusionment could be absorbed, neutralized, and ritualized.

Maraini's insight is particularly valuable because it connects pachinko not only to Western imports like strip shows, pornography, and mass entertainment, but to the deeper structures of Japanese psychology. The game's appeal lies partly in its ability to create a vacuum in which the self is temporarily relieved of social performance. It does not offer transcendence but obliteration, an erasure of inner noise that mirrors the erasure of one's *honne* in daily life. The space of the pachinko parlor thus becomes the secular shrine of emotional self-cancellation, a space where the repression required by Japanese social norms is not lifted but momentarily suspended within a regulated and commodified trance.

This environment anticipates the logic of other forms of commercialized escape. The post-war period saw the rapid expansion of *fūzoku* (adult entertainment), including early forms of hostessing, cabarets, strip theaters, and eventually a sophisticated industry of commodified intimacy. These domains, like pachinko, performed a stabilizing function. They absorbed emotional and psychological energies that could not be expressed publicly, and in doing so they supported the social fabric. The more normalized these spaces became, the more invisible the underlying repression that made them necessary. Prostitution in Japan must be understood from within this social ecology: not as a spontaneous marketplace driven by desire, but as an institutionalized mechanism for managing the contradictions of a society in which the expression of inner life is carefully controlled.

1.2 Androgyny as the Deep Structure of Prostitution

While the Japanese context provides the cultural form through which prostitution manifests, the fundamental cause lies in the longstanding political structure that organizes gender

relations. Women's oppression did not emerge organically from tradition or religion but from the violent processes that accompanied the transition to capitalism (Federici, 2004)⁴. The witch-hunts of the fifteenth to late seventeenth centuries were not aberrations but foundational episodes in the creation of a new social order. Across Europe, midwives, healers, widows, sexually autonomous women, and women who exercised collective authority were systematically eliminated, stripped of their material independence, and redefined as dangerous beings whose sexuality and reproductive capacities required external control. This was not a theological campaign but a political one: a destruction of female autonomy designed to produce a disciplined class whose bodies, labor, and reproductive capacities could be integrated into the nascent capitalist system. Women's bodies were transformed into resources upon which the reproduction of labor power depended; sexuality, reproduction, emotional labor, and domestic activity were all reorganized around the needs of a patriarchal economic order that required women's availability and direct compliance.

Gender is not a cultural residue but a primary field through which power is constructed and legitimized (Scott, 1986)⁵. Androcentrism is not simply male preference; it is a political regime in which male dominance is naturalized through social institutions, symbolic systems, and everyday practices. When linked with Federici's historical framework, Scott's analysis clarifies that prostitution is not an economic activity that arises from scarcity nor deviance. This distinction is central. To write that prostitution exists *because* of repression would imply that repression alone produces sexual economies. Instead, androcentrism creates the structural condition, the female class, in which women's bodies are rendered available for multiple forms of extraction, as natural resources to be exploited at will. Repression, the aforementioned *honne/tatema*e dynamics, and the emotional discipline characteristic of Japanese society shape how that availability is concealed, and then consumed. It is this social grammar of repression that structures the forms of prostitution; male hierarchy implement its necessity.

1.3 The Japanese Family as Micro-State and Emotional Regime

⁴ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 7–14, 17–18.

⁵ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075.

The family becomes the “micro-state” under capitalist patriarchy (Federici, 2004), echoing the political authority of both church and monarchy, rhetoric which does resonate strongly with the Japanese case. The premodern family system, strengthened by Neo-Confucian norms and later reinforced by Meiji state ideology, created a hierarchical domestic order in which women were expected to obey fathers first, husbands then, and finally sons (Haye, 2024).⁶ The family thus became the primary site through which national discipline was reproduced. Expectations of emotional control, modesty, silence, and domestic sacrifice were directed especially at women, and these expectations extended into modern corporate structures. The post-war “salaryman” (modern common terminology for Japanese male working class) model, with its long hours, obligatory after-work drinking, and emotional detachment from domestic life, just complemented this gendered division. Women became the emotional managers of the home, men the disciplined workers of the state. Both roles required profound repression. Women suppressed autonomy; men suppressed vulnerability. The *honne/tatemae* dichotomy therefore operated intimately within the family before extending outward into society.

The structure provides fertile ground for the emergence of prostitution as an institutionalized outlet for the contradictions accumulating within the family micro-state. The emotional and sexual needs that cannot be expressed within the household, due to conformity, exhaustion, gender roles, or emotional distance, seek expression elsewhere. The adult entertainment industry comes barging in, from hostess bars to more explicit forms of prostitution, becoming the state-sanctioned extension of the family’s emotional architecture: a place where men can experience the illusion of being seen, heard, or emotionally attended to without disrupting the system that requires their silence at home.

1.4 Masculinity, Failure, and Kurosawa’s *Tokyo Sonata*

The cinematography on Japanese life is extensive, one though I would say catches the point brilliantly. Kurosawa Kiyoshi’s *Tokyo Sonata* offers an expression of the psychological and social pressures that shape contemporary Japanese motion, especially for men whose identities are tightly bound to their work. In the film, the father, a salaryman who loses his job, conceals his unemployment from his family, maintaining the appearance of competency and stability

⁶ Avril Haye, “Prostitution in Japan : Social Management Or Regulation?”, *Boeki-fū* 2 (April 2007): 170–176.

while internally unraveling. His shame is not simply individual but rather structural. The movie exposes the rigidity of one's identity, the impossibility of any emotional transparency, and the societal demand for performance that governs even the most intimate spaces. The protagonist's desperation, the silence and eventual breakdown illustrate the pervasive impact of *honne/tatema*, not as a cultural curiosity but as an emotional necessity encoded into the architecture of gender. The cinematic framework shows that repression in Japan does not operate only on women. Men, too, are disciplined, though in a very different way. The system demands that men become vessels of labor and women vessels of emotional labor. When men fail economically, they experience the same kind of annihilation that women experienced historically through the destruction of their autonomy. The salaryman's breakdown mirrors, in contemporary terms, the historical disciplining of the female class. *Tokyo Sonata* therefore functions alongside Maraini's interpretation of pachinko as evidence of a society structured by repression, one in which emotional life is driven underground.

In such a context, prostitution emerges not as deviance but as regulation. It becomes one of the primary channels through which repressed needs circulate. The hostess who listens, the escort who performs affection and the sex worker who enacts fantasy, all become part of the machinery through which emotional and sexual energies displaced from the home are reabsorbed into the social system. The film's themes of secrecy, shame, and emotional fragmentation reveal why such a machinery is necessary and why it thrives particularly in Japan.

1.5 The Political Meaning of "Perversion" in a Regulated Society

Repression in Japan produces not the absence of desire but a proliferation of its displaced forms: manga pornography, schoolgirl fetishization, mother-son sexual fantasies, *JK* businesses, hostessing, image clubs, and the near-infinite micro-segmentation of erotic consumption. These phenomena should not be understood as evidence of a uniquely "perverse" national psychology but as manifestations of a political and emotional system that regulates desire in ways that make its expression commodifiable.

Repression generates both silence and elaboration. What cannot be spoken becomes exaggerated in fantasy; what cannot be expressed directly becomes multiplied through

symbolic and commercial channels. In this sense, the perversions visible in contemporary Japanese culture are not deviations, they are manifestations of misogyny refracted through a standard cultural mechanisms of repression. It is not the fantasy that is pathological. Thus, prostitution in Japan appears not as a marginal practice but as a necessary component of a social order that relies on women's availability to stabilize the male emotional life: to absorb excess desire, and to prevent the cracks in *honne/tatemae* from rupturing into open social conflict. Japan's sexual marketplace is not a consequence of cultural indulgence but of political repression rooted in the gendered hierarchies that Federici, Scott, and Traverso describe in different historical contexts.

The logic of suspension away from reality, as it resonates strongly with the longer history of sexuality in Japan. Although Neo-Confucian texts emphasized the importance of female chastity, Tokugawa Japan displayed a far more flexible sexual culture than its own ideology proclaimed. Promiscuity, in the sense of women having multiple partners during their lifetime, cohabitation before marriage, and remarriage after widowhood were not exceptional but common practices. Female household members, including daughters and wives, participated in commercial sex or supported their families through sex work without facing the same moral condemnation that would later characterize the Meiji and modern periods, indicating that *gendered sexual norms were socially negotiated rather than strictly applied* in Tokugawa Japan (Stanley, 2012).⁷ The

This was not the case elsewhere in East Asia. Korean envoys visiting Edo-period Japan remarked with astonishment upon the ubiquity of licensed brothels along the shogun's highways (Chong, 1958)⁸, an experience that echoes, in its own way, the impression I personally had when walking through Kabukichō district under neon light, surrounded by the soft architecture of desire.

The endurance of Confucian prescriptions for female obedience, "daughter obey the father, wife the husband, mother the son", established a gendered continuum of submission that survived well beyond the Tokugawa period and was only later consolidated by the Meiji state through the ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* (良妻賢), the "good wife, wise mother." These doctrines defined the ideal woman as a figure of emotional labor, self-effacement, and moral purification,

⁷ Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

⁸ Chong, Key Ray. "Korean Missions to Tokugawa Japan." *Journal of Asian Studies* 1958.

thereby naturalizing the expectation that women provide affective care even in deeply asymmetric relationships. This ideological framework is crucial for understanding the emergence of maternalized erotic scripts in modern Japan. The psychoanalytic concept of *amae* suggests a desire to be indulged, soothed, or unconditionally accepted underpins many forms of Japanese intimacy, structuring relationships through a longing for maternal approval and dependency (Doi 1973, 27–49)⁹. Within the sexual economy, this emotional structure is displaced onto the prostitute, who becomes simultaneously an object of desire and a surrogate mother, a paradox that would appear deviant in other societies but is legible within Japan’s affective and gendered lexicon. Nosaka Akiyuki’s portrayal in *The Pornographers* of a massage-parlor worker obliged to enact shock, tenderness, and hygienic care, “It is as if you are being treated by your own mother... when you climax, the woman must pretend to be shocked and then wipe you out clean” (Nosaka 1963)¹⁰, just illustrates how prostitution absorbs the emotional transactions historically assigned to maternal femininity. Rather than constituting a rupture with Confucian norms, the mother–son erotic fantasy reconfigures the same gendered hierarchy: the woman, even in commercial sex, remains responsible for the emotional regulation of the male subject. The Japanese sex industry often encodes these maternal gestures as forms of “care work,” transforming what might elsewhere be interpreted as transgressive into an extension of socially sanctioned female duty (Haye 2007)¹¹. Women’s emotional availability serving as the infrastructure for male psychological stability.

The framework did not eliminate sexuality but regulated its visibility: meaning that men were tacitly permitted broad sexual freedom, while women were required to maintain the appearance of sexual restraint, performing virtue through silence. This asymmetry remains visible today. While male participation in the adult-entertainment world is culturally accommodated, female desire is expected to remain concealed, a dynamic that mirrors that same dichotomy itself.

Importantly, Japanese mythology and early religious cosmologies did not stigmatize sex as a moral transgression but treated it as a natural act, a cosmological force. This non-moral framing helps explain why prostitution has historically taken such diverse and elaborate forms: streetwalking, *soaplands*, “no-pan kissa”, *sasei sangyō*, lover banks, ejaculation parlors, and the innumerable specialized niches that constitute the *fūzoku* industry. These forms do not contradict the ideology of chastity; they coexist with it through the logic of duality, where

⁹ Doi, Takeo. *The Anatomy of Dependence*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1973.

¹⁰ Nosaka, Akiyuki. *The Pornographers*. Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1963.

¹¹ Haye, Avril. “Prostitution in Japan: Social Management or Regulation?” *Boeki-fū* 2 (April 2007): 170–176.

public virtue and private indulgence are maintained simultaneously. The cultural history of Japan shows that sexuality has long been fluid, both pragmatic and commodified, even when couched in moral rhetoric. What modern repression has accomplished is not the elimination of desire but the multiplication of discrete arenas in which desire can be expressed safely, anonymously, and without disturbing the social surface. The result is an economy of tightly regulated transgressions, a system in which emotional discipline, Confucian hierarchy, and post-war mechanisms of escape converge to produce a society where prostitution is not an aberration but a structural expression of its emotional and political order.

1.6 The Corporate-State and the Androcentric Reproduction of Social Order

The transition from the Tokugawa period to the Meiji state, and subsequently to the corporate-centered social order of the post-war decades, created an institutional environment in which gendered expectations were crystallized into formal and informal structures of governance. The Japanese state, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, invested heavily in constructing a disciplined, obedient labor force, and this labor force was gendered from its inception. The ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* did not merely define women's domestic duties; it established the emotional architecture on which the modern Japanese family would rest. Women were tasked with cultivating harmony, emotional resilience, and moral refinement within the household. Men were tasked with embodying the productive, rational, and disciplined subject required by the nation-state.

As industrialization accelerated, fast, these expectations became deeply intertwined with the corporate apparatus. The figure of the *salaryman* emerged as a modern reincarnation of the Confucian male, which is loyal, emotionally reserved, devoted to hierarchy, and defined by service to a larger entity. Companies took the place of clans, then offices took the place of extended households, and the economic dependence of women reinforced their confinement within the domestic sphere. What Federici identifies as the creation of a woman class through witch-hunts, i.e. the stripping of autonomy, the disciplining of bodies, and the reorganization of women as reproductive resources, became, in the Japanese context, a process enacted through legal, familial, and corporate norms rather than overt violence. Women were not burned as witches, but they were systematically excluded from public power, confined to

emotional labor, and rendered economically dependent in ways that reflected the same structural logic.

The corporate-state symbiosis of post-war Japan intensified these hierarchies. The system of lifetime employment, mandatory socialization with superiors, and rigid hierarchies within workplaces mirrored the Meiji conception of the hierarchical household. The demands of corporate loyalty required men to spend most of their waking hours outside the home, and this distance reinforced women's role as domestic emotional anchors. The absence of male emotional presence became a structural feature of family life, and the social expectation that women maintain equilibrium within the home reproduced the asymmetry of gendered emotional labor. This environment also produced the emotional fragmentation that underpins the *fūzoku* system. Men whose emotional needs could not be expressed in the home, or who had been trained to see emotional transparency as weakness, sought alternative spaces where attention, affection, or simulated intimacy could be purchased. The corporate-state demanded silence, stoicism, and outward composure; whereas the *fūzoku* industry compensated for the emotional deficits created by that same demand. Prostitution became entwined with the industrial and emotional infrastructure of the nation, reproducing the very hierarchies that created the need for it.

1.7 Confucian Legacy, Mythological Cosmology, and the Reorganization of Sexuality

The endurance of Neo-Confucian ideology in modern Japan provides another lens through which the deep structure of androcentrism can be traced. Although Tokugawa society permitted a range of sexual behaviors—cohabitation, remarriage, and female promiscuity among them—the ideological framework that governed gender remained anchored in the principle of hierarchical obedience. The three obediences, which articulated the subordination of women at every stage of life, as mentioned already, persisted not only as moral instruction but as sociopolitical infrastructure. They informed legal reforms, family registry systems, inheritance customs, and eventually the bureaucratic rationalization of domestic roles in the Meiji era (Mackie, 2003)¹².

¹² Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Religious cosmologies sure did not counter this hierarchy. Shinto mythology naturalized sexuality without moral condemnation, but it also normalized gendered difference as an element of cosmic order (Michiko, 2010)¹³. The creation myths involving the deities Izanagi and Izanami depict sexual union as generative but also encode divisions of responsibility and propriety (Hardacre, 2017)¹⁴. Buddhism, when transplanted into the Japanese archipelago, brought additional layers of gendered symbolism, associating men with spiritual cultivation and women with impurity (Faure, 2003)¹⁵, while simultaneously offering monastic models that excluded women entirely from sacred spaces. These religious layers interacted with Confucian doctrine to produce a social landscape in which sexuality could be simultaneously fluid and structurally controlled.

The historical openness of Japanese society to commercial sex, therefore, does not undermine the argument that prostitution is anchored in androcentrism. Rather, it demonstrates how androcentric systems adapt. Where Christian Europe moralized sex and persecuted women through witch-hunts, Japan refracted the same hierarchical logic through a different symbolic order. Women were not burned, but they were incorporated into structures that rendered their sexuality either invisible or purchasable. The continuity across these culturally distinct systems lies in their shared political foundation: the organization of women's bodies for the emotional and social needs of men.

1.8 Emotional Labor, Sexual Availability, and the Management of Social Contradictions

Modern Japan presents a social environment in which emotional labor is heavily feminized and sexual availability is embedded within a broader system of managing social contradictions. The demands of the corporate-state produce emotional deficits that families alone cannot repair. In this context, the *fūzoku* industry operates not only as an economic sector but as a political one. Hostesses who perform empathy, sex workers who enact fantasy, and participants who simulate innocence all serve to stabilize a society whose emotional demands exceed the capacity of traditional structures. This stabilization must not be confused for accidental. For it reflects the underlying logic of patriarchal governance, wherein women, conceptually if not individually

¹³ Michiko Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions* (Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. pp. 47–53.

¹⁴ Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 40–49

¹⁵ Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), esp. pp. 71–112.

(as cohesion among women was torn apart), absorb the tensions generated by social organization. When men's labor is disciplined, surveilled, and subordinated to corporate hierarchies, their emotional needs are displaced. When women are relegated to domestic roles without corresponding public authority, their emotional labor becomes undervalued, invisible, or commodified: portrayed by Tokyo Sonata's Megumi, the wife who ran away with her house's burglar. In both cases, prostitution functions as the nexus where these imbalances converge.

