Japanese Reflections on World War II and the American Occupation

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The Call for Volunteers

As the American force grew and Camp Chickamauga in Beppu settled in as the regional Occupation headquarters, the thousands of men assigned to Oita began looking for entertainment outlets. Some Japanese have speculated that Beppu was spared any bombing because it was already designated to be the base of operations for this region. The reasons for this are twofold. First, Beppu had no strategic factories or military bases, thus there was no need to destroy it. This simplified setting up a base, as no reconstruction of the city had to be undertaken from the beginning. Second, Beppu was known as a holiday destination renowned for its hot springs and entertainment, or pleasure, district. Within the entertainment district were restaurants, bars, and brothels. The army knew that it would need all of these to keep the troops relaxed and comfortable. The streets of Beppu soon became crowded with young women flocking to the town. For some time all of this was strictly legal, as on August 18, 1945, the Interior Ministry, working under the guidance of the Occupation Headquarters in Tokyo, authorized the opening of special brothels for American soldiers. This was something encouraged by the Japanese for fear that without this outlet, their women would be raped by the Americans, not only shaming the women and their families, but threatening the “pure blood line of the Japanese people.” This concept was called the *Yamato nadeshiko*, or “personification of an idealized Japanese woman.” A radio message was sent to prefectural governors and city officials, as well as police chiefs throughout Japan instructing them to open and supervise these “comfort stations.” They then issued a call to collect as many women as possible for the operation. In other words, it was a patriotic duty of the city leaders to open the houses and for the women to volunteer themselves for this service. A fund of 100 million yen was established under the Recreation Amusement Association (RAA) to fund these enterprises and on August 28 a sign appeared on the streets with the following message:

For all Japanese women! Please cooperate by becoming comfort women for the American troops as part of the national urgency to heal the wounds of the war. We need female workers between the ages of 18 and 25. Free accommodations, clothes, and food will be provided.
It did not take long for the troops in Oita and surrounding towns to begin taking advantage of this service. As soon as the first troops arrived in October 1945, women appeared on the streets. These early prostitutes were destitute, unregistered, and dressed in wartime work pants and clogs. Some sold themselves merely for a bowl of noodles. By early 1946, the brothels started to appear, mostly along Beppu’s Nagarekawa Street, which was a straight shot up a slight hill from the port of Beppu heading toward Camp Chickamauga. Two types of prostitutes competed for business now, those who worked in the legal establishments and those growing numbers who worked the bars and streets. The street girls were labeled “Pan-Pan girls,” and over the years even the women in the brothels gained this working title. The derivation of the name “Pan-Pan” has competing explanations. One holds that when the soldiers called for service from the ladies, they clapped their hands for attention, making the sound “pan-pan.” Another explanation was that in the early days, Japanese women were so desperate they would exchange their bodies for two loaves of pan, the word for bread in Japanese, thus “pan-pan.”

The houses sprang up quickly. When the business was in full force, there were over 100 legal brothels in operation, with between 800 and 1,000 Pan-Pan girls working throughout the city of Beppu. The total population of Beppu at that time, outside the military presence, was close to 100,000 people, so their presence was known to all. Like most of Japan, food and clothing in the Oita area were at a premium. Therefore, applicants for employment in the houses were not hard to come by. The brothels, called kashiseki (rental rooms) by the local populace, were usually named after the owner, such as “Nagata House,” “Inoue House” and, taking on an American flavor, “George House.” As the number of troops increased and the money flowed, the days of the early prostitutes selling themselves for noodles transitioned into brightly painted women vying for customers.

The kashiseki were divided into different territories, and clearly demarcated between those for white soldiers (hokobu kashiseki) and those for black soldiers (hamawaki kashiseki). American racism was alive and well, even in Beppu. It was noted by the local populace that the white soldiers and black soldiers never crossed over into the others’ territory. In additional, while these houses were available to all Americans, they were frequented mostly by enlisted men up to the rank of master sergeant. Most commissioned officers did not use the houses, but spent their time in clubs or cabarets with hostesses and dancers, most of whom were in fact just higher priced Pan-Pan girls.2

2 Ibid., pp. 194-197.
The response of the local citizenry to the growing presence of the Pan-Pan girls was mixed. The girls on the street were impossible to miss, even for the children. This memory comes from a boy who was a primary school student during the Occupation.