By situating prostitution within the entanglement of emotional labor, sexual availability, and gendered hierarchy, we can see how deeply political its presence is. Prostitution is not the failure of society's moral fabric but the mechanism through which that fabric is maintained. It is the place where the contradictions of androcentrism are resolved or deferred, the space where repression becomes profitable, and the arena in which women's bodies become the instruments through which social cohesion is maintained.

1.9 Empire, Violence, and Sexual Infrastructure: Comfort Women and the Historical Genealogy of Military Prostitution

Any account of Japan's contemporary sexual economy must acknowledge the historical continuity between the *fūzoku* system and the imperial structures of military prostitution developed during the Asia-Pacific War. The so-called "comfort women" (*ianfu*) system, established by the Imperial Japanese Army in the 1930s, was not an accidental appendage to warfare, nor merely a military convenience. It was a state-designed infrastructure of sexual exploitation meant to regulate soldiers' bodies, manage sexual desire, prevent venereal disease, and maintain discipline within the ranks (Yoshimi, 2000)¹⁶. It reveals the extent to which sexuality, gender hierarchy, and state power were intertwined long before the emergence of the post-war entertainment industry.

The comfort-station system was built upon a logic of bureaucratic pragmatism and racialized hierarchy. Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino, Indonesian, and Dutch women were forcibly recruited, deceived, or coerced into military brothels that spanned the Japanese empire—from

¹⁶ Yoshimi, Yoshiaki. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Manchuria to Micronesia (Soh 2008, 87–102)¹⁷. These stations functioned simultaneously as sexual outlets, disciplinary tools, and markers of imperial control. The Japanese state invested heavily in regulating these facilities: setting prices, implementing health inspections, coordinating transportation, and overseeing the distribution of women across military zones (Yoshimi 2000, 55–76; Soh 2008, 110–115)¹⁸. Prostitution became militarized, bureaucratized, and weaponized.

The gender ideology underpinning the system reflected the androcentrism that Silvia Federici identifies in early modern Europe, albeit adapted to imperial conditions. Women’s bodies were treated as expendable resources (Federici, 2004, 29–35), their sexuality instrumentalized for the maintenance of military efficiency. Soldiers were encouraged to view the women not as individuals but as instruments of physical release and emotional stabilization. The logic of the comfort-station system thus mirrors the logic that would later shape post-war *fūzoku*: sexuality is mobilized not for intimacy but for the stabilization of male subjects under extreme pressure.

What is striking is not that the comfort-women system existed, as many wartime powers developed sexual infrastructures, but that Japan institutionalized it with such bureaucratic precision (which is very Japanese). The military’s involvement in sexual management created a template for post-war authorities. The same rationale underpinned the 1948 Businesses Affecting Public Morals Act and the 1956 Anti-Prostitution Law (Mackie 2003, 142–149). The districting of red-light zones, the licensing of establishments, and the creation of public morals categories reflect the same logic that justified comfort stations: state-mediated sexual regulation.

The social memory of the comfort-women system also shaped gender relations in subtle but enduring ways. The wartime construction of women as sacrificial, usable, and politically silent resonated with Neo-Confucian notions of female obedience and with the emotional suppression explored in the previous sections. Even after Japan’s defeat, the ideological substrate persisted. The post-war occupation authorities permitted the establishment of short-lived “Recreation and Amusement Association” (RAA) centers to service American troops (Dower 1999, 128–133)¹⁹.

¹⁷ Soh, C. Sarah. *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, 45–76.

¹⁹ Dower, John W. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

One has to take a stroll at Okinawa to make sense of it. Although the RAA was later dismantled, its existence reinforced the idea that women's bodies could be mobilized for national objectives.

The comfort-women system is not an historical aberration, even if it is constantly undermined by selected categories of Japanese politicians, but a nodal point in the longer genealogy of sexual governance in Japan. It confirms that state regulation of sexuality precedes and sets the stage for the contemporary *fūzoku* economy. If Chapter I argued that prostitution is political, the comfort-women system provides its most explicit historical manifestation. Women were not simply victims of military violence; they were positioned as the infrastructure of male stability. This configuration reappears in post-war corporate culture, hostessing, and the proliferation of eroticized youth fantasies in media and anime.

1.10 Literary Eroticism and Repression: Ōe Kenzaburō, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and Murakami Haruki

Japanese literature provides one of the clearest mirrors of the erotic, emotional, and psychological tensions described throughout this thesis. The works of Ōe Kenzaburō, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, or Murakami Haruki articulate, each in a different register, the contradictions that underpin modern Japanese masculinity: repression and indulgence, distance and dependency, violence and vulnerability. These writers reveal the same structural anxieties that animate the *fūzoku* industry and the broader sexual economy: the inability to articulate desire, the disintegration of emotional transparency, and the projection of fantasy onto women whose narrative roles oscillate between muse, screen, and sacrificial object.

Ōe Kenzaburō's early work already exposes the fractures of masculinity in post-war Japan. In novels such as *Seventeen* and *A Personal Matter*, male protagonists are tormented by desires they cannot express and responsibilities they cannot bear, caught between the collapse of imperial ideology and the demands of reconstructed modernity²⁰. Ōe's eroticism is never celebratory; it is abject, troubled, and often entangled with violence. The young male subject is alienated from his own interiority, unable either to inhabit or to relinquish desires that

²⁰ Ōe, Kenzaburō. *A Personal Matter*. New York: Grove Press, 1969.

threaten to destabilize his identity. Women in Ōe's fiction frequently function as figures of moral indictment or as silent witnesses to male unraveling, their presence exposing the inadequacy of masculine self-understanding. This dynamic reflects what Miriam Silverberg describes as the "crisis of post-war virility," in which Japanese men are depicted as unable to reconcile national defeat with the emotional demands of modern life (Silverberg 1991, 77–84)²¹.

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, by contrast, explores eroticism as a site of aestheticized domination. His novels foreground desire not as a natural impulse but as a ritualized performance structured by fetish, submission, and control²². Tanizaki's male characters, or Kenji Nakagami *A Thousand Years of Pleasure's*, in repeatedly surrender to powerful, enigmatic women whose sexuality destabilizes the social order. Yet this surrender is always incomplete; it reasserts the presence of the androcentric gaze: women are powerful only insofar as they remain objects of male fantasy. Tanizaki's fixation on fetishized body parts, feet, skin, clothing, reveals a masculine desire for controlled transgression, where erotic excess is permitted only within carefully constructed boundaries. His work echoes the emotional architecture of *honne* and *tatemae*: public restraint is maintained while private fantasies flourish in secret, a duality that finds a contemporary parallel in the rituals of the hostess club and the aesthetic codes of erotic manga (Kinsella 2000, 33–48)²³.

Murakami Haruki's fiction represents an evolution of this paradigm into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Murakami's protagonists often passive, introspective, emotionally anesthetized men, illustrate the atomization and loneliness of post-industrial Japan. Erotic encounters in his novels are stylized, elliptical, and drenched in emotional ambiguity. In the often too known *Norwegian Wood*, Toru's sexuality is presented simultaneously as a gateway to intimacy and as a site of profound melancholy (Murakami 1987, 112–137)²⁴. For many Japanese readers, including a Japanese classmate who would later become a close confidant of mine, Murakami's treatment of eroticism appears evasive or vainly implicit, as I remember him

²¹ Silverberg, Miriam. "The Modern Girl as Militant." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

²² Tanizaki, Jun'ichirō. *The Key*. New York: Knopf, 1961.

²³ Kinsella, Sharon. *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.

²⁴ Murakami, Haruki. *Norwegian Wood*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987.

saying, precisely because it refracts desire through alienation rather than passion. This evasiveness is not accident; it just reflects the cultural condition that this thesis identifies: the difficulty of articulating *honne* in a society governed by *tatemae*, the erasure of direct emotional expression, and the compartmentalization of intimacy into discrete, often transactional experiences.

Women in Murakami's novels frequently function as enigmatic catalysts for male self-discovery, bearing emotional burdens that protagonists cannot articulate. They disappear, die, or withdraw, leaving the male subject in a state of existential drift. Critics argue that Murakami uses women as "portals" to psychological transformation, denying them interiority in order to foreground male subjectivity (Strecher 2002, 91–104)²⁵. This narrative pattern parallels the structural logic of the sex industry, where women become vessels for male projection, stabilizing emotional contradictions that men cannot express otherwise.

Across these three authors, sexuality becomes a symbolic archive of Japanese modernity. Ōe exposes the violence of repressed desire; Tanizaki transforms fetish into aesthetic ideology; Murakami renders eroticism as emotional absence. Each reveals a different facet of the same political structure: gender asymmetry, affective incoherence, and the disjunction between inner life and social performance. Their literary landscapes function as cultural diagnostics, illuminating the psychological undercurrents that sustain contemporary prostitution, the aesthetics of erotic manga, and the emotional geographies of nightlife districts such as Kabukichō. Literature thus becomes an essential component of the genealogy traced in this thesis: a site where the contradictions of masculinity are exposed without mediation, where eroticism becomes a political language, and where repression becomes a narrative form.

²⁵ Strecher, Matthew. *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Haruki Murakami*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

1.11 Post-War Masculinity: Salaryman Discipline, *Sōshoku Danshi*, and Hikikomori Withdrawal



The architecture of Japan's contemporary sexual economy cannot be separated from the transformations in masculinity that unfolded after 1945. Japanese men, like Japanese women, were reshaped by the political, economic, and emotional demands of reconstruction and high-growth capitalism. Masculinity became not a natural identity but an institutional project: disciplined, routinized, exhausted, and emotionally constrained. The post-war figure of the *salaryman* served as the axis around which this new masculine identity coalesced.

This man, this *Übermensch*, is not merely a worker: he is the embodiment of corporate loyalty, emotional restraint, and social self-effacement. Sociologist Merry White has described him as the “archetypal post-war male,” whose identity is formed through long hours, mandatory after-work drinking, and constant immersion in hierarchical office culture (White 1987, 54–76)²⁶. The emotional suppression demanded by this lifestyle, i.e. excessive work hours, perpetual

²⁶ White, Merry. *The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children*. New York: Free Press, 1987.

politeness, obedience to superiors, parallels the dynamics observed in Ōe and Murakami: the male subject is present but internally absent, socially functional but emotionally inaccessible.

This masculine template intensifies the need for externalized emotional labor, which the *fūzoku* industry provides diligently. Hostess clubs function as mere “corporate extensions,” enabling overworked men to release emotional tension without compromising domestic expectations (Allison 1994, 77–112)²⁷. Hostesses offer emotional care, laughter, and simulated intimacy, compensating for the emotional deficits produced by corporate life. Host clubs, similarly, serve women subjected to analogous pressures, though their historical emergence is more recent. The *salaryman* thus plays a structural role in the sexual economy: his emotional vacuum becomes a market opportunity to be exploited.

By the early 2000s, however, the *salaryman* ideal began to erode. Economic stagnation (The 1997 Asian financial crisis), precarious work, and demographic shifts produced new masculine subjectivities that revealed cracks in the post-war order. The *sōshoku danshi* (“herbivore men”), a term popularized by columnist Maki Fukasawa, describes young men uninterested in traditional masculine roles: uninterested in marriage, career ambition, or assertive sexuality (Fukasawa 2009)²⁸. These men reject the aggressive masculinity of their fathers, opting instead for introspection, gentleness, and consumption of digital or parasocial intimacy. Their disengagement from heterosexual labor destabilizes the gender expectations that previously organized social reproduction.

The emergence of *hikikomori*, impaired by severe social withdrawal, often lasting years, pushes this development just a little further. The *hikikomori* represents not an individual pathology but the implosion of masculine socialization under conditions of extreme pressure: educational competition, parental overprotection, emotional isolation, and the collapse of stable employment pathways (Saitō 2013, 44–61)²⁹. The withdrawn male becomes the inverse of the *salaryman*: instead of over-performance, total refusal; instead of public discipline, private disappearance. This masculine disappearance fuels industries of virtual intimacy, phone

²⁷ Allison, Anne. *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

²⁸ Fukasawa, Maki. “Sōshoku Danshi sedai.” *Nikkei Woman*, 2009.

²⁹ Saitō, Tamaki. *Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

companionship, anime erotica, and digital sexual content—which in turn reinforce the structures of desire management which will be explored in Chapter II.

These generational variants of masculinity—*salaryman*, *sōshoku danshi*, *hikikomori*—share a common thread: emotional dysfunction structured by institutional expectations. All three types struggle to articulate vulnerability, intimacy, or desire within the sociocultural constraints that govern gender performance. This is the same repression described through *honne* and *tatemaie*, the same emotional architecture explored in Section 1.10, and the same structural vacuum that the *fūzoku* industry capitalizes on.

Japan's sexual economy thus emerges not as an adjunct to masculinity but as its affective infrastructure. When men cannot express emotion at work, they express it in hostess clubs. When they cannot maintain intimacy at home, they seek it through commodified interactions. When they cannot face the world at all, they retreat into digital eroticism that demands nothing and offers everything. The sexual economy is the shadow architecture of Japanese masculinity: its mirror, its outlet, and ultimately its support.

1.12 Conclusion: Prostitution as Political Continuity

The analysis developed in this chapter shows that prostitution in Japan cannot be understood through moral, economic, or purely cultural lenses. Its foundation lies in the historical construction of the female class, the political suppression of female autonomy, and the enduring androcentric regime that organizes gendered power. The Japanese context gives this regime its specific expression through emotional repression, behavioral duality, Confucian hierarchy, post-war reconstruction, and the corporate-state, but the underlying structure remains consistent with the processes Federici identifies in the witch-hunts and the class logic Traverso elucidates through fascist violence.

Japan's sexual economy is therefore a contemporary expression of these older political mechanisms. It is a system in which repression and indulgence coexist, in which women's bodies serve as both the site of social stability and the repository of unspoken tensions, and in which desire is managed through commodified structures designed to protect the coherence of the social order. The material that follows in Chapter II will build directly on this foundation,

turning from the theoretical genealogy of prostitution to its concrete manifestations in modern Japan: the *fūzoku* industry, the spatial politics of red-light districts, the state's regulatory ambiguity, the persistence of *JK* practices, and the affective labor of hostess and host clubs.

CHAPTER II – Prostitution as Spatial, Legal, and Institutional Structure in Modern Japan

2.1 The Administrative State: Legal Ambiguity as Governance

A good place to begin any analysis of the ambiguity level on the prostitution in contemporary Japan, is not to be found in psychology, nor in culture or morality, but with administration. What distinguishes the Japanese sex industry from those of Europe, North America, or even other parts of East Asia is the degree to which it has been produced, stabilized, and expanded through bureaucratic classification rather than explicit lawmaking. The State's approach is not one of direct prohibition or legalization; it is the creation of a regulatory field in which prostitution exists only as what the law does not name. The legal framework regulating commercial sexual services in Japan is often described as contradictory, because the sale of sexual services is widespread, yet prostitution is nominally prohibited. The legal contradiction dissolves once one recognizes that the regulatory framework does not address prostitution as a distinct substantive category. Instead, it regulates sexual commerce by incorporating it into existing administrative domains: urban planning, licensing, hygiene, entertainment, and public safety.

The foundation of this system is the 1956 Prostitution Prevention Law (売春防止法, *Baishun bōshi hō*), also known as the Anti-Prostitution Law, which defines prostitution exclusively as sexual intercourse, i.e. vaginal intercourse, conducted for compensation.³⁰ This definition is both technically precise and operationally narrow, for it leaves outside its scope all non-coital forms of commercial erotic service, including oral sex, manual stimulation, non-penetrative roleplay, erotic massage, and companionship services. These activities are instead regulated through the Businesses Affecting Public Morals Law (*Fūzoku eigyō hō*), which does not treat them as sexual acts requiring prohibition, but as categories of entertainment businesses

³⁰ Anti-Prostitution Law (Baishun Bōshi Hō), Law No. 118 of 1956.

requiring licensing and compliance.³¹ The structure does not reflect a moral stance, rather an administrative approach in which sexual commerce is governed by general regulatory tools already used to manage nightlife and leisure industries.

The effect of this legal architecture is that businesses offering erotic services must classify themselves into one of several administratively recognized types, special entertainment businesses, public bathhouses, video rooms, or image clubs.³² These categories determine where establishments may operate, the hours during which they may remain open, the design of their interiors, the training required for employees, and the conditions under which police inspections occur. The classification system allows to manage erotic commerce without substantively defining it, and without attempting to articulate distinctions between sexual, quasi-sexual, and non-sexual services. The emphasis is not on prohibiting particular acts, but on situating diverse practices within an administratively governable scheme.

This regulatory design becomes more apparent when considering the role of prefectural Public Safety Commissions (*Kōan iinkai*). These commissions issue licenses, conduct inspections, and monitor compliance with zoning ordinances and operational rules.³³ Their interventions focus on environmental and procedural criteria—lighting, signage, building layout, distance from schools—not on evaluating the content of services. The Japanese legal system frequently relies on “front-end regulation”: structuring the conditions under which an activity is performed rather than defining or prohibiting the activity itself.³⁴ The governance of commercial sex reflects this logic with unusual clarity: that it is not the *sexual act* that is administered, only the *business context* in which it occurs. Scholars of postwar regulation note that this institutional configuration has allowed the sex industry to expand by adapting to administrative categories rather than by challenging legal boundaries. The *fūzoku* system operates as a mechanism of “social management” in which the state organizes, supervises, and spatially channels erotic commerce without conceptualizing it as a dedicated legal object.³⁵ The administrative model

³¹ Avril Haye, “Prostitution in Japan: Social Management or Regulation?,” *Boeki-fū* 2 (April 2007): 170–176.

³² Mark D. West, *Law in Everyday Japan: Sexuality, Class, Work, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 73–104.

³³ Akiko Takeyama, *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 33–42.

³⁴ West, *Law in Everyday Japan*, 78–82.

³⁵ Haye, “Prostitution in Japan,” 171–175.

thereby supports a large commercial sector, ranging from soaplands to delivery-health services, while relying on procedural compliance rather than explicit substantive definitions. The absence of a comprehensive legal category for prostitution is not an omission or a political stance but a feature of a regulatory environment structured around classification, licensing, and zoning.

The regulatory ambiguity surrounding commercial sex can be interpreted through the framework of biopolitical governance articulated by Michel Foucault. Foucault's account of modern governmentality identifies a shift from sovereign rule based on prohibition to administrative control exercised through regulation, classification, and surveillance.³⁶ In this context, the Japanese state's decision to define prostitution narrowly, while regulating the larger erotic economy through licensing and zoning aligns with a biopolitical logic: sexual commerce as a potential object of management, rather than moral adjudication. Ambiguous definitions enable authorities to govern conduct by shaping the conditions under which erotic labor takes place: the State does not need to define or prohibit sexual acts broadly; as long as it regulates populations, spaces, and business formats. The approach allows commercial sex to remain economically integrated while administratively ordered, while illustrating how legal indeterminacy functions as a technique of governance rather than as a legislative gap.

In sum, the Japanese state governs commercial sexual services through the institutional tools it uses for nightlife, public order, and entertainment industries. The result is a regulatory framework that is both highly structured and substantively minimal. It produces a system in which erotic commerce is not legalized nor criminalized in a comprehensive way, but bluntly administratively integrated. This integration constitutes the foundation for the industry's economic scale, its spatial distribution, and its adaptability, issues explored in the sections that follow.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 135–159.

2.2 Taxation, Corporate Expenditure, and the Political Economy of the Sex Industry in Japan

The commercial sex industry in Japan is not only shaped by legal definitions and administrative categories; it is also sustained by sturdy fiscal structures that place erotic businesses within the broader economy. While the industry is often perceived as existing at the margins of legality, it is instead well integrated into the tax, accounting, and commercial regulations in ways that reveal its economic relevance. The absence of a unified legal category for «sex work» does not then imply economic invisibility, on the contrary: the industry functions through successfully established mechanisms of registration, taxation, and financial reporting, positioning it as part of the formal service economy rather than an illicit or extralegal domain.

Businesses classified under the *fūzoku eigyō* framework are required to register with municipal tax authorities and are subject to a range of fiscal obligations including corporate tax, consumption tax, and local business levies.³⁷ This includes soaplands, fashion-health services, delivery-health services, hostess clubs, and a variety of entertainment establishments that incorporate erotic labor. Although their activities do differ in content, these businesses share a common fiscal treatment: they are assessed on their classification as commercial enterprises, which ultimately contributes to the industry's economic stability. Revenues are trackable, staff compensation subject to withholding, and establishments are required to maintain standardized accounting records.³⁸

A substantial portion of the industry's financial activity is driven by corporate expenditure. Hostess clubs in central districts such as Tokyo's Ginza or Osaka's Kitashinchi have long served as venues for *settai*, a practice of corporate entertaining.³⁹ Historically, expenditures at such establishments could be filed as necessary business expenses, reflecting a commercial culture in which relationship-building through hospitality, including entertainment involving alcohol and conversation, was understood as part of professional (male) practice. Although tax

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1. Haye, Avril. "Prostitution in Japan: Social Management or Regulation?" *Boeki-fū* 2 (April 2007): 170–176.

³⁸ West, Mark D. *Law in Everyday Japan: Sexuality, Class, Work, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 73–104.

³⁹ Allison, Anne. *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 65–92.

reforms in the 1990s restricted some categories of deductible entertainment, spending at high-end hostess clubs continued to be processed as hospitality expenses in many corporate contexts.⁴⁰ The result is an economic flow in which eroticized or emotionally intimate service provision is indirectly subsidized through corporate budgets, reinforcing the industry's durability and linking it to mainstream economic activity.

Financial flows also reveal patterns of interdependence between the sex industry and urban development. Districts such as Kabukichō in Tokyo, Susukino in Sapporo, and Nakasu in Fukuoka, as plenty other hotspots, function as significant nodes of nighttime economic activity, with real estate, leasing practices, and service procurement networks tied to *fūzoku* businesses.⁴¹ Establishments often operate within multi-tenant buildings whose landlords specialize in nightlife properties, and the industry supports ancillary services such as security, cleaning, supply logistics, and advertising. Such a level of complicity brings together an ecosystem that employs not only sex workers, but also large numbers of wagers in parallel or supporting roles. The *fūzoku* sector contributes substantial revenue to local economies, through rent, consumption tax, and service procurement, making it a nontrivial component of the urban service economy, a precious gem.⁴²

The industry's integration into economic policy became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, businesses categorized under *fūzoku eigyō* were formally eligible for certain forms of state financial assistance, including subsidies for lost revenue and employee support payments.⁴³ This inclusion did not represent a direct endorsement of the industry but reflected its position within the administrative and fiscal system. Establishments that were registered, tax-compliant, and properly licensed were treated similarly to other service-sector businesses affected by mandated closures. The debate generated by this policy illustrated a distinction between moral attitudes and fiscal practice: while public opinion remained divided, the administrative apparatus treated erotic businesses as part of the economy it was required to stabilize.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 89-93

⁴¹ Seigle, Cecilia Segawa. *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 221–233.

⁴² Bestor, Theodore C. *Neighborhood Tokyo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 167–182.

⁴³ Tokyo Metropolitan Government, *COVID-19 Business Assistance Guidelines*, 2020.

At the individual level, workers in the sex industry engage in complex arrangements regarding income reporting and taxation. While many establishments operate through formal payroll systems, a significant proportion of workers are classified as independent contractors, which affects tax obligations, eligibility for social insurance, and access to employment protections.⁴⁴ The tension between formal economic integration and the lack of a unified labor category for sex workers creates disparities in income security and social safety-net access. These disparities stem not from the illegality of prostitution as defined in the “Anti-Prostitution Law”, but from the absence of a statutory framework that addresses erotic labor as a category of work. As a result, taxation and economic regulation integrate the industry structurally without clarifying its labour status, almost conveniently.

Taken together, these fiscal and economic arrangements show that the sex industry is indeed embedded in an economic infrastructure that does indeed define contemporary Japan. It is governed through the same administrative and financial tools applied to other service sectors: corporate expenditure practices, tax compliance, licensing fees, and urban commercial zoning. The administrative neutrality of these mechanisms has allowed the industry to achieve scale, diversification, and resilience. The following section examines how these dynamics interact with urban spatial organization, producing distinctive nightlife districts whose development is inseparable from the regulatory environment described above.

2.3 Spatial Regulation and the Urban Geography of the Sex Industry in Japan

The spatial distribution of the sex industry in Japan reflects a meticulous regulatory logic. Rather than dispersing commercial sexual services throughout urban environments, prefectural and municipal authorities have historically concentrated them into designated nightlife areas, producing a geography in which erotic commerce is spatially visible yet administratively contained. The pattern emerges from a long-standing approach in which the placement of sex-related businesses is used as a mechanism for managing pedestrian flow, policing resources, real estate development, and nighttime economies.

⁴⁴ Takeyama, Akiko. *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 75–88.

The best-known example of this pattern is Kabukichō: located in the Shinjuku ward of Tokyo. Originally redeveloped in the postwar period as part of a broader reconstruction strategy, Kabukichō became a focal point for entertainment businesses, including cinemas, restaurants, bars, and later, numerous *fūzoku* establishments.⁴⁵ The district's dense concentration of multi-tenant buildings, small-scale commercial units, and narrow pedestrian streets has allowed for a high turnover of nightlife businesses and a built environment conducive to the diversification of erotic services. The mix of entertainment zoning and commercial flexibility in Kabukichō has created a modular urban fabric in which sex-related businesses can appear, disappear, or reconfigure themselves without requiring large-scale infrastructural change.⁴⁶ This modularity has contributed to the district's persistence despite successive redevelopment initiatives and policing campaigns.

Other cities exhibit similar patterns. Susukino in Sapporo and Nakasu in Fukuoka function as major nightlife zones with significant concentrations of sex-related businesses operating under the *fūzoku eigyō* framework.⁴⁷ These districts occupy central, easily accessible locations within their respective cities and are spatially integrated with transportation hubs. Accessibility is a crucial factor: proximity to rail networks and high foot traffic supports a steady flow of customers, while the urban morphology of these districts, small plots, mixed-use buildings, and a high density of alleyways, facilitates the coexistence of various service types. The clustering pattern reduces enforcement costs for municipal authorities, who can designate specific areas for increased monitoring, zoning adjustments, and licensing inspections. Zoning regulations play a significant role in this structure. Municipal governments impose restrictions on where *fūzoku* businesses may operate, often using distance rules that prohibit establishments from opening near schools, residential neighborhoods, or public institutions.⁴⁸ Over time, such ordinances have produced district-level concentrations that align with broader planning goals, thus channeling nightlife into areas already designated for commercial activity and away from

⁴⁵ Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 162–165; see also Bestor, Theodore C. *Neighborhood Tokyo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 167–182.

⁴⁶ Roman Cybriwsky, *Roppongi Crossing: The Demise of a Tokyo Nightclub District* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 41–54.

⁴⁷ Seigle, Cecilia Segawa. *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 221–233.

⁴⁸ Mark D. West, *Law in Everyday Japan: Sexuality, Class, Work, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 77–89.

zones associated with daytime civic life. *Hanne* and *tatema*e, day and night. Tokyo is a whole different city when the sun goes down. The resulting landscape is one in which the sex industry is simultaneously visible and segregated, a pattern consistent with historical approaches to urban entertainment districts in Edo, Meiji, and early Shōwa Japan.⁴⁹ An additional factor in the spatial governance of the sex industry is the relationship between nightlife districts and the real estate market. Buildings in the mentioned districts are often held by landlords or real estate companies specializing in nightlife properties, with leasing arrangements structured to accommodate the specific operational needs of *fūzoku* businesses.⁵⁰ This specialization reduces the costs associated with tenant turnover and regulatory compliance, creating a commercial environment where sex-related establishments are treated as legitimate tenants within a functioning urban economy. The spatial clustering of these businesses then reflects not only regulatory constraints but also market dynamics, including rental prices, building typologies, and the economic incentives that shape urban property ownership.

The spatial concentration of nightlife districts such as Kabukichō, Susukino, and Nakasu reflects what Foucault describes as the “distribution of bodies in space,” a disciplinary mechanism through which modern authorities manage populations by organizing their movement, visibility, and proximity.⁵¹ The zoning of erotic commerce into discrete districts exemplifies the spatialized form of governance: it channels desire into administratively legible spaces where surveillance is more efficient and oversight can be routinized. The role of these districts can also be understood through the conceptual lens offered by Giorgio Agamben, particularly on his notion of “exception,” spaces where normal regulatory regimes are modified without being suspended (Agamben speaks of it in regard to States rather spaces).⁵² Nightlife districts occupy precisely such a threshold: activities that would be impermissible elsewhere in the city are then tolerated within their boundaries, subject to licensing and environmental compliance. They are neither excluded from legality nor fully absorbed into standard commercial regulation.

⁴⁹ Seigle, *Yoshiwara*, 14–37.

⁵⁰ Bestor, *Neighborhood Tokyo*, 176–181.

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 141–169.

⁵² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 35–45.

Policing also contributes to the consolidation of nightlife districts. Concentration enables the deployment of targeted inspection teams, regular patrol patterns, and coordinated interventions by the Public Safety Commissions.⁵³ Enforcement is generally focused on procedural compliance, mainly licensing, hours of operation, signage, and building layout, rather than substantive evaluations of service content. However, the geography of policing aligns with the geography of zoning: districts designated for nightlife receive more frequent regulatory oversight, while areas outside these zones are subject to stricter enforcement to prevent spillover. This spatialized model of regulation produces predictable patterns of tolerated and non-tolerated activity, reinforcing district boundaries over time.

Taken together, these factors reveal that the sex industry's geography is not the result of informal or ad hoc development but is shaped by a combination of factors. Urban planners, landlords, police, and licensing authorities all play roles in producing and maintaining the spatial configuration of nightlife districts. The result is an urban landscape in which erotic commerce is not hidden from view but is geographically organized in ways that facilitate governance. This spatial concentration forms the basis for the district-level economies examined in the following section and illustrates how the regulatory system described in Section 2.1 acquires its material expression in the built environment of contemporary Japanese cities.

⁵³ West, *Law in Everyday Japan*, 85–94.

2.4 JK and the Governance of Youth Sexual Labour in Japan



The set of commercial practices collectively described as “JK businesses”, a term derived from *joshi kōsei* (female high school student), occupies a distinct regulatory position within the sex industry of Japan. Unlike other sectors operating under the *fūzoku eigyō* framework, JK businesses are characterized not only by their erotic orientation but by their association with minors, which places them at the intersection of moral regulation, child welfare law, labor policy, and police oversight. Their emergence in the early 2000s, inspired by the punk subculture of the *kogyaru* (コギャル) of the 90s characterized by microskirts and loose socks, particularly in districts such as Akihabara and Ikebukuro in Tokyo, prompted new administrative responses and reshaped the governance landscape surrounding youth and commercial intimacy.

JK businesses encompass a wide range of activities: walking dates, conversational companionship, paid photography, reflexology (massage performed by uniformed girls), and other forms of non-coital interaction marketed through the aesthetic conventions of schoolgirl culture.⁵⁴ While these practices do not generally involve acts that fall under the legal definition of prostitution, they occupy a grey zone between eroticized service work and youth culture

⁵⁴ Galbraith, Patrick W. *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan* (Duke University Press, 2019).

industries. Establishments often advertise *seifuku* (制服, school-uniform aesthetics), innocence, and the performance of scripted femininity associated with adolescent characters in manga and anime.⁵⁵ The framing is commercial rather than explicitly sexual, yet consumer expectations, as well as marketing strategies and the embodied labor of workers position these businesses within the broader field of contemporary erotic commerce.

The commodification of schoolgirl imagery predates JK businesses and had been already a recognizable feature of Japanese media and consumer culture by the 1990s (Kinsella, 2014).⁵⁶ Its incorporation into commercial service industries, where employees embody stylized forms of adolescent femininity, created conditions that challenged existing regulatory frameworks. Unlike hostess clubs or soaplands, which are addressed through licensing systems tailored to adult entertainment, JK businesses drew the attention of child welfare authorities, women's safety organizations, and police units tasked with preventing exploitation. The resulting governance approach is therefore not an extension of the *fūzoku* system but a hybrid model combining elements of youth protection, labour surveillance, and public safety regulation.

The governance of the businesses illustrates a form of biopolitics centered on youth protection, wherein the state regulates not specific acts but the conditions under which adolescents may circulate within commercial environments. Once again, Foucault helps describing the phenomena as management of populations through norms, risk calculations, and protective measures applied to groups defined as vulnerable or formative.⁵⁷ The regulatory response to JK businesses aligns with the logic that oversight could be justified, not by the legality of the services offered but by the imperative to safeguard minors and maintain a sound environment for the youth. This emphasis on vulnerability and population stewardship situates JK regulation within broader demographic and administrative concerns. These businesses inhabit a regulatory in-between space: permitted insofar as they comply with youth ordinances, yet subject to intensified surveillance because they evoke age-coded eroticization. Their governance demonstrates how administrative systems manage ambiguous forms of intimacy

⁵⁵ Saitō, Tamaki. *Beautiful Fighting Girl* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 55–77.

⁵⁶ Kinsella, Sharon. *Schoolgirls, Money and Rebellion in Japan* (London: Routledge, 2014), 23–49.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 135–159.

by placing them under multiple, overlapping regimes of protection, inspection, and spatial containment.

Administrative responses to JK businesses intensified after 2010, when the Tokyo Metropolitan Government identified the sector as a potential site of coercion and exploitation.⁵⁸ Prefectural governments issued ordinances restricting minors from participating in compensated dating activities, prohibiting late-night shifts, and requiring businesses to register with local authorities.⁵⁹ Legislative measures varied by jurisdiction, producing a patchwork regulatory environment in which the permissibility of JK-related activities depended on the interaction between municipal ordinances and national child welfare law. Police inspections focused on verifying worker age, monitoring working conditions, and assessing compliance with restrictions on physical contact.⁶⁰ These enforcement practices reflect an administrative understanding of JK businesses not primarily as sexual enterprises but as youth-oriented commercial environments requiring enhanced oversight.

At the level of labour, participation in JK businesses raises complex questions about classification: workers are often treated as part-time employees or independent contractors, and the absence of a statutory category for youth erotic labour complicates the application of labour standards. Employment relationships are frequently informal, with compensation structures based on short-term engagements, revenue-sharing arrangements, or per-session payments. This informality complicates the monitoring of working conditions, income security, and protections associated with youth employment regulations. The administrative challenge arises not from the criminalization of the acts involved, for many JK services do not fall under prostitution law, but from ensuring compliance with age restrictions, workplace safety norms, and constraints on the types of services legally permitted for minors.