I remember seeing lots of street girls, the Pan-Pan girls. They were young and looked very rich in their colorful dresses and makeup. When the Americans finally left Beppu, the train station was filled with Pan-Pan girls saying goodbye and crying. The Japanese never kiss in public, but there were lots of soldiers kissing lots of those girls.3

Their presence proved so ubiquitous that some schoolchildren wrote a letter to the police commissioner about what they saw in the streets. It is not clear if this was a voluntary action, or encouraged by adults. In any case, the children pleaded, “Please hear us out. We feel the way the women present themselves is bad, and it makes us feel ashamed. We think what they are doing is the same as dogs and cats. Please help them.”4

While most people recall the Pan-Pan girls with a distinct sense of regret, there remains a lingering acceptance and absence of harsh judgment toward them when recalling those years. “Many of the girls working in Beppu came from the island of Shikoku and places outside Beppu. The girls from Beppu who did this went to other places, like Fukuoka,” remembers Tokie Ono, who saw the girls every day as she sold fruit from her family’s shop on Beppu’s main street. “For me, this was just their job. It was a hard time, and they made money to send to their parents.”

Another woman echoes Mrs. Ono’s words, saying:

We didn’t like it, but I can’t be critical of them. In Japan, it’s always been a woman’s job to put food on the table. If the man of a family has a job and brings money home, all is well. But if he doesn’t have a job, the woman still has to put food on the table. At that time, job opportunities were limited for women. The Pan-Pan girls had to do what they could to provide for their families when their fathers, husbands, and brother were either dead in the war or couldn’t find jobs. To me, this was just their job. It was a hard time, and they had to make money to support their families or send to their parents.5

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3 Interview with Sadayoshi Yutani.
5 Interview with Nobuko Takahashi.
The reflective view of many men proves generally more harsh, but also mixed. Even some acknowledged that the presence of the girls in Beppu made contributions to the economy and, at a minimum, kept the soldiers away from other Japanese women. In fact, some acknowledge, nothing much changed except the vast number of girls, as prostitution had been legal in Japan well before the Occupation. Umon Takamatsu, whose mother taught him to withstand pain and suffering without handouts, says, “During the Occupation there were lots of problems in Beppu with prostitution. I can understand that the girls had to do this to make a living, but.... Well, it changed Beppu.”

On a school trip to Beppu from Saiki one day, Minoru Kanda had his first view of Americans. They were strolling in the street with the Pan-Pan girls, he recalls, which gave him a “bad impression” that he still holds today. But he also acknowledges that the red light district made Beppu an active and prosperous town while other places suffered. “In the daytime, there were 100,000 people in the town, but at night it seemed to grow to 200,000! The prosperity ended after the Korean War, when the soldiers left.” Toyoki Goto agrees, saying, “It was a job, their line of work.” Another grudgingly accepts the activities of the Pan-Pan girls from his fear of what American soldiers would do to Japanese women if they had no access to the prostitutes. “In Beppu it wasn’t like the Americans were raping the women, and besides, Beppu had girls like this even before and during the war.” The same rationale was used in the town of Usa, which held a small contingency of Americans as they dismantled the Usa Naval Air Base. “There were about 85 American soldiers in Usa. Some of the women in a restricted area, called the pleasure quarter, got along very well with them. This place was first set up by the Japanese naval forces when they stationed here, and now they just switched their clientele to the Americans.”

Closing the Houses – Sort Of

The presence of the brothels and Pan-Pan girls, while initially serving both Japanese concerns for maintaining the purity of their culture and American soldiers’ sexual gratification, was not without serious consequences that brought occasional policy shifts. The most serious problem concerned the quick spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). One spot check found that 90% of the RAA prostitutes had contacted at least one type of

6 Interviews Interview with Nobuko Takahashi, Takafumi Yoshimura, Minoru Kanda, and Toyoki Goto.
STD. American officials were shocked to discover that these diseases ran rampant among the soldiers. In one division, 70% had an STD. The cause is not surprising, according to a Beppu brothel owner at the time, when one discovers that each girl serviced between ten and eighteen soldiers a day. This brought a closure to the RAA facilities in 1946 and threw the business into a tailspin. The American military made all these facilities off limits, visiting the owners and telling them the system was over.

A former brothel owner in Beppu recounts what happened next:

The military authorities put out an order that our places were “off limits” now. The women were worried, “What will become of us if the soldiers stop coming?” We all attended a protest meeting at City Hall organized by the association of brothel owners and called by our Union President Nagata and Association President Nishida. We discussed the life and death nature of this decision for our livelihood, but we left feeling that the situation would not get better.7

This particular owner was visited by an American officer at his establishment and told to close it down, but he did not want to give the women the bad news. The following day, when the officer called to check if the women had been brought together to hear the news, the answer was no. That evening, the officer returned to the house and spoke to about 50 to 60 prostitutes, informing them that it was not good for women to do this work, the business was shutting down, and they had to leave. Some of the women tried to quit and looked for other jobs; however, change proved difficult. Most had no training or skills that prepared them to work, for example, as office ladies. So they went back to work as Pan-Pan girls.8

Over the years of Occupation and into the Korean War, Beppu witnessed several attempts to close the businesses. These included everything from raids by Military Police to civilian enforcement of Japanese antiproststitution laws. But the customers kept coming, and the Pan-Pan girls and their bosses continued to service them.

The American military authorities periodically disseminated regulations to curb behavior detrimental to army discipline, including visits to the local brothels and other nightspots frequented by the soldiers. It speaks to not only the spread of STDs, but also black market activities practiced throughout the Occupation and Korean War deployment in Beppu. The

7 Saga, p. 200.
8 Ibid.
following policy circulated around town in October 1954, when the Pan-Pan houses were illegal but still active. It stipulates:

In response to many questions which were asked concerning the placing of certain bars in Beppu "Off Limits," the following is a statement of policy. A commanding officer is responsible for the health and welfare of his men as well as for the training and combat readiness. Since he has this great responsibility, he is also given great authority. He can, in the interest of the welfare of his men, dictate where they may go and what they may do, even during their off duty hours. This right or duty is established not only by army regulations, but also by army custom.

Concerning bars, cabarets, tea houses, cafes, restaurants and similar business establishments, the following acts or omissions are felt to be undesirable for health, welfare and discipline of this command.

1. Failure to maintain proper sanitary conditions.
2. Failure to maintain proper venereal disease control measures.
3. Selling or buying black market merchandise, such as cigarettes and whisky on which Japanese or United States of America tax has not been paid.
4. Selling or buying narcotics or other harmful drugs.
5. Selling alcoholic beverages to intoxicated individuals.
6. Selling alcoholic beverages to soldiers after 2330 hours on week nights or 2400 hours on Saturday night or nights preceding announced army holidays.
7. Extending credit to military personnel.
8. Accepting "Military Payment Certificates" in payment for goods or services.
9. Accepting identification cards, identification tags, Geneva Convention cards or similar documents as a collateral for goods or services.
10. Failing to maintain order in the establishment.

Owners of business establishments must meet the foregoing provisions to insure the continued patronage of U.S. Security Forces personnel at their establishments. Those who do not will be promptly placed "Off Limits."

Roy E. Linguist, Brigadier General, Commanding

The Military Police were sent to raid known prostitution establishments, mainly to chase the soldiers out rather than to arrest the women. Such raids

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were commonplace, and, though irritating, the brothel owners and the women working there grew to expect this interference. In some instances, however, the Military Police crossed one line too many when the raids trampled on Japanese culture, sometimes quite literally. The following letter, which must have elicited no small amount of laughter at base headquarters as it was delivered, was written by the Provost Marshal of Camp Chickamauga to Beppu City leaders regarding a complaint from local brothel owners.