The growth of JK businesses must also be understood within the broader context of commercial spaces in districts oriented toward youth culture and media consumption. In areas such as Akihabara, neighborhood in the Chiyoda ward of Tokyo, businesses offering cosplay, maid

⁵⁸ Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youths (東京都青少年の健全な育成に関する条例, *Tōkyō-to Seishōnen no Kenzen na Ikusei ni Kansuru Jōrei*), 2010.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; see also Osaka Prefectural Assembly, *Youth Healthy Development Ordinance*, 2015.

⁶⁰ National Police Agency (NPA), *White Paper on Crime*, 2018.

services, and themed entertainment coexist with *JK* establishments, creating an environment in which the boundaries between fandom, performative labour, and eroticized service work can be porous.⁶¹ This proximity complicates regulatory interventions because establishments that are superficially similar may fall under different legal regimes. Administrative authorities have responded by implementing targeted surveillance measures, such as mandatory business registration, visible display of company information, and routine police visits, which distinguish *JK* businesses from non-erotic youth-oriented services.

Critically, the regulatory trajectory of *JK* businesses demonstrates that youth-related erotic services are governed through an approach fundamentally distinct from that applied to adult *fūzoku* establishments. While the latter are integrated into licensing systems and addressed as part of the broader entertainment economy, *JK* businesses are regulated primarily through child welfare frameworks, ordinances addressing compensated dating, and police directives focused on risk prevention. The dual structure reflects the specific administrative challenge posed by the intersection of youth labour, commercial intimacy, and aestheticized sexuality. It also marks a divergence from the highly routinized, category-based oversight applied to adult sectors of the sex industry. As a result, *JK* businesses do occupy a rather unique position within the regulatory landscape of contemporary Japan: neither fully encompassed by the entertainment business framework nor addressed solely through criminal law. Their governance depends on continuous administrative adjustment and discretionary enforcement. This institutional complexity distinguishes the sector from other segments of the sex industry and highlights the multifaceted nature of regulation when youth, commerce, and eroticized representation converge.

2.5 The AV Industry as a Structured and Semi-Legal Labor System in Contemporary Japan

The adult video (AV) industry in Japan constitutes one of the most visible and commercially significant sectors within the broader field of erotic labor, yet its regulatory status differs markedly from that of both prostitution and *fūzoku* services. AV production is legal, regulated through general commercial and labor statutes, and integrated into national distribution

⁶¹ Galbraith, *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*.

networks. Nevertheless, it operates within a distinctive framework shaped by obscenity law, contractual practice, industry self-regulation, and periodic public scrutiny. The primary legal constraint governing AV production derives from Article 175 of the Penal Code, which prohibits the distribution of “obscene” materials.⁶² Despite the lack of a textual definition of what constitutes for obscenity, judicial interpretation has held that what does is the explicit depictions of genitalia or sexual penetration, leading to the industry-wide practice of mosaic censorship. The requirement that explicit images be obscured does not restrict the production of AV itself but determines the form in which it may be distributed. As a result, the legal status of AV hinges on compliance with a technical standard, i.e. pixelation, and not prohibitions concerning the acts depicted. This approach effectively places AV production within the domain of lawful audiovisual media provided it conforms to the obscenity constraint. Beyond obscenity law, the AV industry is shaped by organizational structures that distribute production across a network of agencies, labels, studios, and distributors.⁶³ Production companies typically recruit performers through talent agencies specializing in adult entertainment, negotiate contractual terms, and coordinate filming schedules. The work environment is governed not by a dedicated labor statute but by general employment and contract law. The absence of a specific regulatory framework has historically enabled diverse contractual arrangements, including one-time performance contracts, multi-title agreements, and revenue-sharing schemes.⁶⁴ Industry governance relies heavily on market norms and self-regulatory associations, which seek to standardize production practices and mitigate reputational risk. Concerns regarding performer consent and contractual pressure have periodically prompted public debate and administrative intervention. A notable instance occurred in 2016, when several performers reported coercion and deceptive recruitment practices, leading to investigations by consumer protection authorities and the establishment of new industry guidelines.⁶⁵ Subsequent reforms introduced standardized written consent procedures, cooling-off periods for contracts, and clearer mechanisms for performers to withdraw from production. In 2022, the Diet, the national legislature of Japan, passed legislation requiring formalized consent protocols and granting

⁶² Penal Code of Japan (Keihō), Article 175.

⁶³ McLelland, Mark. “Sex, censorship and media regulation in Japan: A historical overview”, Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia, 2014

⁶⁴ Takeyama, Akiko. *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 75–88 (for comparative labor structures).

⁶⁵ Takeyama, Akiko, *Involuntary Consent: The Illusion of Choice in Japan’s Adult Video Industry*, 2024.

performers the right to request suspension of distribution under specific conditions.⁶⁶ The recent reforms surrounding performer consent reflect an effort to articulate autonomy within the formal structures of contract and consumer protection law. However, legal scholarship has noted that consent, when defined in strictly procedural terms, captures only the moment of agreement and not the broader conditions under which individuals enter the industry. The historical processes that shaped women's economic and social vulnerability, including the long-term erosion of material autonomy and the gendered division of labor, complicate the assumption that erotic labour can be understood purely in terms of voluntary market participation.⁶⁷ From this perspective, formalized consent protocols address coercion at the point of contract but do not resolve the structural factors that shape entry into erotic media work, such as economic precarity, limited employment alternatives, or gendered expectations surrounding intimacy and display. The legal framework therefore ensures procedural clarity without attempting to adjudicate the deeper question of how autonomy is materially conditioned in contemporary labour markets. These developments show that AV regulation has emerged not through specialized pornography law but through the adaptation of consumer protection, labor, and contractual standards to the specificities of erotic media production.

The structure of AV labor differs from other segments of the sex industry because it is recorded, commodified, and disseminated through national and international distribution channels. Major platforms, DVD distributors, rental shops, and digital subscription services, operate openly and in compliance with intellectual property law, tax obligations, and audiovisual media regulations.⁶⁸ Digital distribution has expanded the industry's economic scale, linking it to global markets and creating demand for production at a volume possible only under a regulated and standardized system. The sector thus occupies a hybrid position: erotic in content, but governed through the same administrative and commercial instruments that structure other media industries.

The industry's visibility and economic integration have also facilitated the emergence of advocacy groups and support organizations focused on performer welfare. NGOs, legal

⁶⁶ Diet of Japan, *Act on Performer Protection in Video Production*, 2022.

⁶⁷ Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 238

⁶⁸ Galbraith, Patrick W. *Otaku and the Media Mix: An Ethnography of Consumer Culture in Tokyo* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 198–214.

societies, and worker-support collectives provide consultation services concerning contracts, workplace conditions, and post-career transitions.⁶⁹ This institutional field is more developed than in other areas of the sex industry because AV performers operate within recognized commercial structures, negotiate standardized contracts, and often maintain identifiable public personas. While advocacy and support remain uneven, the presence of such organizations contributes to the industry's governance through norms rather than formal statutory frameworks.

AV production's labor conditions reflect its hybrid legal and economic status. Filming environments are regulated under general workplace safety laws, and studios are subject to inspections concerning lighting, equipment, and facility standards.⁷⁰ Performer compensation varies widely, but contracts typically outline payment schedules, image rights, distribution limits, and profit participation. The administrative challenge lies not in determining the legality of the services provided, which are unambiguously lawful, but in regulating the conditions under which labor is performed and content is circulated. This challenge has become more prominent with the rise of digital production, as online dissemination increases the longevity of recorded material and raises questions about performers' rights over their images.

Taken as a whole, the AV industry demonstrates the extent to which erotic labor in contemporary Japan can be structured through general commercial regulation, industry norms, and self-governance, rather than explicit sex-industry statutes. The sector is core to the national economy. This structure contrasts with the zoning-based governance of *fūzoku* and the youth-protection framework applied to *JK* businesses, highlighting the diversity of regulatory logics that organize sexual labor in the country. In the next section, the analysis turns to the increasing reliance on migrant labor and the legal mechanisms through which mobility, precarity, and administrative categorization intersect within the sex industry.

⁶⁹ Lighthouse Support Center for Victims of Sexual Content, Annual Report 2021.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), *Workplace Safety Standards for Small-Scale Filming Environments*, 2018.

2.6 Migration, Labor Precarity, and the Participation of Foreign Workers in the Sex Industry of Japan

The contemporary sex industry in Japan is shaped not only by national regulatory models but also by global patterns of migration and labor mobility. While the majority of workers in *fūzoku* establishments are of Japanese nationality, foreign workers have played a significant role in certain sectors, particularly in hostessing, entertainment services, and some forms of adult-oriented hospitality. Throughout the countless hotspots spread all over Tokyo's most crowded districts, one will, in the event of being man and walking alone, be most definitely approached by women whose accents cannot be mistaken for Japanese: it can only be guessed with some level of accuracy the place of origin. Their presence is not the result of a dedicated migration channel for erotic labor, as none exists, but of the ways broader immigration, visa, and labor regimes intersect with the economic structures of nightlife industries.

The most historically significant migration pathway into nightlife labor has been the entertainer visa (E-6), introduced in 1981 under the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act.⁷¹ The category was designed to admit singers, dancers, and performers, but by the late 1980s and early 1990s it had become associated with the recruitment of Filipina hostesses working in bars, cabarets, and clubs across the country.⁷² These establishments operated legally, with workers employed under contracts submitted to immigration authorities, and were subject to the same business regulations as domestic hospitality venues. The entertainer visa system thus created a semi-formal avenue through which foreign women participated in the nightlife economy without entering the *fūzoku* sector in the narrow, legally-defined sense. These migration patterns were shaped by a combination of economic and gendered factors (limited employment opportunities in sending countries), recruitment intermediaries (talent brokers and placement agencies), and the structure of nightlife labor (aesthetic, emotional, and conversational service work).⁷³ Although hostessing does not involve sexual services under Japanese law, it shares with other forms of eroticized labor the requirement of sustained emotional performance. Many workers arrived through legitimate recruitment channels but

⁷¹ Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, Law No. 319 of 1951, amended 1981.

⁷² Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. "Trafficked? Filipino Hostesses in Tokyo's Nightlife Industry." *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 145–178.

⁷³ Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1–29.

entered employment relationships characterized by contractual dependency, brokerage fees, and sometimes debt-financed mobility, which are seen as typical in the prostitution enclaves, conditions that shape migrant labor across multiple sectors of the service economy.⁷⁴

By the mid-2000s, increased scrutiny of the entertainer visa system led to regulatory reforms. In 2005, the Japanese government tightened eligibility requirements, citing concerns about inadequate performance credentials and potential exploitation by intermediaries.⁷⁵ These reforms significantly reduced the number of entertainer visas issued and contributed to a decline in large-scale recruitment from the Philippines. The policy did not eliminate migrant participation in nightlife industries but shifted it: foreign workers increasingly entered through student visas, spouse visas, technical trainee programs, or short-term visitor statuses, which created new forms of legal precarity.⁷⁶ Workers on these visas were not explicitly recruited for nightlife labor, but some entered the sector because their visa status permitted part-time employment or because informal arrangements offered higher earnings. The trend has generated administrative challenges, particularly for immigration enforcement. Workers whose activities exceed the conditions of their visa, such as those employed beyond permitted hours or outside approved sectors, risk sanctions or deportation.⁷⁷ However, enforcement is uneven and often focused on employers rather than individuals. Immigration authorities have conducted periodic inspections of establishments suspected of hiring unauthorized migrant workers, but the regulatory response remains shaped by the larger immigration system rather than by sex industry legislation.⁷⁸ This reflects the broader structural fact that foreign participation in nightlife labor arises from general labor-market conditions and visa precarity, and not from a designated migration regime sponsored by the government tied to erotic commerce.

In addition to hostessing, migrant workers also appear in some segments of the adult entertainment industry, such as exotic dance venues, image clubs, and certain types of massage

⁷⁴ Ibid., 53–82.

⁷⁵ Ministry of Justice (MOJ), *Revision of Entertainer Visa Guidelines*, 2005.

⁷⁶ Nishimura, Yuko. “Migrant Women and Precarious Labor in Japan’s Service Sector.” *Japan Labor Review* 15, no. 2 (2018): 48–67.

⁷⁷ MOJ, *Immigration Enforcement Report*, 2019.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

parlors (mostly Thai). Their participation is shaped by the intersection of consumer demand, employer recruitment practices, and the possibility of higher earnings relative to other available forms of part-time or short-term employment.⁷⁹ Unlike AV production, which requires compliance with Japanese obscenity law and involves significant contractual documentation, these sectors often operate under more informal employment arrangements. The absence of a specific legal framework for erotic labor means that foreign workers are governed by the same rules that apply to any worker whose employment intersects with visa categories that do not explicitly authorize such work. NGOs and support organizations have noted that migrant workers in nightlife industries face distinct vulnerabilities, including limited Japanese language proficiency, unfamiliarity with administrative systems, and restricted access to social insurance.⁸⁰ These factors can affect workers' ability to navigate contractual disputes, wage claims, or workplace misconduct. Support centers in major cities such as Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka provide legal advice and consultation, but assistance remains unevenly distributed and dependent on local civil-society capacity. The administrative landscape thus shapes not only the legality of migrant participation but also the availability of institutional support.

The role of migration in the sex industry demonstrates that foreign workers' participation is not a direct function of prostitution law but a byproduct of immigration policy, economic disparity, and the structure of the hospitality and entertainment sectors consciously sponsored by the male audience. The absence of a statutory category for erotic labor, noted here as an analytical condition and not a policy recommendation, means that migrant workers are governed through visa classifications designed for fundamentally different purposes. Their participation reflects the interaction between national immigration goals, regional labor demand, and the economic incentives embedded in nightlife industries.

2.7 Policing, Enforcement Patterns, and the Administration of Public Morals in Japan

The enforcement of regulations surrounding the sex industry in Japan reflects a policing structure oriented less toward the suppression of commercial sexual services than toward maintaining administrative order within designated urban and regulatory frameworks. Because

⁷⁹ G. Koch, *Producing Iyashi: Healing and Labor in Tokyo's Sex Industry* (2016)

⁸⁰ Lighthouse Support Center for Migrant Women, Annual Report 2020.

most erotic businesses do not fall under the statutory definition of prostitution and are instead governed through the *fūzoku eigyō* classification, policing focuses primarily on procedural compliance: licensing, zoning, signage, hours of operation, and the correct declaration of business type, which the past Sections have helped understand.⁸¹ Substantive evaluation of erotic conduct is relatively rare, and enforcement is shaped by predictable patterns of discretion, targeted monitoring, and district-level administration.

The institution most directly involved in day-to-day oversight is the Public Safety Commission (*Kōan iinkai*), mentioned in past sections, operating at the prefectural level.⁸² These commissions coordinate with police departments to conduct inspections of nightlife districts such as Kabukichō in Tokyo, Susukino in Sapporo, and Nakasu in Fukuoka. Inspections typically verify employee age, confirm adherence to approved business categories, and check compliance with structural requirements such as lighting, soundproofing, and internal layout.⁸³ This form of administrative policing aims to ensure that businesses remain within the operational boundaries defined by the licensing system rather than to evaluate the sexual content of services. Enforcement intensity varies significantly by district: nightlife areas designated for commercial entertainment are subject to routine, predictable policing, whereas neighborhoods zoned for residential or mixed-use development experience zero-tolerance enforcement against unlicensed erotic activity.⁸⁴ In the meantime, the geographic alienation serves as a dam for the *honne/tatemaie* dichotomy, the tidiness of the outside, seen and shared, and the chaos of the inside, mysterious and secluded.

The National Police Agency (NPA) structures enforcement through periodic nationwide campaigns targeting specific practices, such as unlicensed delivery-health services, *JK* businesses operating without registration, or establishments employing workers without proper documentation.⁸⁵ These campaigns typically involve short periods of heightened surveillance followed by a return to routine monitoring. The pattern suggests a dual approach: everyday

⁸¹ Mark D. West, *Law in Everyday Japan: Sex, Sumo, Suicide, and Statuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 73–104.

⁸² National Public Safety Commission, *Annual Administrative Report*, 2020.

⁸³ West, *Law in Everyday Japan*, 77–89.

⁸⁴ Bestor, Theodore C. *Neighborhood Tokyo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 167–182.

⁸⁵ National Police Agency (NPA), *White Paper on Crime*, 2018.

compliance policing combined with episodic interventions intended to address emerging areas of concern or to signal administrative responsiveness. A critical feature of enforcement in this sector is discretion. Because the legal categories that govern erotic commerce are administrative rather than substantive, officers possess considerable latitude in determining when a violation has occurred and how strictly to apply sanctions.⁸⁶ Violations may result in warnings, temporary suspensions, fines, or license revocation, but enforcement outcomes vary significantly by prefecture. Comparative studies show that regions such as Tokyo and Osaka tend to apply regulations more actively, while smaller municipalities exhibit comparatively less intervention.⁸⁷ This unevenness reflects differences in local political priorities, resource allocation, and the economic significance of nightlife sectors to urban development strategies.

Another dimension of policing relates to labor conditions. Because «sex work» is not defined as a statutory labor category, police oversight intersects indirectly with labour standards enforcement. Authorities may inspect contracts, verify worker age, or examine compliance with rules regarding minors, but they do not regulate wages or workplace conditions beyond what is mandated under general employment law.⁸⁸ This creates a regulatory environment in which working conditions are monitored primarily through the lens of compliance with public-safety and zoning statutes rather than labour rights frameworks.

In the context of foreign workers (addressed in Section 2.6), enforcement is primarily oriented toward visa compliance. Immigration authorities coordinate with prefectural police to identify establishments employing workers outside the scope of their visa status.⁸⁹ These inspections do not typically address the nature of the services provided but rather whether employment aligns with the conditions attached to the worker's residency category. This approach exemplifies the broader separation between prostitution law and immigration policy, each operating through its own administrative logic.

Finally, the administration of public morals (*fūzoku shisetsu no kanri*) plays a central role in structuring enforcement. The category in Japan requires a conceptual clarification that

⁸⁶ West, *Law in Everyday Japan*, 82–94.

⁸⁷ Bestor, Theodore C. *Neighborhood Tokyo*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, *Guidelines on Labour Standards Enforcement*, 2016.

⁸⁹ Ministry of Justice (MOJ), *Immigration Enforcement Report*, 2019.

distinguishes it from Western legal traditions grounded in explicit moral doctrine. The term does not operate primarily as a defense of sexual virtue or religious normativity; rather, it functions as a regulatory concern with environmental disturbance and relational equilibrium. What is protected under the language of public morals is the stability of shared space, not purity. The state intervenes when commercial practices threaten to disrupt the atmosphere of collective life (whose symbol is a Japanese, collecting garbage on a public street on a Sunday morning) when signage becomes too explicit, when solicitation becomes too visible, when erotic commerce intrudes upon residential rhythms. In this sense, public morals refer less to the content of sexuality and more to its placement within social circulation. The distinction is crucial because it reveals that enforcement is directed against dissonance, and not sexuality. The policing of erotic districts, therefore, does not seek to eliminate desire, for that it reshaped on different palettes; it seeks to prevent the uncontrolled leakage of desire into spaces coded as neutral or familial. What is regulated is the permeability between sphere, sightlife districts are tolerated precisely because they spatialize intensity, they concentrate what might otherwise diffuse across the city. Public morals enforcement ensures that this concentration remains intact.

Here the bridge to Chapter I: if *honne* and *tatemaie* describe the management of interiority and façade at the level of the individual, public morals describe the same management at the level of urban space. The state does not discipline emotion directly; it disciplines its spatial expression: the regulatory emphasis on signage, entrance architecture, and district zoning reveals a governance model concerned with surfaces. What must be preserved is not the elimination of erotic commerce but the continuity of a shared visual and affective order.

This spatialization of morality reflects a broader social logic in which conflict is displaced rather than confronted. Just as individuals learn to internalize dissonance rather than externalize it (Japanese kids as erratic, Japanese adults as disciplined), erotic commerce is permitted so long as it does not fracture the public choreography of everyday life. The administrative apparatus becomes the mechanism through which potential disruption is absorbed into designated zones, preventing the collapse of the dual system that organizes social relations. Public morals, therefore, operate not as a moral doctrine but as a technology of equilibrium, ensuring that what is structurally necessary to the economy does not destabilize the aesthetic coherence of the social whole.

The public morals term lacks a fixed legal definition but operates as an administrative standard used to justify interventions concerning signage, advertising, and the placement of businesses.⁹⁰ Because public-morals regulations are formulated at the prefectural level, local governments possess considerable autonomy in defining acceptable commercial behavior, leading to geographical variation in enforcement priorities. The flexibility of this category allows authorities to adjust regulatory attention to emerging business models, reflexology salons, cosplay cafés, or hybrid entertainment venues, without introducing new statutory categories.

Taken together, policing within the sex industry reflects a model of administrative governance rather than criminal suppression. The emphasis on zoning compliance, licensing, and periodic inspection produces a form of regulation that is structured, predictable, and aligned with urban planning priorities. Enforcement does not aim to eradicate erotic commerce but to situate it within frameworks that facilitate oversight and manage its spatial distribution. This model underscores the broader theme of this chapter: the sex industry in contemporary Japan is regulated not as an exceptional domain but as part of the administrative management of urban economies and public order.

2.8 Digital Platforms, Surveillance, and the Reorganization of Erotic Labor in Japan

The expansion of digital platforms has reorganized the landscape of erotic labor in Japan by shifting significant segments of commercial intimacy away from geographically bounded districts and into online spaces characterized by dispersed labor, fragmented oversight, and new forms of surveillance. Unlike the zoning-based model governing physical establishments, digital environments operate through a mixture of platform rules, advertising regulations, data-monitoring practices, and occasional interventions by police and administrative agencies. The resulting regulatory reflects the layered interplay between existing laws, platform governance, and the affordances of digital communication technologies.

One major transformation concerns the rise of digital matchmaking, escort referral, and delivery-health portals, many of which serve as intermediaries between consumers and offline

⁹⁰ Tokyo Metropolitan Government, *Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youths*, 2010.

services. These platforms typically register as advertising or telecommunications businesses rather than as sex-industry operators, very similar maneuver mentioned in Siddharth Kara's *Sexual Trafficking* on countless similar ads in a Moldavian newspaper,⁹¹ placing them under regulatory regimes primarily concerned with data protection, commercial transparency, and consumer safety. Because the "Anti-Prostitution Law" only criminalizes coital transactions (see Section 2.1) and because delivery-health services typically offer non-coital forms of intimacy, online advertising does not inherently violate prostitution law. Oversight therefore focuses on preventing misleading advertising, child involvement, and violations of local ordinances concerning solicitation.⁹² This creates a situation in which the digital infrastructure of the sex industry is regulated largely through general commercial statutes rather than sector-specific laws.

Digital environments have also reshaped the organization of erotic labor by enabling decentralized work arrangements, including independent escorting, online companionship, cam work, and subscription-based content on platforms such as FanCentro or domestic equivalents (e.g., FC2), which operate within Japanese jurisdiction even if modeled on global platforms. These forms of labour often fall outside the formal licensing framework applied to *fūzoku* establishments, because the workers are not operating physical premises requiring registration. Instead, individuals are generally governed through tax regulations applicable to sole proprietors and through platform-specific guidelines, which vary in transparency and enforceability. The legal oversight of online erotic labor is therefore mediated by contractual relationships with platform operators, who determine permissible content and enforcement mechanisms.

Surveillance practices in digital spaces differ significantly from those applied to physical nightlife districts. Rather than relying on police patrols or on-site inspections, administrative authorities employ monitoring of online advertisements, investigation of unlicensed businesses using digital channels, and collaboration with platform operators to identify prohibited activities.⁹³ The National Police Agency periodically issues notices to platforms regarding

⁹¹ Kara, Siddharth. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

⁹² Tokyo Metropolitan Government Socially Responsible Procurement Guidelines, 2025.

⁹³ National Police Agency (NPA), *Policy Report*, 2020.

prohibited solicitation, minors' involvement, or deceptive business practices; compliance is generally achieved through takedown requests or updates to platform moderation protocols.⁹⁴ However, enforcement remains reactive and uneven, shaped by the technical complexity of online communication and the jurisdictional limits of prefectural police.

Digital platforms also introduce new issues concerning data privacy and the circulation of sexualized images. The ease of recording, sharing, and archiving content has heightened concerns about the longevity of erotic materials featuring identifiable individuals. This is distinct from AV regulation, which involves contractual documentation and industry norms. Workers engaged in informal online erotic labor often lack comparable protections concerning image rights or takedown mechanisms.⁹⁵ This vulnerability is addressed not through sex-industry legislation but through general privacy and defamation rules, which require individual claimants to initiate action, which is a challenging process given the transnational spread of digital content.

The shift to digital labor has also intensified the fragmentation of regulatory responsibility: while physical establishments fall under concrete zoning, licensing, and police oversight, online operations implicate tax authorities, consumer protection agencies, communications regulators, and platform governance systems. Scholars of digital labor note that this fragmentation creates regulatory asymmetries, in which the obligations imposed on physical businesses are considerably clearer than those applied to individuals operating online.⁹⁶ As a result, the digital sector of erotic labor occupies an administratively ambiguous position: it is economically significant, widely used, and partially integrated into formal regulation, yet subject to oversight mechanisms that are indirect and inconsistently applied.

For workers, digitalization offers expanded opportunities for income generation but also introduces new forms of precarity. Income is irregular, platform-dependent, and subject to algorithmic visibility; market success relies on self-branding, consistent production, and

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Lighthouse Support Center for Victims of Sexual Content, *Annual Report 2021*.

⁹⁶ Utsumi, Junki & Mizusawa, Katsuro & Tachibana, Yousuke & Ogata, Ippei & Tetsuya, Hiroyuki. (2025). *Regulating Gig Work and Labor Protections in the Age of Platforms*. International Journal of Humanities, Management and Social

managing customer interactions in a competitive environment.⁹⁷ These dynamics position workers as quasi-entrepreneurs operating without the structural supports associated with traditional employment, even while their labour constitutes a recognizable part of the erotic economy. The legal and administrative systems have yet to articulate comprehensive frameworks addressing these labour conditions, leaving platform-based erotic work regulated through a patchwork of commercial law, tax policy, and, in cases of harm, general civil remedies.

Digitalization marks a significant evolution in the organization of erotic labor in contemporary Japan. It relocates substantial segments of the sex industry into environments structured by platform governance rather than zoning or licensing; it fragments regulatory responsibility; and it introduces new modes of surveillance that rely on data monitoring rather than physical inspection. Yet this transition also reshapes the conditions under which erotic labor is performed. Workers operating on subscription platforms, video-chat services, or SNS-based digital companionship experience a dual form of vulnerability: they remain embedded in gendered economies of desire that structure erotic labor around male consumption and recognition, while simultaneously entering a platformized market in which income is determined by algorithmic visibility, user engagement, and competitive self-branding. Research on digital sex work indicates that these systems often replicate entrenched gender hierarchies: performers must anticipate, respond to, and emotionally manage male expectations in ways that reproduce the asymmetries already documented in offline erotic economies. At the same time, the commercial architecture of platforms produces a second layer of precarity, as revenue streams are subject to opaque algorithmic sorting, fluctuating consumer demand, and the extraction of platform fees that reduce performers' earnings.

Although the thesis does not adopt a normative stance toward sex-industry policy, it is important to acknowledge dissenting voices within feminist scholarship who argue that digital platforms intensify the structural constraints under which erotic labor is performed. Scholars such as Elizabeth Bernstein note that the shift toward individualized, market-oriented erotic services—whether offline or online—may deepen inequalities by reframing sexual labor as entrepreneurial self-management conducted within capitalist infrastructures that

⁹⁷ Jones, Angela. *Camming: Money, Power, and Pleasure in the Sex Work Industry* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 45–73. (Not Japan-specific but widely used in digital-labour scholarship.)

disproportionately benefit intermediaries rather than workers.⁹⁸ From this perspective, digitalization does not merely overlay the existing regulatory system with new technological forms; it also reconfigures the power relations that shape erotic labor, creating a landscape in which sexual and economic forms of exploitation may intersect. These critiques do not negate the administrative analysis elaborated in this chapter, but highlight the broader structural dynamics within which digital labor is situated. In this light, digitalization appears not as a break from the conventional organization of erotic commerce but as a continuation of its underlying logics: market-driven, gendered, and increasingly mediated through technological systems that distribute risk and reward unevenly.

2.9 Conclusion



The regulatory landscape of the sex industry in contemporary Japan is shaped less by the explicit content of prostitution statutes than by a wider administrative architecture that

⁹⁸ Bernstein, Elizabeth. *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

organizes erotic labor through ambiguity, spatial management, and delegated forms of institutional control. Across its various domains, from licensed *fūzoku* businesses to online erotic markets, the industry is governed by a system that treats sexual commerce as an object of administrative ordering rather than a moral adjudication. Chapter III serves to understand whether the framework adopted fits a Japanese cultural narrative, introduced in Chapter I. This model does not depend on broad prohibitions or detailed statutory classifications; instead, it relies on a narrow legal definition of prostitution paired with expansive regulatory discretion in zoning, licensing, inspection, and administrative guidance. Ambiguity is thus not a defect but a structural feature: it enables regulators to manage a fluid and diversified sector without continuously revising legislation or criminalizing forms of intimacy that fall outside a narrowly defined offence.

The governance of sexual commerce is equally shaped by the spatial distribution of erotic businesses within urban environments. Concentrated districts such as Kabukichō, Susukino, and Nakasu operate as spatial containers where nightlife industries can be monitored through predictable enforcement routines. Their physical and social forms, dense built environments, vertical commercial structures, and continuous pedestrian flows, permit a degree of surveillance and infrastructural accommodation that reduces regulatory friction. These districts exemplify the disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms described by Michel Foucault, in which populations are governed through the arrangement of space, circulation, and visibility. At the same time, their liminal legal status reflects the kind of threshold described by Giorgio Agamben: within their borders, practices that would be inconsistent with zoning or moral regulations elsewhere in the city are deferred, creating an exception, provided they remain administratively legible (in this sense though, *iustitium* is not suspended)⁹⁹.

The emergence of *JK* businesses further demonstrates how the state manages ambiguous forms of intimacy through overlapping regulatory regimes. Rather than addressing these establishments as part of the sex industry, authorities regulate them through youth protection ordinances, employment rules, and public-safety measures that reflect demographic anxieties and the biopolitical imperative to allegedly safeguard minors. Governance in this domain is shaped not by the legality of specific acts but by the aesthetic and symbolic associations of schoolgirl imagery, producing a regulatory environment in which vulnerability, risk, and public sentiment become focal concerns. The industry operates at the intersection of youth culture,

⁹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of exception*, 2005, 55-67.

commercial labor, and state intervention, illustrating how administrative systems respond to forms of intimacy that resist straightforward categorization.

Parallel dynamics can be observed in the governance of migrant participation in nightlife economies. Because no statutory category exists for erotic labor, migrant workers participate through visa statuses intended for unrelated forms of employment. Their regulation therefore arises from the interaction between immigration law, labor-market conditions, and municipal enforcement priorities rather than from any unified policy regarding sexual commerce. The resulting legal precarity is not an exception but a predictable effect of a system that governs erotic labor indirectly, through adjacent administrative domains rather than through designated statutory frameworks.

The digitalization of erotic labor introduces a final layer of complexity. Online platforms, whether referral sites, subscription-based content systems, or cam services, operate within regulatory environments defined by platform governance, data protection rules, and consumer regulations; these digital intermediaries effectively become private regulators, determining content standards, enforcing age verification, and shaping the economic conditions under which workers operate. Their authority exemplifies the distributed nature of governance in this sector: that the state relies on private institutions to maintain order in domains where statutory law is limited or technologically outpaced.

Across all these domains, the sex industry functions within a regulatory environment characterized by a distributed governance. Public Safety Commissions oversee licensing and inspections; industry associations manage risk and standardization; landlords and intermediaries enforce building-level compliance; platforms implement their own content and conduct rules; and informal norms circulate within nightlife economies themselves. The multi-layered structure maintains a stable equilibrium in which erotic labor is neither fully prohibited nor fully normalized. Instead, it is embedded within urban economies, managed through administrative techniques, and shaped by institutional cooperation rather than legislative definition.

Sexual commerce becomes a domain of policy not because of its moral status but because it requires coordination across multiple institutional fields. This administrative form of governance produces a regulatory landscape that is coherent in practice despite its legal fragmentation. By examining the mechanisms through which ambiguity, space, and

institutional intermediaries structure erotic labor, the chapter provides an analytical foundation for understanding how Japan's sex industry can be simultaneously pervasive, regulated, tolerated, and only partially articulated in statutory law: *henne* and *tatemaе*.

This framework also establishes the necessary conceptual bridge to Chapter III, where the thesis moves from examining the structures of governance to analyzing the subjectivities, cultural logics, and socio-economic patterns that sustain the contemporary sex industry. If Chapter II has demonstrated how the state organizes and stabilizes erotic commerce, Chapter III will address how individuals navigate these structures, how intimacy and labor intertwine, and how the cultural economy of desire is produced and circulated within this administrative order.

CHAPTER III

3.1 Subjectivity and the Internalization of Emotional Division

Modern systems of governance operate through the organization of conduct and the formation of regulated subjects. Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power emphasizes that modern authority is sustained through everyday practices that shape behavior, perception, and self-understanding (Foucault, 1975).¹⁰⁰ In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault further suggests that sexuality becomes an object of knowledge and management within broader strategies of governance (Foucault, 1976).¹⁰¹ Within this framework, emotional life is not excluded from regulation; rather, it is incorporated into institutional patterns of conduct.

In Japan, the distinction between *honne* (private feeling) and *tatemaе* (public presentation) has long been described in sociological and anthropological literature as a feature of interpersonal interaction (Lebra, 1976).¹⁰² While often treated as cultural etiquette, this distinction also structures expectations regarding appropriate emotional expression. Situational calibration of

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, Michel. 1976. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.

¹⁰² Lebra, Takie Sugiyama. 1976. *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

feeling—expressing enthusiasm, restraint, agreement, or neutrality depending on context—is learned through repeated socialization. Over time, the calibration becomes habitual.