> It has been brought to my attention that Military Policemen under my command have been entering houses of prostitution in search of soldiers without first removing their boots. I regret these actions and have taken immediate action to insure strict compliance with the Japanese custom of removing shoes or covering them with suitable protective covering. I want to assure each house owner that future incidents will not occur again as all Military Policemen have been personally instructed by me on this matter. Charles W. Hill, Captain, MPC Provost Marshal

Basically, the demand was so great, and the local Oita economy so dependent on them, the Pan-Pan girls were allowed to continue their trade, even though it was technically illegal to do so. As the nature of the work changed, life became more complicated and difficult for many of the owners and prostitutes. One local observer recounts that, even though closures due to sanitary conditions continued on and off for years, soldiers kept coming and business was strong. But the businesses were not regulated now, and problems arose. He recounts those days, writing:

> The American soldiers didn’t know Japanese and didn’t know how to count the Japanese yen, so they got cheated by pimps and were brought into Pan-Pan houses instead of promised hotels. House managers, cycle rickshaw workers, and pimps worked together to trick soldiers. However, the money was split between these three and the Pan-Pan girl. So the girls ended up only getting one-fourth of what the soldiers paid.

Because the trade was not regulated and health checks not enforced, STDs continued to infect both prostitutes and clients. Houses offering only oral

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10 Beppu City Library Archives, Letter from Charles W. Hill, Capt., MPC, Provost Marshal. Title and date not available.
11 Saga, p. 197.
sex became popular among troops worried about catching the disease, but they, like other places, were eventually shut down during the series of antiprostitution crackdowns. It didn’t matter much, as houses just relocated and kept up their trade. In some cases they moved from the designated red light district to more mainstream communities to avoid detection.Recalls police officer Toyoji Koya:

Some women rented rooms in a house in Soen. In fact, this was not an uncommon practice. But with people busy coming and going, they’d be discovered and shut down. We kept tabs on these girls, because the houses were illegal. We even kept records on them when they moved houses. The women working in the bars, however, were registered as legal, and we didn’t bother them. The Occupation forces were mostly worried about STDs, but there were so many loopholes, the businesses continued, whether legal or illegal. The most severe punishment for the girls was forced hospitalization if they were discovered to carry a disease.12

Many brothel owners complained that Americans refused to pay for services while providing an IOU, which might never be paid. But because it was illegal to offer the Americans their services, they could not report the soldiers to military authorities. So they had to take the loss. Some girls grew addicted to alcohol, while others became drug addicts, mostly through the temptations offered by American soldiers who brought drugs to Beppu from outside Japan. Former Beppu policeman Koya, who was assigned to work with the American Military Police, explains why the camp commanders were so concerned to shut down certain establishments. “The drugs, mostly ephedrine, came from the Occupation forces. They sold drugs to get money so they could visit the girls. We wanted to control it, but there were too many soldiers involved, and we couldn’t deal with all of them.”13

Crazy Mary and Miss Beppu

The drugs, alcohol, and STDs took its toll on many of the women. One infamous story of a Pan-Pan girl crushed by the dark side of the Occupation is that of Beppu’s “Crazy Mary.”

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12 Ibid., pp. 202-208.
13 Ibid.
It was said that “When Mary moves, we will know where the army is moving. When the fleet comes in, Mary appears.” She had a dog that performed tricks in front of Beppu station. When soldiers walked by, she’d hold out her hand and say, “Give me money.” No one knew if she was in her right mind or not. Sometimes, she walked the red light district of Nagarekawa Street shooting a gun in the air. Other times, she hid in the Akiba shrine from the MPs. It was said that she was married to a soldier from San Francisco, only for half a year, before he was killed in Korea.¹⁴