The organization of emotional life in Japan has also been examined through the lens of relational selfhood. Takie Sugiyama Lebra describes the Japanese self as situationally embedded, oriented toward context rather than autonomous assertion (Lebra, 1976).¹⁰³ Such an orientation does not eliminate individuality, but it situates self-expression within relational frameworks. The distinction between *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) further structures social boundaries, shaping how intimacy and disclosure are distributed. Emotional transparency is typically reserved for inner circles, while formal restraint characterizes external interaction. Over time, the navigation of these layered boundaries becomes routine.

This layered structure influences expectations surrounding disclosure and dependency. In societies where expressive individualism is normative, emotional articulation is often framed as authenticity. In Japan, by contrast, moderation and contextual sensitivity are frequently valued more highly than spontaneous expression (Benedict, 1946; Lebra, 1976). While postwar generations have experienced shifts in communication norms, the cultural legitimacy of restraint persists in many institutional settings. The result is not to be confused for an absence of emotion but its regulation according to relational hierarchy.

Within corporate environments, this regulation intersects with organizational loyalty. Thomas Rohlen's ethnography of white-collar employment illustrates how corporate belonging historically extended beyond contractual labor into social identity (Rohlen, 1974).¹⁰⁴ Company events, after-work gatherings, and seniority-based hierarchies reinforced collective cohesion; emotional alignment with organizational goals is encouraged as part of professional conduct.

The internalization of role-specific affect can therefore shape expectations regarding partnership. If emotional responsiveness is disproportionately feminized, relational reciprocity may become unevenly distributed. This unevenness does not necessarily produce overt conflict; it may instead become normalized as part of household routine. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is useful here, as it captures how durable dispositions are formed through

¹⁰³ Lebra, Takie Sugiyama. 1976. *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

¹⁰⁴ Rohlen, Thomas P. 1974. *For Harmony and Strength: Japanese White-Collar Organization in Anthropological Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

repeated practice (Bourdieu, 1977)¹⁰⁵, that same repetition found both in *pachinko* and Buddhism, discussed in Chapter I. Habitus operates beneath conscious deliberation, shaping what appears natural or self-evident; emotional asymmetry, when routinized, may be experienced as customary rather than negotiated.

Digital mediation has introduced additional layers through which emotional presentation may be differentiated. Communication platforms such as messaging applications, social networking sites, and anonymous forums allow users to maintain distinct profiles across partially overlapping audiences. The distinction between frontstage and back-stage performance acquires renewed relevance in digitally networked environments, where individuals may curate multiple presentations simultaneously (Goffman, 1959).¹⁰⁶ These technological affordances do not in themselves determine emotional division; rather, they provide structured opportunities for selective disclosure and audience segmentation. In a social context where modulation of affect according to relational boundary is already normalized, digital platforms extend the range of contexts in which such modulation can occur.

Digitally mediated erotic forms further illustrate this development. The circulation of adult video through streaming services, the consumption of eroticized manga and anime, and the proliferation of virtual companionship or dating simulation applications introduce modes of engagement in which desire is temporally bounded and symbolically mediated. Scholars of Japanese popular culture have noted that character-based consumption in manga and anime frequently detaches affective investment from narrative continuity, emphasizing modular traits and visual codes over sustained interpersonal development (Azuma, 2001; Kinsella, 1998). These forms of mediated intimacy do not replace embodied relationships; however, they allow for affective interaction without the reciprocal obligations associated with long-term partnership. In this sense, digital erotic culture reflects and extends patterns of segmented intimacy observable in offline institutions.

The urban environment of Tokyo provides a spatial dimension to this mediated segmentation. The dense layering of illuminated screens, commercial signage, themed districts, and entertainment infrastructures has frequently invited comparison with cinematic depictions of

¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰⁶ Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

hyper-mediated urbanity. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), whose visual design drew in part on Tokyo's nocturnal cityscape, offers a stylized representation of a metropolis saturated with artificial light, advertising, and technologically mediated identity. The comparison is heuristic rather than literal. Tokyo's visual emphasis on screens and surface presentation in both contexts underscores the centrality of mediated appearance in contemporary urban experience. In such environments, identity is frequently encountered through display technologies—billboards, avatars, animated characters spread through the streets—rather than direct interpersonal continuity. The prevalence of digital imagery and commodified aesthetics reinforces the importance of presentation as a social modality.

Taken together, digital communication and digitally mediated erotic forms contribute to an expanded infrastructure of segmented interaction. They do not generate emotional division independently of prior socialization; instead, they operate within established norms of contextual presentation and relational boundary. The technological environment amplifies existing capacities for differentiated self-display, integrating them into everyday communication and cultural consumption.

The intersection of emotional regulation and commodification becomes particularly visible in sectors where intimacy is explicitly monetized. Hostess clubs, for example, provide structured environments in which conversation, attentiveness, and symbolic admiration are exchanged for payment. Anne Allison's ethnography demonstrates how corporate clients use such spaces to perform status and manage workplace tensions (Allison, 1994).¹⁰⁷ The hostess's role involves calibrated responsiveness, tailored to each client's expectations. These interactions occur within clear temporal and contractual boundaries, distinguishing them from long-term relational commitments.

The intelligibility of such arrangements depends upon familiarity with role-based emotional modulation. Participants enter these spaces already equipped with expectations regarding presentation and concealment. Commercial intimacy does not introduce a new emotional grammar; for emotional segmentation becomes explicit through price and duration, yet mirroring segmentation present in non-commercial settings.

¹⁰⁷ Allison, Anne. 1994. *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

At the same time, the normalization of regulated expression may influence how vulnerability is distributed. Surveys on mental health attitudes in Japan suggest that reluctance to seek psychological counseling remains comparatively high, particularly among men (OECD, 2022)¹⁰⁸, fiercest acolytes of an embedded conservative view of strength dating *shogunate* time. Cultural emphasis on endurance and self-control may shape such *samurai* (侍) attitudes. While public discourse increasingly addresses mental health awareness, stigma associated with overt emotional disclosure persists in some contexts. The management of affect thus extends beyond interpersonal etiquette into broader health behaviors.

It is important to avoid interpreting these dynamics as static or homogeneous. Generational variation, regional difference, and socioeconomic stratification all mediate emotional norms. Younger cohorts may express greater openness in certain domains, and shifts in workplace culture are ongoing. Nevertheless, aggregate indicators of labor structure, time allocation, and gender segmentation demonstrate continuity in institutional patterns (MHLW, 2023; OECD, 2023). Subject formation remains embedded within these patterns.

From a theoretical standpoint, the convergence of disciplinary practice (Foucault, 1975)¹⁰⁹, performative repetition (Butler, 1990)¹¹⁰, and affective circulation (Ahmed, 2004)¹¹¹ provides a framework for analyzing how emotional division becomes durable. Institutional routines shape bodily comportment and communicative expectation. Repetition consolidates gendered alignment with specific emotional roles. Circulation distributes affective responsibility unevenly across social actors. Together, these processes contribute to a patterned organization of subjectivity in which segmentation of feeling and presentation is normalized.

This internal organization forms part of the infrastructure of social reproduction. The ability to separate role from interiority facilitates predictable interaction within hierarchies and markets. At the same time, sustained segmentation may influence how individuals approach dependency, commitment, and reciprocity. The following section considers how these patterns

¹⁰⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2022. *Suicide Rates (Indicator)*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage.

¹¹⁰ Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

¹¹¹ Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

intersect with demographic change and the institutional transformation of marriage and reproduction. The shift from subject formation to reproductive structure does not imply direct causation; rather, it examines how parallel institutional configurations interact within a shared social context.

Educational institutions provide early exposure to these norms. Classroom organization in Japan emphasizes group participation, synchronized activity, and collective responsibility (Rohlen, 1983; Lewis, 1995). Students participate in shared cleaning duties, coordinated ceremonies, and structured routines that reinforce awareness of group dynamics. Emotional self-regulation is embedded in these practices. Expressive individualism is moderated in favor of collective alignment. The distinction between interior feeling and outward comportment becomes intelligible within these early institutional settings.

Gender differentiation intersects with this process. Research on classroom interaction indicates that girls are frequently encouraged toward relational attentiveness and behavioral compliance, while boys are often associated with assertiveness within structured hierarchies (Tsuneyoshi, 2001).¹¹² Within this context, emotional responsiveness and accommodation become more closely aligned with femininity, while emotional restraint and authority become associated with masculinity. These associations are neither fixed nor universal; however, they are recurrent across institutional contexts.

Labor market organization reinforces such patterns. Despite significant increases in female labor force participation, women in Japan remain disproportionately represented in non-regular employment and service-sector occupations (MHLW, 2023).¹¹³ These roles frequently require sustained interaction with clients or customers and involve forms of affective regulation consistent with Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983).¹¹⁴ Emotional composure, politeness, and attentiveness are often explicit occupational expectations. The management of feeling thus becomes integrated into economic activity.

¹¹² Tsuneyoshi, Ryoko. 2001. *The Japanese Model of Schooling: Comparisons with the United States*. New York: Routledge.

¹¹³ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). 2023. *Basic Survey on Employment Structure*. Tokyo: MHLW.

¹¹⁴ Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Male employment trajectories exhibit different structural features. Full-time corporate employment remains more common among men, particularly in managerial tracks (OECD, 2023).¹¹⁵ Workplace cultures characterized by long hours and hierarchical organization often privilege endurance and reliability. Expressions of vulnerability may be constrained by expectations associated with professional identity. R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a framework for understanding how such expectations contribute to the consolidation of specific masculine norms (Connell, 1995).¹¹⁶

These patterns extend into family life. Survey data from the Cabinet Office indicate that women perform a significantly larger share of unpaid domestic labor compared to men (Cabinet Office, 2022).¹¹⁷ This includes both physical tasks and relational coordination within households. The expectation that women manage household harmony and caregiving responsibilities intersects with broader labor market inequalities. Nancy Fraser's analysis of social reproduction highlights the tension between capitalist labor demands and the time-intensive requirements of care (Fraser, 2016).¹¹⁸ When caregiving remains unevenly distributed, affective labor becomes concentrated within specific gendered roles.

The cumulative effect of these arrangements is a distributed organization of emotional responsibility. Women are more frequently positioned within occupations and domestic roles that require relational attentiveness. Men are more frequently positioned within institutional settings that emphasize hierarchy and endurance. These patterns are not exhaustive descriptions of individual experience, but they reflect aggregate trends documented in employment and time-use statistics (MHLW, 2023; OECD, 2023).

Empirical indicators of psychological strain provide additional context. Japan continues to document cases of *karōshi*, or death associated with overwork, and work-related mental health disorders remain a matter of public concern (MHLW, 2022).¹¹⁹ At the same time, suicide

¹¹⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2023. *OECD Employment Outlook 2023*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

¹¹⁶ Connell, Raewyn W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹¹⁷ Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. 2022. *White Paper on Suicide Prevention in Japan*. Tokyo: Cabinet Office.

¹¹⁸ Fraser, Nancy. 2016. "Contradictions of Capital and Care." *New Left Review* 100: 99–117.

¹¹⁹ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). 2022. *White Paper on Labour and Welfare*. Tokyo: MHLW.

statistics reveal gendered variation in patterns of vulnerability (OECD, 2022; Cabinet Office, 2022). Such data cannot be reduced to a single explanatory variable; however, they suggest that institutional demands upon emotional regulation and endurance have measurable consequences.

Within this broader framework, the sexual marketplace can be situated as a domain in which emotional segmentation becomes explicit and contractual. Hostessing, adult video production, and other forms of commercial intimacy operate through defined temporal and relational boundaries. Emotional engagement is structured and delimited. These features correspond to patterns already present in non-commercial institutions, where role-specific affect is routinely calibrated.

The familiarity of segmented intimacy in commercial settings therefore presupposes prior socialization into regulated emotional expression. The distinction between performance and interiority, while intensified in sexual commerce, reflects a more general organization of affect across educational, corporate, and domestic contexts. The ability to navigate multiple registers of expression is cultivated over time.

From a theoretical perspective, Foucault's account of disciplinary power and Butler's theory of performativity converge in this analysis. Repeated institutional practices shape embodied dispositions. Emotional modulation becomes part of the habitus through which individuals interpret and inhabit social roles. The organization of subjectivity thus precedes formal legal or administrative regulation.

This internal architecture of emotional division does not operate in isolation. It interacts with economic structure, gender hierarchy, and institutional design. The following sections examine how these patterns intersect with the organization of reproduction, labor precarity, masculinity, and cultural representation. The aim is not to attribute demographic or social transformations to a single factor, but to situate them within a broader configuration in which intimacy is shaped by institutionalized forms of regulation and segmentation.

3.2 Intimacy, Marriage, and the Reorganization of Reproduction

Social reproduction refers to the processes through which societies sustain and renew themselves across generations. Reproduction extends beyond biological procreation to include caregiving, domestic labor, affective coordination, and the maintenance of social relations (Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2016). Much of this labor remains statistically and institutionally under-recognized. documents how public policy and infrastructure are frequently designed around male-dominant mobility patterns, overlooking gendered differences in care-related travel (Perez, 2019).¹²⁰ In one widely cited case from Sweden, municipal snow-clearing schedules initially prioritized major roadways used primarily for commuter traffic, while sidewalks—more frequently used for caregiving-related travel, hence by women—were cleared later. When the order was reversed, injury rates declined and overall municipal costs decreased. Although this example might not pertain to Japan directly, for it would need a bit more of research, it illustrates how the organization of public space can reflect implicit assumptions about whose labor is prioritized. Such patterns underscore the broader feminist argument that reproductive labor is often treated as secondary within economic planning.

In contemporary Japan, demographic indicators point to sustained transformation in patterns of marriage, household formation, and fertility. The interpretation of these shifts requires careful attention to structural context.

Japan's total fertility rate has remained below replacement level since the mid-1970s. In 2022, the rate stood at 1.26 births per woman (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2023).¹²¹ The average age at first marriage has steadily increased, reaching 31.1 for women and 32.5 for men (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research [NIPSSR], 2023).¹²² The proportion of individuals who never marry has also risen. Among those aged 45–49, approximately 28% of men and 18% of women were unmarried as of recent surveys (NIPSSR, 2022).¹²³ In parallel,

¹²⁰ Perez, Caroline Criado. 2019. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. London: Chatto & Windus.

¹²¹ Statistics Bureau of Japan. 2023. *Statistical Handbook of Japan*. Tokyo: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

¹²² National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR). 2023. *Population Projections for Japan*. Tokyo: NIPSSR.

¹²³ National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR). 2022. *The Fifteenth Japanese National Fertility Survey*. Tokyo: NIPSSR.

single-person households have increased significantly, particularly in urban areas (Statistics Bureau, 2023).¹²⁴

These developments are frequently attributed to economic stagnation, labor insecurity, and insufficient family policy. Such factors are relevant. However, demographic transformation must also be situated within broader changes in the organization of intimacy and gendered labor. Anthony Giddens argues that late modern societies have witnessed the emergence of what he terms the “pure relationship,” sustained by mutual satisfaction rather than external obligation (Giddens, 1992).¹²⁵ Under such conditions, marriage is less tightly bound to economic survival or social expectation and more closely associated with personal fulfillment. The stability of the relationship depends upon continued reciprocity.

Feminist political economy has however repeatedly emphasized that reproduction is not really external to economic organization. Silvia Federici situates early modern witch hunts within processes of primitive accumulation, arguing that the regulation of women’s bodies and reproductive capacities contributed to the stabilization of emerging capitalist labor systems (Federici, 2004).¹²⁶ In her later work, she extends this analysis to structural adjustment policies imposed on countries such as Nigeria under International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) programs. According to Federici, these policies restructured social reproduction by reducing public welfare provision, intensifying women’s unpaid labor burdens, and indirectly disciplining fertility through economic constraint (Federici, 2012).¹²⁷ Reproduction, in this.

The Nigerian case discussed by Federici reflects a context of externally imposed economic restructuring in which reproductive labor was indirectly reshaped through austerity and welfare retrenchment. Japan’s trajectory differs significantly. Postwar reconstruction under U.S. occupation did not entail structural adjustment conditionality comparable to IMF or WB

¹²⁴ Statistics Bureau of Japan. 2023. *Statistical Handbook of Japan*. Tokyo: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

¹²⁵ Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹²⁶ Federici, Silvia. 2004. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.

¹²⁷ Federici, Silvia. 2012. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

programs. Nevertheless, reproduction became closely aligned with national economic reconstruction. The consolidation of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model during the high-growth period linked household stability to corporate employment structures (Gordon, 1997; Uno, 1993). The family functioned as a site through which labor supply was reproduced and social stability maintained. In contemporary Japan, demographic decline has again positioned reproduction within macroeconomic planning. Fertility rates are discussed in relation to pension sustainability, labor shortages, and fiscal balance (NIPSSR, 2023; Cabinet Office, 2023).

While the mechanisms differ from those identified by Federici in Nigeria, the incorporation of reproduction into economic strategy remains a recurring feature during periods of structural transition. Modern Japan presents a markedly different configuration. It is not subject to externally imposed structural adjustment in the same manner, nor has it implemented coercive population control measures comparable to those documented in other national contexts. Instead, demographic decline has been framed domestically as a structural challenge to economic sustainability, pension systems, and labor supply. Governmental responses have included childcare subsidies, expansion of parental leave, financial incentives for childbirth, and liberal labor market reforms aimed at increasing female participation (Cabinet Office, 2023; OECD Family Database, 2022). These measures seek to encourage fertility rather than restrict it. Pronatalist policy addresses demographic output (birth rates), but does not necessarily transform the organization of social reproduction (who performs care, under what conditions, at what cost). Time-use surveys continue to indicate that women perform a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and caregiving labor (Cabinet Office, 2022).¹²⁸ Encouragement of fertility could therefore operate within an existing framework in which the responsibility for reproductive labor remains unevenly distributed across gender and class lines.

Despite this contrast, reproduction in Japan remains firmly situated within the domain of policy. Foucault's concept of biopolitics is instructive here, again, as it highlights the shift from sovereign power over territory to regulatory power over population (Foucault, 1976).¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. 2022. *White Paper on Suicide Prevention in Japan*. Tokyo: Cabinet Office.

¹²⁹ Foucault, Michel. 1976. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.

Population size, age structure, and fertility rates become objects of statistical monitoring and administrative intervention. Annual government reports detail demographic projections and assess the economic implications of population aging (NIPSSR, 2023). Reproduction is thus incorporated into macroeconomic planning, albeit through incentive-based mechanisms rather than overt discipline.

The distinction between coercive regulation and incentivized encouragement is significant. Japan's policies operate through subsidies, workplace reform initiatives, and public discourse on work–life balance. However, the framing of fertility as a matter of national economic concern situates private reproductive decisions within collective economic calculation. This framing does not reduce individuals to instruments of the state; nonetheless, it demonstrates that reproduction functions as a variable in policy deliberation. The state's concern with declining birth rates reflects an awareness that demographic contraction affects taxation, social security systems, and labor markets. The “crisis of care” (Fraser, 2016).¹³⁰ Advanced capitalist societies confront tensions between labor market flexibility and the reproduction of the labor force. In Japan, where aging is pronounced and immigration remains relatively limited compared to other OECD countries, the reproduction of the population acquires particular salience. Policy measures aimed at supporting families coexist with persistent gender asymmetries in unpaid labor and employment segmentation (MHLW, 2023).¹³¹ As a result, the encouragement of childbirth does not automatically resolve the structural conditions that shape reproductive decision-making.

The comparison with Federici's analysis of Nigeria therefore illuminates both continuity and divergence. In both cases, reproduction is embedded within economic governance. In Nigeria, structural adjustment reduced social supports and intensified reproductive precarity. In Japan, demographic decline prompts efforts to stimulate fertility through administrative and fiscal measures. The underlying commonality lies not in identical mechanisms but in the recognition that reproduction is inseparable from political economy. And those, biologically and socially, intertwined with reproduction are women.

¹³⁰ Fraser, Nancy. 2016. “Contradictions of Capital and Care.” *New Left Review* 100: 99–117.

¹³¹ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). 2023. *Basic Survey on Employment Structure*. Tokyo: MHLW.

Whether through austerity or incentive, the organization of population remains intertwined with state strategy.

Within the broader regime of managed intimacy described in this thesis, demographic policy interacts with patterns of labor, gender, and affective expectation. Incentives for childbirth operate within institutional structures that continue to distribute caregiving unevenly and to organize employment around long working hours. Consequently, reproductive outcomes reflect the intersection of policy design with established social arrangements. The analysis here does not posit direct continuity between early modern reproductive discipline and contemporary Japanese demographic policy. Rather, it situates Japan within a longer theoretical discussion in which reproduction is understood as a politically mediated dimension of social reproduction.

Financial insecurity and concerns about work–life balance are frequently cited as reasons for postponing marriage (Cabinet Office, 2021).¹³² At the same time, expectations regarding gender roles within marriage have undergone partial transformation. The asymmetry influences perceptions of marital desirability, particularly among women with stable employment.

When labor markets demand flexibility, geographic mobility, and extended working hours, the temporal resources required for caregiving become strained. If caregiving responsibilities remain unevenly distributed, the perceived cost of marriage and parenthood increases. Under such conditions, reproductive decisions become closely tied to employment stability and anticipated domestic workload.

The organization of masculinity also intersects with these trends. The salaryman model, historically characterized by long-term corporate loyalty and long working hours, leaves limited space for sustained domestic participation (Allison, 1994; OECD, 2023). Although working patterns are evolving, surveys continue to show relatively low levels of paternal involvement in early childcare compared to OECD averages (OECD Family Database, 2022).¹³³ Where expectations of intensive maternal responsibility persist, women may assess the compatibility of career and motherhood with caution.

¹³² *The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality*. Tokyo: Cabinet Office. 2021

¹³³ OECD Family Database. 2022. *Public Policies for Families and Children*. Paris: OECD.

The regime of managed intimacy described in Section 3.1 provides additional context. If emotional life is structured around role-specific segmentation, the transition to sustained reciprocal dependency within marriage may require negotiation across differentiated expectations. This does not imply that segmented subjectivity causes demographic decline. Rather, it suggests that institutional arrangements of work, gender, and affect shape the conditions under which long-term commitments are formed.

The family as a site of symbolic reproduction highlights the role of habitus in shaping reproductive strategy (Bourdieu, 1998).¹³⁴ Dispositions formed through education, labor, and gender socialization influence perceptions of obligation and possibility. When women anticipate disproportionate domestic responsibility and men anticipate constrained professional mobility in response to family demands, the timing and likelihood of marriage may shift. These shifts occur within a broader economic environment characterized by growth in non-regular employment, particularly among younger cohorts (MHLW, 2023).¹³⁵

In addition to delayed marriage, changes in fertility patterns reflect altered sequencing of life events. The age at first childbirth has increased steadily, and the proportion of births outside marriage remains relatively low compared to many Western countries (NIPSSR, 2023).¹³⁶ This suggests that marriage continues to function as the primary institutional framework for childbearing. However, as marriage is postponed or foregone, fertility correspondingly declines. The link between marriage and childbirth in Japan remains comparatively strong.

Urbanization further shapes these dynamics. Metropolitan regions such as Tokyo exhibit higher rates of single-person households and later marriage compared to rural prefectures (Statistics Bureau, 2023).¹³⁷ Urban labor markets offer expanded employment opportunities for women but also entail high living costs and intensive work schedules. These structural conditions interact with gender norms and institutional expectations.

¹³⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹³⁵ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). 2023. *Basic Survey on Employment Structure*. Tokyo: MHLW.

¹³⁶ National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR). 2023. *Population Projections for Japan*. Tokyo: NIPSSR.

¹³⁷ Statistics Bureau of Japan. 2023. *Statistical Handbook of Japan*. Tokyo: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

It is therefore analytically preferable to understand demographic change as the outcome of intersecting institutional configurations rather than as the consequence of individual preference alone. The commodification of certain forms of intimacy—through commercial entertainment, digital mediation, and segmented leisure—coexists with transformations in labor organization and gender division of care. Together, these factors contribute to the reorganization of social reproduction.

At this stage, it is important to avoid attributing demographic trends to a single explanatory variable. Fertility decline in Japan predates the contemporary expansion of digital intimacy and reflects long-term structural shifts in education, urbanization, and female labor participation. However, the broader regime of managed intimacy provides a lens through which to interpret how emotional expectations, labor constraints, and gender asymmetries intersect in decisions regarding marriage and parenthood.

The following section will examine more closely the economic dimension of this intersection, focusing on feminized precarity and the distribution of care labor within contemporary Japan.

3.3 Gendered Political Economy and Feminized Precarity

The reorganization of reproduction described in the previous section cannot be separated from transformations in labor structure. Social reproduction depends not only on fertility rates and household formation but also on the material conditions under which caregiving and wage labor are performed. In Japan, shifts toward labor flexibilization since the 1990s have altered the distribution of economic security across gender and age cohorts.

The expansion of non-regular employment has been particularly significant. Following the collapse of the asset price bubble in the early 1990s, labor market reforms encouraged greater flexibility in hiring practices. Fixed-term contracts, part-time positions, and dispatch work increased steadily (Gordon, 2017).¹³⁸ As of 2023, approximately 37% of Japan's workforce was classified as non-regular, with women disproportionately represented in these categories

¹³⁸ Gordon, Andrew. 1997. *The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

(MHLW, 2023).¹³⁹ Among employed women, more than half hold non-regular positions, compared to a substantially lower proportion among men.

Non-regular employment is associated with lower wages, reduced access to benefits, and limited opportunities for career advancement. These conditions influence household formation and reproductive decisions, but they also shape the organization of care labor more directly. When women are concentrated in flexible or part-time employment, their availability for unpaid domestic work may be implicitly assumed. The alignment between part-time labor and caregiving responsibility reinforces gender segmentation without formal prohibition.

Such segmentation reflects the structural externalization of care costs. Federici (2004)¹⁴⁰ emphasizes that capitalism depends upon unpaid reproductive labor while formally separating it from waged production. Nancy Fraser (2016)¹⁴¹ argues that contemporary capitalism generates recurrent “care crises” by destabilizing the conditions necessary for social reproduction. In Japan, long working hours for core male employees coexist with part-time or precarious employment for many women. This arrangement sustains corporate productivity while distributing the burden of domestic coordination unevenly.

The care sector itself exhibits similar characteristics. Childcare and eldercare occupations remain relatively low-paid compared to other professions requiring comparable levels of responsibility (OECD, 2022).¹⁴² Staff shortages in eldercare facilities have been widely reported, particularly in rural areas (MHLW, 2023).¹⁴³ Efforts to address these shortages have included the introduction of limited numbers of foreign caregivers under Economic Partnership Agreements with countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. Although the scale of such recruitment remains modest relative to overall demographic need (MHLW, 2023)¹⁴⁴, it reflects

¹³⁹ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). 2023. *Basic Survey on Employment Structure*. Tokyo: MHLW.

¹⁴⁰ Federici, Silvia. 2004. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.

¹⁴¹ Fraser, Nancy. 2016. “Contradictions of Capital and Care.” *New Left Review* 100: 99–117.

¹⁴² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2022. *Suicide Rates (Indicator)*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

¹⁴³ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). 2023. *Basic Survey on Employment Structure*. Tokyo: MHLW.

¹⁴⁴ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). 2023. *Basic Survey on Employment Structure*. Tokyo: MHLW.

an emerging reliance on transnational labor within feminized sectors. Scholarship on global care chains has demonstrated that care labor frequently moves across borders in response to demographic imbalance and wage differentials (Parreñas, 2001; Sassen, 2000).

At the same time, Japan's broader migration regime has historically included separate visa categories for entertainers, under which some migrant women have entered nightlife and hospitality industries. As discussed in Chapter II, vulnerabilities associated with employer sponsorship, debt-financed recruitment, and limited legal mobility have, in certain documented cases, facilitated transitions into precarious or exploitative erotic sectors. While care migration programs and entertainment visas operate under distinct regulatory frameworks, their coexistence highlights the stratified organization of feminized migrant labor. The demand for affective and bodily labor, whether in eldercare institutions or nightlife districts, intersects with differentiated forms of legal status and economic dependency.

The interaction between feminized precarity and reproductive policy is therefore complex. Pronatalist incentives operate within a labor market where many women face unstable employment trajectories. The expectation that women combine wage labor with primary caregiving responsibility may generate tension between economic participation and domestic obligation. Empirical studies indicate that career interruption following childbirth remains common, and re-entry into full-time permanent employment is comparatively limited (OECD Family Database, 2022).¹⁴⁵

At the same time, the persistence of the male breadwinner model at the upper tiers of corporate employment reinforces income disparities within households. Full-time regular employment continues to offer greater wage stability and promotion prospects. The coexistence of secure male employment and precarious female employment reproduces a hierarchical household structure even in dual-income families.

This configuration does not imply uniform experience across all social groups. Educational attainment, urban–rural differences, and sectoral variation influence labor outcomes. However, aggregate patterns demonstrate that labor flexibilization has intersected with gender norms in ways that affect the distribution of both paid and unpaid work.

¹⁴⁵ OECD Family Database. 2022. *Public Policies for Families and Children*. Paris: OECD.

Within the broader regime of managed intimacy, the commodification of affect in certain sectors can be understood as part of this labor transformation. Emotional labor is not confined to explicitly sexualized industries. Retail, hospitality, and caregiving occupations require sustained affective regulation similar to that described in Section 3.1. When such labor is performed under precarious contractual conditions, economic vulnerability may coexist with expectations of emotional availability.

Guy Standing's concept of the "precariat" describes workers who experience chronic insecurity, limited social protections, and fragmented occupational identity (Standing, 2011).¹⁴⁶ While the analysis is global in scope, aspects of this framework are relevant to younger Japanese cohorts navigating non-regular employment. Economic insecurity intersects with delayed marriage and deferred parenthood, but it also shapes long-term career planning and caregiving capacity.

The political economy of care in Japan thus reflects layered segmentation: between regular and non-regular workers, between male-dominated and female-dominated sectors, and between secure and precarious employment tracks. Reproductive policy addresses demographic output, yet the organization of labor determines the feasibility of sustained caregiving. Without structural redistribution of time and income, the encouragement of fertility operates within existing asymmetries.

This section has focused on the material dimension of social reproduction. The following section turns to masculinity and affective withdrawal, examining how male subject formation interacts with labor structure and relational expectations.

3.4 Masculinity, Authority, and Affective Displacement

The organization of social reproduction described in the previous sections presupposes not only feminized care labor but also specific configurations of masculinity. Masculinity in postwar Japan has been historically associated with corporate discipline, economic provision, and restrained emotional expression (Rohlen 1974; Connell 1995). This configuration did not

¹⁴⁶ Standing, Guy. 2011. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

emerge independently of the structures examined in Chapters I and II. Rather, it developed alongside institutional arrangements that displaced certain forms of affect into regulated commercial spaces.

Chapter I traced the formation of gender hierarchy and the internalization of emotional division. Chapter II demonstrated how sexual commerce became spatially concentrated and administratively regulated rather than eliminated. These two processes intersect in the stabilization of masculine authority. The corporate model required sustained temporal commitment to the firm and conformity to hierarchical norms (Gordon, 1997).¹⁴⁷ Emotional self-restraint and endurance were integral to this model. Vulnerability, domestic dependency, and affective need were not eliminated; they were relocated.

Anne Allison's ethnography of Tokyo hostess clubs illustrates how corporate masculinity and commercialized intimacy became structurally interlinked (Allison, 1994).¹⁴⁸ Hostess establishments functioned not merely as leisure venues but as extensions of corporate culture. Business negotiations, bonding rituals, and displays of status took place within spaces where attentiveness and admiration were provided by women trained in emotional modulation. These venues operated within legally tolerated zones, reflecting the administrative logic described in Chapter II. Masculine authority was reinforced through ritualized consumption of managed intimacy.

This displacement of affect does not imply insincerity or artificiality in all cases. Rather, it indicates that emotional expression was organized spatially and economically. Intimacy could be accessed without destabilizing the domestic or corporate order. The segmentation analyzed in 3.1 thus intersects with gender hierarchy: men's emotional needs were structured through channels that preserved their position within both workplace and household.

Since the 1990s, economic stagnation and labor market flexibilization have altered the conditions under which this model operates. Lifetime employment has become less secure for

¹⁴⁷ Gordon, Andrew. 1997. *The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁴⁸ Allison, Anne. 1994. *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

younger cohorts, and wage growth has slowed (OECD, 2023).¹⁴⁹ The stability that underpinned the breadwinner–homemaker arrangement has been partially eroded. In this context, public discourse has increasingly referred to «herbivore men» (*sōshoku danshi*), men perceived as less assertive in romantic pursuit and less committed to traditional markers of masculinity (Yamada, 2009). Survey data indicate a rise in the proportion of unmarried men expressing limited interest in marriage or sexual relationships (NIPSSR, 2022).¹⁵⁰

Interpretations of these trends vary. Some commentators frame them as cultural decline; others emphasize economic precarity. From the perspective of this thesis, these developments can be examined as adjustments within an existing regime of managed intimacy. When corporate stability weakens, the capacity to perform breadwinner masculinity is affected. If authority in the domestic sphere was historically anchored in economic provision, insecurity in employment may alter relational dynamics.

At the same time, alternative forms of mediated intimacy have expanded. Online pornography, virtual companionship services, and character-based consumption in manga and gaming environments provide affective engagement without requiring negotiation of long-term commitment. These modalities are not uniquely male, but usage patterns suggest gendered concentration in certain domains (JASE, 2021).¹⁵¹ The availability of segmented, on-demand intimacy parallels earlier commercial structures such as hostess clubs, though with reduced social ritual and lower financial threshold.

The phenomenon of *hikikomori*—commonly defined as prolonged social withdrawal lasting six months or longer—has attracted sustained attention in Japan since the late 1990s. Government surveys estimate that several hundred thousand individuals may meet the criteria, though precise numbers vary depending on definitional thresholds (Cabinet Office, 2022).¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2023. *OECD Employment Outlook 2023*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

¹⁵⁰ National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR). 2022. *The Fifteenth Japanese National Fertility Survey*. Tokyo: NIPSSR.

¹⁵¹ Japan Agency for Sexuality and Education (JASE). 2021. *Survey on Sexual Behaviors and Media Consumption*. Tokyo: JASE.

¹⁵² Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. 2022. *White Paper on Suicide Prevention in Japan*. Tokyo: Cabinet Office.

While withdrawal affects individuals across gender lines, a substantial proportion of identified cases are male, particularly within younger and middle-aged cohorts.

Public discourse frequently frames *hikikomori* in clinical or psychological terms. However, sociological analyses suggest that withdrawal cannot be reduced to individual pathology alone. Their emergence coincides temporally with the destabilization of lifetime employment and the expansion of non-regular labor following the economic stagnation of the 1990s (Allison, 2013; MHLW, 2023). For cohorts socialized into expectations of stable corporate integration, the erosion of that pathway created uncertainty regarding masculine adulthood.