Not all the girls working in Beppu despaired of their fate or, like Mary, went crazy. Some of the entrepreneurial ones adjusted to the new legal realities and thrived, at least until the Americans left the city in 1956. One especially popular lady was known as “Miss Beppu.” This lady plied her trade between Nagarekawa Street and the Ginzagai, which served as entrance to the center of Beppu. The area was called “Pan-Pan Market.” It was a place where pimps and cycle rickshaws stationed themselves, waiting for soldiers to walk by. In most cases, the drivers took the soldiers to their respective employers’ house. A few of the girls, however, had picked up business skills by this time, and owned their own entertainment room, even owning their own rickshaws with their own drivers. “Miss Beppu” was one of those. She wore Chanel No. 5 perfume, likely a gift from an admiring soldier, and always carried a folding fan when riding in her rickshaw. She wasted no time on the common soldier, but sent suggestive glances from the rickshaw to white soldiers above the rank of Master Sergeant. She lived in Ukiyoshiji, the main street for the Pan-Pan houses, in a room decorated with lace curtains and beautiful flowers. According to local lore, she was reputed to have a gorgeous bed behind those curtains. Many Beppu citizens were fascinated by her brashness and a bit envious of her success. Her performance in the street and behind her curtain was put on hold, it was said, only when her younger brother came home from university. On those days, she wore no makeup and changed into a sweet sister.¹⁵

This was also a time when many Beppu housewives operated as part-time Pan-Pan girls. Wives would leave home as if going to the grocery store for the family, and take a side route to one of the houses. Sometimes they would bring the soldiers to their home, sending their children outside for a while. When asked by a friend why she did this, one woman explained

¹⁴ Saga, p. 197.
¹⁵ Ibid.
simply that her husband made too little money, and this was an easy way to support her family.\footnote{Ibid., p. 210.}

Despite the give and take between the Pan-Pan girls and the American military establishment over the years between 1945 and 1956 and the problems brought from black market and drug problems, overall the presence of American military in Beppu and surrounding towns helped raise the standard of living far more than if they had been absent. From the brothels in the red light district to the fruit stands on main street, to the well-paying jobs available in carpentry and food preparation inside Camp Chickamauga, opportunities grew more plentiful and extra incomes helped people rebuild their lives.

The Korean War and Exit from Beppu

The Korean War was a particularly booming period, as soldiers flooded into the town with money to spare, and the American government made sure its soldiers lived comfortably as they either prepared for battle only hundreds of miles away in Korea, or came back for R&R, or rest and recreation. The only down side to this, as remembered by many from that period, was the sadness with which people in Beppu learned of the many deaths of young men they had only recently come to know, if only casually.

The command structure of Camp Chickamauga was transformed during the Korean War, and this change brought new prestige to Beppu when it played host to higher levels of commanding generals. It also presaged the transition from the wars of the Pacific and Korea to one in Southeast Asia. General Mark Clark, known widely for his role in the European theater during World War II, was one of those officers who visited Beppu to inspect his troops as commander of the Far East Command in the United Nations forces. Another was General William S. Westmoreland, destined only a decade later to become the commanding general of American forces in Vietnam. Westmoreland and his family resided for a period of time in Beppu, while he shuttled back and forth between Korea and Japan as Commanding General of the 187\textsuperscript{th} Airborne Regimental Combat Team, which was now stationed in Beppu. Westmoreland was keen to maintain excellent relations with the local Japanese officials and on many occasions visited with them socially and professionally to enhance those ties. He often wrote letters of thanks for their kindness to him and his men. Many letters merely reflect diplomatic
protocol and address mundane topics. But Westmoreland recognized the value of such casual diplomacy in maintaining support for America’s active role in the region. One reason for this was the influence of the communists and socialists active in Oita and throughout Japan at the time, a serious concern given the war with North Korean and the presence of Chinese communist troops only a few hundred miles away. No event or meeting was too small to recognize. This is an example of such a letter, sent to the Beppu liaison representative between the military and the local government three months before the end of the Korean War.

9 April, 1953
Dear Mr. Okamoto:

I would like to thank you for inviting me to attend the baseball game on the 7th of April between the Oriols [sic] and Lions. It was an excellent game in every respect and an occasion which I thoroughly enjoyed. Your son-in-law is without question an outstanding pitcher and it was a pleasure to see him perform.

With Warmest Regards, I am,
Sincerely,

W.C. Westmoreland, Brig. Gen, U.S.A., Commanding
Mr. Takao Okamoto
2229-Banchi, Oaza Beppu
Beppu, Oita Ken

In July 1953, the armistice was signed that ended the fighting in Korea. Because the truce was shaky and failed to eliminate concerns about further warfare with China, American forces remained in Japan, and still remain to this day. U.S. troops stayed in Beppu until their camp closed for good in 1956.