As discussed in Chapter I, gender hierarchy in modern Japan developed in tandem with institutionalized emotional discipline. Masculine identity became closely aligned with corporate endurance, economic provision, and restrained affect. The salaryman model did not simply organize employment; it structured male adulthood. Entry into full-time corporate work functioned as a marker of social maturity and relational legitimacy.

When this pathway becomes inaccessible or unstable, the symbolic architecture of masculinity is affected. Qualitative studies of withdrawn men often report feelings of inadequacy, failure to meet familial expectations, or anxiety regarding employment prospects (Allison, 2013).¹⁵³ In such contexts, withdrawal may represent disengagement from a social script that appears unattainable.

The connection to the regime of managed intimacy becomes visible when withdrawal is considered alongside the displacement mechanisms described earlier. Commercial spaces such as hostess clubs historically allowed men to perform authority and desirability within bounded environments. These spaces did not require long-term relational reciprocity; they provided structured affirmation. Digital alternatives now offer similar possibilities through online gaming, streaming platforms, and virtual companionship services.

For some individuals, however, participation in even these mediated forms may be limited by economic constraint or psychological inhibition. Withdrawal thus represents a position at the margin of the system rather than outside it. The hikikomori subject remains embedded in

¹⁵³ Allison, Anne. 2013. *Precarious Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

familial households, often supported financially by parents. This prolongation of co-residence reflects broader demographic patterns of delayed independence (NIPSSR, 2023).¹⁵⁴

From a social reproduction perspective, *hikikomori* complicates intergenerational dependency structures. Parents, aging themselves, may provide sustained material support to adult sons who are not integrated into wage labor. The gendered distribution of care described in previous sections becomes relevant here. Mothers, in particular, are often reported to manage daily interaction and mediation within households containing withdrawn members (Allison, 2013).¹⁵⁵ Care thus extends beyond childcare into adult dependency. The extension of maternal caregiving into adult dependency recalls the symbolic structure identified in Chapter I. There, commercial intimacy was shown to be framed in maternal terms, with female service positioned as affective regulation rather than reciprocal desire. The literary example analyzed earlier illustrated how masculine vulnerability was accommodated through a feminized role that combined bodily service with emotional containment.

In the case of *hikikomori*, a similar asymmetry appears within the domestic sphere. When adult sons remain in the parental household and daily maintenance is undertaken primarily by mothers, care is prolonged beyond conventional developmental boundaries. The dependency observed in these households does not replicate commercial intimacy; however, it reflects the same underlying configuration in which male vulnerability is absorbed by feminized labor rather than reorganized through mutual partnership. The displacement described in Chapter II, where intimacy was spatially regulated, finds a parallel here in temporal extension: dependency is neither publicly disruptive nor institutionally restructured, but contained within the private household.

It would be bold to interpret *hikikomori* as a direct product of sexual commodification or digital mediation. Rather, it can be situated within the intersection of labor insecurity, masculine expectation, and segmented intimacy. When corporate integration functions as the primary avenue for adult male identity, and when that integration becomes uncertain, alternative scripts

¹⁵⁴ National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR). 2023. *Population Projections for Japan*. Tokyo: NIPSSR.

¹⁵⁵ Allison, Anne. 2013. *Precarious Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

may lack equivalent legitimacy. Withdrawal becomes one possible response to structural dislocation.

The persistence of *hikikomori* also reflects temporal dimensions discussed in Section 3.3. Stable adulthood in the postwar period followed a relatively linear sequence: education, corporate employment, marriage, fatherhood. Contemporary labor markets produce less predictable trajectories. Fragmented employment and delayed marriage disrupt this sequencing. For some men, the transition to independent household formation is deferred indefinitely. The disruption of linear adulthood trajectories may also be considered in relation to the broader regime of emotional and social discipline discussed in Chapter I. Both masculine and feminine subjectivities were shown to be shaped by sustained self-regulation; men through sexual restraint and corporate endurance, women through affective accommodation and relational management. These forms of discipline presupposed stable institutional pathways through which effort was translated into status and belonging. When such pathways become uncertain, the justification for prolonged self-restraint may weaken. In this sense, *hikikomori* can be understood not as a dramatic rupture but as a limit condition of sustained disciplinary integration. Withdrawal does not express rebellion against social order; rather, it reflects difficulty inhabiting established scripts under altered economic and relational conditions.

Importantly, the phenomenon should not be romanticized as resistance or overstated as epidemic collapse. Many withdrawn individuals eventually re-enter education or employment through targeted programs. Government initiatives have expanded counseling services and community outreach (Cabinet Office, 2022).¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, it might not a matter of casualty that many dystopian social attitudes are reflected, or at least studied, only in Japan.

In relation to Chapter II, it is noteworthy that Japan's regulatory management of sexual commerce coexists with limited large-scale unrest or visible crisis regarding gender relations. Spatial containment and commercial displacement of intimacy contribute to surface stability. Withdrawal, by contrast, represents a quieter disruption. It does not challenge public order; it reduces participation.

¹⁵⁶ Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. 2022. *White Paper on Suicide Prevention in Japan*. Tokyo: Cabinet Office.

Masculinity under managed intimacy thus exhibits differentiated outcomes. Some men continue to inhabit corporate and familial roles. Others engage in segmented digital or commercial forms of affective interaction. A smaller proportion disengage more extensively. These variations occur within a shared structural framework in which emotional expression is regulated, labor is stratified, and intimacy is segmented.

The analysis of *hikikomori* therefore deepens the argument of this chapter. Social reproduction depends upon the integration of successive generations into economic and relational institutions. When integration falters, dependency patterns shift. Withdrawal does not dismantle the regime of managed intimacy: it just reveals its limits.

It is important to avoid overstating uniformity. Paternal leave uptake, while still limited, has increased gradually in recent years (OECD Family Database, 2022).¹⁵⁷ Nonetheless, aggregate patterns indicate that masculine identity remains closely tied to employment status and economic capacity.

The connection to Chapters I and II lies in the persistence of displacement mechanisms. The regulatory tolerance of commercial intimacy, the spatial containment of sexual districts, and the normalization of emotional segmentation have historically functioned to stabilize gender hierarchy. When economic transformation destabilizes the breadwinner model, these mechanisms do not disappear; they are reconfigured through digital mediation and alternative consumption practices.

Masculinity under managed intimacy therefore exhibits both continuity and adaptation. Authority is no longer guaranteed by lifetime employment, yet the structural separation between domestic reproduction and commodified affect remains visible. Emotional needs may be addressed through segmented channels rather than renegotiated within the household. This configuration interacts with the reproductive patterns described in 3.2: if partnership requires sustained reciprocity and shared temporal commitment, the persistence of displacement mechanisms may influence relational formation.

This analysis does not attribute demographic change to masculine withdrawal alone. Rather, it situates masculine subject formation within the broader regime that organizes intimacy

¹⁵⁷ OECD Family Database. 2022. *Public Policies for Families and Children*. Paris: OECD.

spatially, economically, and affectively. The stability of social reproduction depends upon the interaction of these dimensions.

3.5 Conclusion

Cultural production does not mechanically determine social structure, yet it participates in the circulation of symbols through which social arrangements are rendered intelligible. In Japan, the visual and narrative representation of femininity, youth, and intimacy has developed alongside the institutional configurations examined in previous sections. Rather than treating media as causal agents, this section considers how certain recurrent motifs correspond to the organization of gendered labor, affective segmentation, and managed sexuality.

Postwar popular culture has long incorporated stylized representations of youthful femininity. Manga, anime, and idol industries frequently foreground visual codes associated with innocence, emotional accessibility, and exaggerated vulnerability (Kinsella, 1998; Azuma, 2009). These representations do not exhaust the diversity of Japanese media production; however, their prominence in both domestic consumption and international circulation is notable. Character-based attachment often centers on modular traits, voice tone, costume, personality archetype, rather than sustained narrative depth (Azuma, 2009). Emotional investment becomes oriented toward reproducible visual elements.

From a gender perspective, such imagery often positions femininity as available for observation and affective projection. The “male gaze” in cinema emphasizes how visual regimes can structure spectatorship around asymmetrical desire (Mulvey, 1975). While Japanese media traditions differ from classical Hollywood cinema, comparable dynamics of stylized visibility are present in certain genres. The aestheticization of youth and emotional receptivity intersects with broader patterns in which female affect is commodified and regulated.

The adult video industry, which expanded significantly from the 1980s onward, similarly organizes intimacy into discrete, reproducible formats. Performances are categorized, distributed, and consumed through standardized channels. The segmentation of desire into searchable and marketable units parallels the temporal and spatial segmentation described in Chapter II. Intimacy becomes framed within explicit contractual and visual boundaries.

It is important to avoid conflating representation with lived experience. Media consumption does not automatically translate into social practice. Nevertheless, symbolic repetition contributes to normalization. When commercial and cultural forms consistently depict intimacy as staged, time-limited, and asymmetrical, these representations coexist with institutional arrangements that manage sexuality through zoning and administrative categorization.

Urban space reinforces this symbolic layering. Districts such as Akihabara and Kabukichō concentrate themed entertainment, character goods, and nightlife venues within visually saturated environments. The density of signage, animated displays, and promotional imagery contributes to a landscape in which identity and desire are mediated through surfaces. While comparisons to cinematic depictions of hyper-mediated urbanity—such as *Blade Runner*(1982)—are often made at the level of visual resemblance, the relevance here is analytic rather than aesthetic. Both environments foreground technologically mediated display as a primary mode of interaction. In Tokyo, however, this mediation operates within a stable regulatory framework rather than dystopian collapse.

The idol industry offers another example of managed intimacy. Idol performers cultivate images of accessibility while maintaining strict boundaries regarding personal life. Fan interaction is structured through controlled events, handshake sessions, and mediated communication platforms. Emotional proximity is simulated yet regulated. This configuration mirrors the broader regime in which intimacy is neither prohibited nor fully reciprocal, but carefully staged.

These cultural forms coexist with demographic trends described in Section 3.2. Marriage remains the primary institutional framework for childbirth, yet partnership formation has been delayed or foregone by significant segments of the population. Media representations that detach desire from reproduction do not cause this shift; however, they provide symbolic environments in which intimacy is imagined independently of long-term domestic obligation.

The analysis of *hikikomori* in Section 3.4 further illuminates this relationship. Digital media and character-based consumption offer affective engagement without requiring participation in conventional adulthood trajectories. Withdrawal does not necessarily imply isolation from mediated intimacy; it may involve immersion in alternative symbolic worlds. These worlds do not abolish social norms but reorganize them through representation.

Taken together, cultural representation participates in the circulation of managed intimacy. The visual economy of youth, accessibility, and segmentation corresponds to institutional patterns in which sexuality is spatially contained, labor is stratified, and emotional expression is role-specific. Cultural production does not stand outside these arrangements; it articulates and refracts them.

Chapter III has examined the social consequences of the regime outlined in Chapters I and II across multiple domains: subject formation, reproduction, labor organization, masculinity, and cultural representation. The persistence of demographic contraction, feminized precarity, affective displacement, and mediated intimacy does not point toward singular causation. Rather, it reflects the coherence of a system in which repression is not simply prohibitive but organizational. Sexuality is managed, care is unevenly distributed, and vulnerability is displaced across institutional boundaries.

The next step is not to propose reform or prediction, but to recognize the structural interdependence of these domains. Social reproduction in contemporary Japan unfolds within a framework that integrates emotional discipline, administrative regulation, labor stratification, and symbolic circulation. Understanding this interdependence clarifies how gender hierarchy persists not through overt coercion but through patterned segmentation of intimacy and care.

Conclusion

The trajectory of this thesis has moved from the historical and emotional foundations of Japanese social organization, through the administrative and spatial mechanisms that structure its sexual economy, to the contemporary social consequences that emerge from the conjunction of repression, gender hierarchy, labor segmentation, and institutional ambiguity. What began as an inquiry into prostitution in Japan has unfolded into an examination of a broader political system: one in which emotional discipline, gendered power, and regulated visibility converge to organize intimacy, desire, and reproduction. The argument developed across these chapters has shown that prostitution in Japan is not an isolated subculture nor an economic irregularity, but the visible expression of a deeper social architecture.

From the outset, the thesis positioned prostitution not as a market phenomenon but as a political technology, a continuation of the historical processes of subordination described by Silvia Federici and a contemporary expression of the gendered power dynamics analyzed by Joan Scott. The Japanese case further demonstrates that political domination does not always operate through explicit coercion. It can be exercised through silence, emotional duality, spatial management, and administrative indirection. The *honne/tatemae* grammar explored in Chapter I provides a conceptual frame for understanding how emotional repression and gender hierarchy intertwine: how individuals learn to withhold interior life, how families become sites of asymmetrical emotional labor, and how the corporate-state reproduces the same dual structure on a national scale.

The consequence is a society in which desire is not eradicated but reorganized. As shown in Chapter II, the state does not eliminate prostitution through legal prohibition; nor does it normalize it through open legalization. Instead, it governs sexual commerce through classification, licensing, zoning, and administrative discretion. Prostitution, in the narrow sense defined by the 1956 “Anti-Prostitution Law”, becomes only a small component of a larger erotic economy regulated through business categories and spatial distribution. This ambiguity is not a legislative oversight but a technique of governance: the result is a *fūzoku* system integrated into urban economies, corporate culture, and everyday practices, yet formally detached from explicit political recognition.

Chapter III extended this analysis by tracing the consequences of this regime across social reproduction, labor, masculinity, and cultural representation. The demographic anxieties of contemporary Japan—delayed marriage, declining birth rates, non-linear life trajectories—cannot be understood apart from the gendered distribution of care and the temporal inequalities generated by long-hour corporate labor and feminized precarity. Social reproduction, as theorized by Federici and Fraser, reveals its full significance in this context: the encouragement of fertility does not alter the underlying organization of care. Women continue to absorb domestic responsibility, while the care sector itself becomes segmented across class, contract type, and increasingly, carefully regulated migrant labor streams.

Masculinity, too, is shaped by the same structures. The emotional suppression required by corporate culture, the displacement of vulnerability into commercial intimacy, and the emergence of alternative masculine forms—salaryman endurance, *sōshoku danshi* disaffiliation, *hikikomori* withdrawal—are not isolated phenomena but varied outcomes of a

single emotional regime. The *hikikomori* case demonstrates the limit point of the system: when institutional pathways for adulthood destabilize, the subject trained to repress vulnerability and perform composure may find no available script to inhabit. Withdrawal thus becomes not a rebellion but a structural suspension, a privatized interruption of the disciplinary order. The fragile, precarious, or withdrawn male subject is not an anomaly but a figure that reveals how the existing regime of managed intimacy absorbs unmet relational demands. They are displaced. For individuals who struggle to inhabit established scripts, commercial intimacy continues to function as one of the few socially legible and institutionally tolerated forms of affective interaction.

The connection to the arguments of Chapter I becomes visible here. The maternalization of women's emotional labor, whether enacted within commercial intimacy or within the domestic sphere, recurs as a fundamental principle of the social order. Cultural representation, explored in Section 3.5, further reflects these structural dynamics. The stylization of femininity, the segmentation of intimacy into reproducible formats, and the proliferation of mediated desire in anime, manga, idol culture, and adult video industries mirror the institutional segmentation of sexuality described in Chapter II. Cultural production does not generate the social order, but it expresses and stabilizes it. Its recurring motifs—feminine availability, emotional accessibility without reciprocity, intimacy without relational obligation—are aligned with the broader organization of managed intimacy.

Across these domains, what emerges is a portrait of a society in which contradiction is not resolved but distributed; in which emotional repression is not a cultural idiosyncrasy but a technique of governance; and in which women, as a historical class, carry the weight of both domestic and commercial care. Japan is not unique in this regard, but its combination of duality, administrative technique, and gendered emotional labor makes it an analytically illuminating case.

In closing, it is fitting to return to Fosco Maraini, whose *Ore giapponesi* accompanied the conceptual horizon of this study. Maraini did not merely observe Japan; he listened to its silences, its absences, its suspended spaces. He recognized the evidences of a society in which emotional life is disciplined to the point of requiring institutionalized outlets. This thesis extends that insight to prostitution, arguing that commercial sexual labor functions within the same emotional economy as pachinko, hostess clubs, and mediated intimacy. What Maraini

glimpsed in the rain of steel balls and the glow of neon was not decadence but structure: a social machinery that absorbs, redirects, and neutralizes the contradictions of everyday life.

What this thesis ultimately contributes is an analysis of how power operates through intimacy: how repression produces commercialized outlets; how gender hierarchy produces emotional labor; how administrative structures produce zones of tolerated exception; and how the female body, as Federici and Scott remind us, becomes the site upon which political order is both reproduced and concealed. Prostitution in Japan is therefore not an anomaly nor an archaism. It is a political institution. It is woven into the temporal rhythms of labor, the emotional architecture of the family, the spatial logic of urban governance, and the symbolic codes of cultural production. It is a testament to the enduring coherence of a system that stabilizes itself not through transparency but through silence, segmentation, and ritualized displacement.

The purpose of this study has not been to judge but to reveal. And to reveal, perhaps, what Maraini himself understood: that beneath the polished surfaces of conformity lie the profound emotional and political mechanisms through which a society sustains itself — not by solving its contradictions, but by organizing them.

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